

India in London  
Performing India on the Exhibition Stage 1851-1914.

Submitted by Rosie Jensen to the University of Exeter  
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Abstract.

In *India in London* I explore the numerous ways that Indian identity was being corporeally represented in Victorian London. Unlike other colonial identities who were also exhibited throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the exhibition of India in London routinely included a range of 'authentic' performers and entertainments, including native artisans, ethnological models of tribal and caste groups, snake charmers, conjurers, contortionists, nautch girls (Indian dancers), and theatrical spectacles. By exploring the presentations and interpretations of these embodied forms of display, I attend to the exhibition of a colonised culture that although broadly branded 'premodern' was also being acknowledged as an ancient and artistic civilisation and therefore could not be fully situated into an inferior category. By paying attention to contradictions such as these, I urge that, in the context of exhibiting peoples, white imperial power manifested not only through 'savages' but also through cultures that were more ambivalently comprehended. Therefore, while detailed evaluations of these entertainments join to and expand the scholarship that deals with the exhibition of peoples, I also show that the exhibition of India importantly accounts for the tenacious and creative strategies of the imperial ethos. Furthermore, by understanding exhibitions during this period as theatrical sites, which involved the participation of a British audience, I argue that Indian identity was partly being produced in, by and for the public imagination.

In this thesis I largely explore the relationship between display and imperialism and consider *how* this relationship ensued through embodied, varied and performative ways of viewing, knowing, racialising, historicising and gendering India in the urban metropolis. However, by responding to the contentions and contradictions of performance, I also show that exhibited India in its assorted forms resided in numerous, often conflating, sometimes competing powers, including imperialism, entertainment, science, capitalism and nationalism in the Indian context. India as exhibition is consequently significant not only for its contribution to imperial discourse-making, but also for its disobediences to the hegemonic script. An argument thus develops in the pages to follow that although the exhibition of Indian bodies reflected, produced and promoted an image of India that the British Empire relied upon in order to succeed, they also rebounded within discourses that critiqued. Most interestingly, it is through these ambiguities that the making of imperial ideology in popular culture, the instability of British-Indian relations and the eventual downfall of the Raj can be charted. It is here that my most significant contribution lies.

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## INTRODUCTION.

*EXHIBIT B*: SEPTEMBER 2014, THE BARBICAN, LONDON.

People have said, 'White boy, you are messing with my culture. You have no right to tell the story of our spiritual practices or our history, because you are getting it all wrong.' And I can't defend [my previous] works today in the same way I could back then. For all I know, I could look back at Exhibit B in 10 years and say, 'Oh my God, I am doing exactly what they are accusing me of.' But that's the risk you take. It comes with the territory.

—Brett Bailey  
(‘Edinburgh’s most controversial show: Exhibit B, A Human Zoo’ *The Guardian* 11<sup>th</sup> August 2014)

In September 2014, coincidentally when I was just starting out on this project, Brett Bailey’s controversial *Exhibit B* was scheduled for show at the Barbican. An art installation featuring the exhibition of people, the very subject of my thesis, its timing couldn’t have been better, and I immediately purchased tickets to see it. Featuring African and African-Caribbean performers, *Exhibit B* sought to critique the ‘human zoos’ of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which paraded people as objects of scientific curiosity. Lampooning these forms of display, Bailey’s exhibition, which had already appeared in twelve different cities, featured a hard-hitting series of tableaux, including a black man in a cage, a semi-naked black woman with a slave shackle around her neck, and even the famous ‘Hottentot Venus.’ Using living models presented in scenes of slavery and torture in order to deglamorise the showcase of people, the idea of the installation was to subvert a disturbing phenomenon, to turn the notion of exotic spectacle on its head, and to force its audience to confront the historic manifestations of racism that still haunt society today. I was curious if and how this could be achieved. I was also motivated, not to reconstruct nineteenth-century voyeurism, but, influenced by

the well documented 1992 exhibition *Two Undiscovered Amerindians*, to experience what it would feel like to gaze, to be confronted with how and where to look, and to face the uncomfortable history of my culture, and hoped it might bring new context to my work.

However, the day after its opening night at the Barbican, the day I was due to see it, I received an email notifying me of its cancellation. The Barbican informed me that, despite having been previously shown in other locations with overwhelmingly positive responses, it was impossible to continue in London after 'extreme' protests during the opening night caused serious threat to audiences, staff and performers. Although I wonder now if I was spared from being a participant of a racist reproduction, I was disappointed and uneasy about its cancellation. Though I worried about the selectiveness of Bailey's choices, at the time I was also concerned about the censorship and suppression of potentially important works. Officials from the Barbican similarly criticised the protests, believing that the cancellation failed both audiences and artists. They were troubled about the implications for the freedom of expression, uneasy by the methods "used to silence artists and performers" (*The Guardian* 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014).

Conversely, meanwhile, campaigners protested that Bailey's installation objectified the black body, and re-rendered it passive, voiceless, victimised. "The problem with *Exhibit B*" argued Dr Kehinde Andrews, "is that it reproduces the human zoo and the racism at the heart of it" (*The Guardian*, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2014). Activist and journalist Sara Myers initiated a petition, which received 21,000 signatures, to withdraw *Exhibit B* from the Barbican. She appealed that the show was offensive and racist, reminding people that "[t]his was a reality for our black African ancestors... This is somebody's pain. The ability to detach oneself from that comes from white privilege and supremacy" (*The Independent*, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2014). Numerous critics agreed that grafting stories from the nineteenth century to a modern day narrative, Bailey's show distorted and truncated racism into a linear story of oppression and African-ness. Some even argued that Bailey's work was a



manifestation of “institutional racism” within the arts (Paul Richards in *BBC News* 24<sup>th</sup> September 2016).

Reflecting on my initial excitement, I am persuaded by the protestors’ objections, and I’m relieved not to have been a participant of a racist activity. As Qureshi preciently discussed in 2011, as if preempting *Exhibit B*, “[a]nxieties that one might become complicit in displayed peoples’ derogation or re-enact and thereby contribute to the dissemination of racist and voyeuristic views are both well founded and, one suspects, common” (2011: 283). Indeed, as *Two Undiscovered Amerindians* exposed in 1992, audiences easily take up the dominant roles they condemn, and therefore unconsciously authorise attitudes they believe they stand against. Bailey himself confessed he was uncertain of the outcome of his exhibition, and admitted that the very attitudes he aspired to subvert might proliferate as a result of his work. Considering this, it is not difficult to empathise with those who protested against his reconstruction of a racist cultural practice which once publicly produced and condoned racism. Whilst I believe that there was something subversive, or at least confrontational, about his exhibition, I have come to realise that any agency was also bound to a renewed and dehumanising objectification, especially given that Bailey recruited new performers at each destination. I am also torn between making an evaluation that is somewhat estranged from the show, since I never saw it, and a reprieve, in hindsight, of not being party to a restoration of the atrocity of white hegemony devised as some kind of atonement for those atrocities. That the show welcomed predominantly white, relatively wealthy audiences is troublesome in itself; begging the question: was *Exhibit B* not only about white atonement, but also about a renewed permission to look at the black body? Yet, there was something else concerning me, both before I bought the tickets and more so after the show was cancelled. Whilst I agree that Bailey’s project fetishized the black body, I also maintain that his work stood as an incomplete parody of the human zoo. It is easy to appreciate, in conception, why the exhibition of black performers might make the biggest impact on the demonstration of racism. However, if the aim was to comment on the spectacle of exhibiting peoples, and thus force an audience to encounter the historic formulation of racism,

then the decision to show only African bodies feels rather incomplete and certainly inconclusive. It could be argued that by changing actors at each destination whilst re-awaking an abhorrent cultural entertainment, Bailey not only re-cast the black body ethnically homogeneous, valueless, abused and expendable, but also rendered racism the binary condition of white against black.

\*

*'EXHIBIT A'* - INDIA IN LONDON: DECEMBER 1885, PORTLAND-HALL,  
LONDON

If residents in the metropolis do not succeed in acquiring an insight into the habits and customs of those who dwell in far-away regions, the fault certainly will not lie with the caterers, who in these days are so busily engaged in bringing the four quarters of the globe to our very doors. In turn London has witnessed an incursion of "friendly Zulus," African earthmen, Tartar nomads, and civilised Japanese; and of late the "fierce light" of showman-like enterprise has been made to beat upon our fellow subjects of the Indian Empire.

(India in London. *The Morning Post*, 23 December 1885: 5)

If by some magic power we could suddenly be transported from the streets of London to the bazaar of some Indian city, the change in our surroundings would not be more striking than they are when we step out of Regent Street into Portland Hall.

(A Visit To An Indian Village. *The Children's Friend* [Date Unknown])

In the winter months of 1885 a new sensation hit London: India in London opened at Regent Street's Portland-Hall. The exhibition offered dwellers of the Victorian metropolis an immersive and compelling experience of the increasingly popular India. Catering to a growing demand for the exotic East, Portland-Hall's interior gallery had been converted into a picturesque Indian

panorama full of Oriental exoticism, luxury and romance. Setting the scene for an authentic Indian prospect, visitors were admitted to the exhibition via a turnstile manned by an old “Hindoo gentleman”, and once inside were welcomed to an “an excellent idea of an Indian Village” (*The Times* 24 December, 1885: 14). The exhibition’s luxurious seating, exotic sights, sounds, and flavours secured it as a fashionable social venue for London’s upper classes, for whom people exhibits had become all the rage. Redolent with the heady haze of incense, smells of spices, and the sounds of ‘tom-toms,’ the village brimmed with visual delights; expensive Indian jewels, colourful Indian fabrics threaded in gold, models of exotic Indian animals, and most remarkably with “fellow subjects of the Indian Empire” (*The Morning Post*, 23 December 1885: 5). Indian waiters served curries and tea, and ‘native’ craftsmen plied their trades, while “gyrating” nautch girls, jugglers, conjurers, snake charmers, and a Burmese pantomime presented an enigmatic assortment of India’s amusements and novelties (*The Times* 24 December, 1885: 14).

Entertainments included routines by Banoo Kahan “one of the most talented jugglers of the East”, who could “make a shot go through his mouth and out of his eye” (*The Times* 24 December, 1885: 14). The nautch dancers captivated audiences with their exotic looks and snake-like movements. Dancing to the strange strums of Eastern instruments, these sensuous dancers, clad in ornate and revealing saris and adorned with jewellery, brought an Oriental fantasy to life. In the village’s seventeen ‘Hindoo’ shops ‘native artisans’ represented the assortment of industries and creeds to be found in India. On display were potters, weavers and goldsmiths, as well as the “Parsee, Hindoo, and Mahomedan” (*The Times* 24 December, 1885: 14). These included a “Parsee work-box maker”, who according to reviews was “although a good workman, is also slow. He chips a piece of ivory in a very leisurely way, and looks up at us from time to time languidly as though he were quite weary of life” (*The Children’s Friend*). With its colourful and lively array of amusements, the 1885 exhibition was widely congratulated for enigmatically bringing ‘all’ of India authentically to life in London.

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The exhibition of peoples in the nineteenth century context, especially towards the end of the century, was far more colourful, far more entertaining, and far more insidious than Bailey's 2014 reconstruction. The Victorian metropolis included a plentiful range of foreigners, all of whom worked for the reinforcement of white supremacy under the notion of otherwise distant cultural delights. Presented in their 'natural environments' displays of 'natives'—including 'Bushmen', 'Zulu Kaffirs', Guyanese, 'Hindoos', Ceylonese, Cypriots and Chinese—offered Victorian patrons corporeal knowledge of so-called primitive cultures in a fantasised and notably theatrical construction of the colonial identities on display. Most significantly, the performative effects of staged identities, and the discourses of racism that ensued, were forged out of the conditions of entertainment and colonisation. By reaching mass audiences, these were made relevant to imperial ideologies upon which colonial power was founded. Indeed, persisting as particularly crowd-pleasing racial stereotypes, displays of peoples were an exceptionally powerful feature of Victorian popular culture and played a significant role in imperial-inspired notions of the Other, ideas of ethnic identity, as well as Britain's own self image making. Within the rich climate of exhibiting foreign peoples, India became an especially popular theme in London. Exploited for their commercial and exotic appeal, events routinely included a diverse range of 'authentic' Indian performers, including native artisans, tribal models, jugglers and nautch girls, all of whom were put up for observation in so-called authentic Indian spaces. In *India in London* I explore this range of 'authentic' entertainments more closely.

In order to understand the exhibition of India, the history, methods and context of exhibiting a wide range of living foreign peoples during these years must first be acknowledged. Imperial cities routinely presented a plentiful range of foreigners from afar as part of the context of recreation, education and imperialism (in order to consider more attentively the relationship between display, the making of race and Raj ideology, in *India in London* I deal with only one facet of this milieu: the exhibition of India). Representative of a rampant, yet publically and scientifically condoned Victorian racism, an

obsession with looking, mass-entertainment, and a tradition of parading exotic and 'savage' Others for entertainment, the exhibition of a wide variety of peoples reached its peak during the pinnacle of high imperialism. Exhibiting peoples was a hugely popular practice in Britain, and although people exhibits began as singular spectacles as early as the fifteenth century, the nineteenth century witnessed a significant up-shift in their number, scale, and popularity. It was during the 1800s that the British public "flocked to see, among others, groups of Sami, Krenak, Inuit, Anishinabe, Bakhoje, Zulus, San, Arabs, Pacific Islanders, Aboriginal people, Indians, Japanese, Ndebele, Chinese, and "Aztecs"" (Qureshi, 2011: 2). Initially exhibited inside museums, menageries, lecture halls and on the streets, people were increasingly exhibited throughout the nineteenth century on remarkably large scales inside international exhibitions, which in themselves were extraordinary in scale.

A unique product of their time, unparalleled by today's standards, it is difficult to imagine the scale of Victorian exhibitions, which imported goods, manufactures, objects, arts and peoples from across the globe. Commodities of every description, including new technologies, machinery, taxidermy and living animals, fine art and glorious giant plants were housed together in vast exhibition buildings. The 1851 exhibition, the first international exhibition of its kind and the 'Works of Industry of All Nations', displayed 100,000 objects by over 15,000 contributors in galleries that stretched more than ten miles, enticing a total of six million visitors. The Great Exhibition was so successful that it inspired a series of Exhibitions, World Fairs and Expositions, in Britain, France, Australia, India and the U.S, which were characteristically bigger, enticed even larger audiences, and were more majestic than their 1851 parent. As Hoffenberg explains; while "it is impossible to ignore the burden of the 1851 exhibition, which both haunted and provoked the organizers of post-Crystal Palace exhibitions", the successors of the Great Exhibition were undoubtedly larger and more influential (2001: 6). After all, as has been broadly accepted, the Crystal Palace was, "only one exhibition in an extensive history of shows" (ibid, 8). International exhibitions were a regular feature of the Victorian landscape and beyond, and World Fairs still exist today.

While focusing on industrial achievements, nineteenth-century exhibitions also celebrated imperial conquest and, as noted, routinely recruited colonised people for display. Entire families were often imported to showcase their cultural identities and the everyday 'primitive' activities of their lives for the satisfaction of curious spectators. More ominously still, exhibitions paraded exotic Others in order for inquisitive Victorians to see and 'know' the colonised, and in doing so became a mode through which colonised land and body became *owned*. As Dirks argues about colonialism more generally, "[m]arking land and marking bodies were related activities... Before places and peoples could be colonized, they had to be marked as "foreign," as "other," as "colonisable"" (1992: 6). Indeed, in order for Empire to work, Europe's systematic beliefs about cultural difference had to be created and conserved. The exhibition of colonised peoples played a central role in this process, and in entertaining and educative ways 'revealed' the inferiority of the colonised Other for home audiences in the branding and subjugation of those people and in the justification of Empire-building.

The identities displayed in exhibitions, rather than those who performed as singular curiosities on streets or in academic settings, reached the largest audiences and made the most persuasive impact on ideas of identity and the ideologies of colonialism within the strategies of mass entertainment. The period under investigation here, being 1851 to the outbreak of the First World War, marked the heyday of exhibition culture and high imperialism alike. The millions of people who attended nineteenth-century exhibitions were entertained and taught by them, and although some questioned shows' authenticity, audiences were also being encouraged that the identities on display were truthful. Furthermore, in an age where only a minority travelled, stock images could easily be taken as representative of entire populations. As Munro (2010: 80) reminds us, the discourses spawned at exhibitions remained present in the consciousness of visitors long after the show was over. Part of the power of the phenomenon lay in theatrical, corporeal and comparative modes of display. Shown inside 'native villages' that juxtaposed displays of British industrious prowess, exhibited peoples were easily consumed as the

antithesis of Western modernity, appearing as living proof of just how far the West had advanced by comparison.

It has long been accepted that exhibited people routinely appeared as oppositions to modernity. Scholars including Corbey (1999), Greenhalgh (1998), Hoffenberg (2001), MacKenzie (1984), Mathur (2007), Maxwell (1999), Munro (2010), Pickering (2001), and Qureshi (2011) widely recognise that London's nineteenth-century exhibitions dominated Britain's cultural landscape. From the disciplines of social history, art history and anthropology, these scholars broadly agree that nineteenth-century exhibitions typically enabled the hosting country to show-off their scientific ingenuities, their dominance and power. Collectively this body of work draws links between exhibitions and imperialism, illustrating that imperial domination was communicated most strongly to a British public through contrasting representations of the 'rational' metropolis and its 'savage' colonies on the periphery. Corbey (1991), Pickering (2001), MacKenzie (1984), Maxwell (1999), Munro (2010) and Sánchez-Gómez (2013) all view exhibited Others as highly successful mediations of the imagined savage/civilised divide, agreeing that colonised people were exhibited not only for their exoticness and distinctiveness, but also for their supposed primitivism. Maxwell, for example, argues that the idea of ethnological exhibits was "not just to expose the masses to the spectacle of racial difference, but also to make the people of white Anglo-Saxon nations feel mentally, physically and morally superior" (1999: 2). Colonial manifestations, according to Maxwell, were "in the business of confirming and reproducing the racial theories and stereotypes that assists European expansion" (Maxwell, 1999: 9). Corbey (1993: 344) similarly claims that exhibited peoples highlighted a distinction between 'wildness and civility' and 'nature and culture,' wherein primitivism was staged in minute detail. It was, as Adas clarifies "Europeans' perception of the material superiority of their own cultures, particularly as manifested in scientific thought and technological innovation, [that] shaped their attitudes toward and interaction with peoples they encountered overseas" (1989: 4). Munro also emphasises that human showcases "provided people with an easily understood ideological map of the world" (2010: 80). She stresses that the exhibition of colonised

peoples structured knowledge, shaping and reinforcing cultural attitudes and a sense of social order (ibid). Exhibited peoples came to occupy prime locations in exhibition spaces, and became a highly popular and expressive cultural form. It has been widely recognised that they epitomised a desirable distinction between the colonised 'savage' and the 'civilised' coloniser for home audiences.

Exhibited peoples have been increasingly acknowledged not only as part of the context of imperialism but also as part of the discourse of nineteenth-century scientific theory on the evolution of mankind. As Maxwell explains, the most popular attractions of exhibition grounds, showcasing bodies "claimed an educative function and gained the imprimatur of contemporary scientific theories of race" (Maxwell, 1999: 1). It is highly relevant that the largest, most popular exhibitions occurred not only in the age of high imperialism, but also in the age of Darwin, which "was the formative period for evolutionary ideas, when questions about human origins and ancestry, about the status of humans as a species among others and about the diversification of life forms were matters for public speculations as well as specialist research" (Goodall 2002: 1). Conflating with the larger narrative of progress, and therefore revealing connections between ethnological theory and imperialism, exhibitions of the mid-nineteenth century were commonly interested in educating a British public about human variation, evolution and ethnology. Ethnological displays consisted of life-sized models of ethnic groups who 'verified' Europeans to be at the top of the evolutionary scale. As Greenhalgh explains:

The popularity in academic and popular circles of social Darwinism led to its continuous presence as an idea at exhibitions from the 1870's onwards. Essentially, followers of social Darwinian theory subscribed to the existence of a human evolutionary chain which placed some races nearer to the animals than others. Obviously, Aryan races derived from Western stock represented the pinnacle of development.... Measured on the yardstick of Progress, all races showed themselves hopelessly behind the white man.

(Greenhalgh, 1998: 96)



Literature concerned with human zoos, meanwhile, more forcefully argues that the showcases of foreign people were highly racist activities, the bodies on display routinely offered as examples of less-evolved 'savages,' which appeared as 'proof' of the 'scientific' primal link between humans and animals (Blanchard *et al*, 2013; Boetsch and Snoep, 2011). That body of work stresses that human zoos marked a progressive shift from scientific to public racism in the West. Displayed behind fences, inside zoos and alongside animals, African bodies were rendered less than human. The techniques of anthropometry, performed in front of large audiences, compared the bodily features and measurements of the exhibited 'specimens' with those of monkeys. The result being that exhibited people appeared as confirmations of the nineteenth-century scientific missing-link theory, 'evidencing' white racial superiority by contrast. Highly charged with Victorian racism during a time of Empire-building, and a potent feature of Western understandings of the 'natural history' of man, historians who characterise the shows as human zoos contend that exhibition of African peoples operated in popular and scientific manifestations of racism. For scholars those processes indicate the origins not only of contemporary stereotypes, but also the origins of the eugenics movement, and thus the subject has been awarded great currency.

Other recent studies argue that those who focus *only* on themes of savagery and dominance do so at the risk of re-objectifying the exhibited body and denying individual voices. Subscribers to the human zoo model have been criticized for focusing solely on the abusive and inhuman aspects involved in the exhibition of people. When opposing the highly charged racial implications of people exhibits, as Qureshi argues "it is not difficult to see why many have taken the shows to be unproblematic icons of Western racist exploitation of foreign, often colonized, peoples... It is not difficult to empathize with this use" (2011: 283). Nonetheless, as Qureshi appeals, "it is worth being more critical of the criteria currently used to establish displayed peoples' status within these projects; otherwise, these people risk being reestablished as freaks renamed as cultural icons" (*ibid*). Alternative literatures on ethnographic displays argue that banishing displayed peoples yet again to a permanent state of savagery, performers in the human zoo story are re-rendered passive victims and

emerge entirely in the hands of the dominant.

This issue identifies an important body of work that negates the consensus that the exhibitions of peoples—be they driven by public education or commercial entertainment—operated only in Western imperial-inspired notions of superiority. Providing the first substantial overview of human exhibition, Qureshi's *Peoples on Parade* (2011) has made the greatest contribution to the field. Qureshi stresses that “associations between displayed peoples, imperialism, and ethnic difference are neither inherent nor self-evident; rather they must be created and maintained” (2011: 4). She considers in depth the showcase of peoples in context of scientific theories on race, their management, promotion and popularity, and explores the social meaning and interpretations of exhibited peoples. Paying close attention to context, including nineteenth-century scientific theories on race and ethnology, Qureshi's undertakings include a consideration of a range of past perspectives. Reflecting on who the performers actually were, and how they were recruited, she considers for example Saartjie Baartman's journey as the exhibit ‘Hottentot Venus’ in 1810, the consent issues of Caldecott's Zulus in 1853, as well as the Buffalo Bill performers of the Wild West shows from 1883 onward. Qureshi also provides essential groundwork on the history of voyeurism in the metropolis, exploring why and how exhibited peoples were transformed into consumable commodities. For instance, she recognises the importance of promotional material on the streets, in the press and in posters, playbills and advertisements “in which showmen laid claim to readers’ attention in an effort to secure custom” (2011: 49). She shows that this created a market and demand for the exhibition of people, and led to the importation of performers in the hundreds later in the century. By exploring the interactions between showmen, managers and foreign peoples, Qureshi stresses that displayed peoples “cannot be reduced to polarized models of control and passivity, victim and aggressor” (2011: 152). She also charts the evolution of the exhibition culture, contributing to a broader understanding that exhibitions transformed in flavour as the century progressed. She explains that by becoming progressively committed to public entertainment by the late nineteenth century “the shows had become increasingly dissociated from

stimulating interest in human development and increasingly associated with spectacle, visual extravagance, and public frivolity” (Qureshi, 2011: 270).

## EXHIBITING INDIA

Despite the healthy body of literature that has engaged with the exhibition of peoples, significant lacunas in the literature remain. The often exclusive attention on Africa, even that which exposes pluralities and complexities, tends to exclude other racial and cultural identities that were also being created and performed. In doing so the literature often truncates the variety of exhibited peoples in favour of those who were believed to occupy a ‘zero-degree civilization.’ Addressing a feature of this neglect, in this thesis I attend to the exhibition of Indians. Although I would urge further closer scrutiny of, amongst others, the exhibition of Native Americans, the Irish, and Indigenous Australian peoples, I would also insist that, encapsulating an inventive racialisation of India during the reign of Raj, the exhibition of India in London during the second half of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century echoes as a particularly varied and critical form of display. By considering the numerous ways in which India was being corporeally represented in Victorian London (including craft performance, ethnological display, dance and spectacle), I not only build on Qureshi’s work, I also attend to the exhibition of a colonised culture that could not be fully slotted into a primitive or savage character, since it was also acknowledged as an ancient and artistic civilisation. I probe more deeply the conflating—though also conflicting—relationship between public entertainment and anthropology, as well as the components of Indian identity that together were taken as being fully representative, and were therefore more powerful and more convincing as a result. Perhaps more pertinently, the exhibition of India exposes, and at times even aggravates, the complex, unsettled and fluxing relationship between Britain and India at this time. On the one hand the corporeal exhibition of India potently helped to compose colonial oppositions that Empire relied upon including modernity/tradition, industrious/exotic and under the conditions of entertainment, capitalism, scientific theory and Empire-building. On the other, it produced a range of

discourses that unsettled the celebration of trade markets, modernity and even imperialism. Therefore, the display of India suggests that exhibitions were not only sites of imperial ideology-making, they were also sites of imperial contestation.

Focusing on India, I contribute to the works of another important scholar who has already engaged with the exhibition of India in London. Saloni Mathur's *India by Design* (2007) probes the representation of India in London—from the nineteenth century to present day—in London's department stores, exhibitions, postcards, paintings and museums. Conceived in the meeting of anthropology and art history, Mathur's investigation of Indian colonial forms in London focuses on the trajectories of visual culture. She is interested in how oppositional cultures, especially the picturesque and traditional India, were produced through art, exhibition, consumer cultures and museums from the late nineteenth century to the post-independence era. She expertly traces the complex, converging and often contradictory narratives of imperialism, Indian nationalism, art and craft through a range of popular visual culture, bringing into view “the material and rhetorical processes of imperial spectacle and the specificities of contestation that ensue” (2007: 9). Interested in paradoxes and contradictions that present themselves in London, Mathur treats the colonial forms of exhibited people as “suspicious signs” who may confirm imperial power but also act as “crises” (ibid, 12). Mathur's most significant contribution lies in her interrogation of the craftsmen inducted to perform as ‘native artisans’ at the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition. Impressively tracing the journey of an Indian peasant, Tulsi Ram, Mathur reveals that exhibited craftsmen refused the terms of their representation, thus demonstrating that the “bodies on display have their own biographies, strategies, journeys, and petitions that refute their inscription as mere ethnic objects” (2007: 54-6).

Following on from Qureshi's and Mathur's valuable insights, in this thesis I explore the plentiful ways in which India was being corporeally showcased in exhibitions. In doing so I expand interrogation to show that unlike the exhibition of other countries, India in exhibition included a range of performance modes, including ethnological models, craftsmen, nautch girls, snake charmers,

musicians, acrobats, and spectacles. By considering each of these forms of display I observe the production of a powerful and persuasive framework of Indian identity being created and showcased in the exhibition space, and I chart the making of imperial discourse through those forms of display and against a culture that could not be fully slotted as inferior. One of the most interesting questions asks what characters these performances—which were often collectively exhibited—produced, and what their combined narratives offered. What becomes clear is that by showcasing creative versions of India's history, cultural and manufacturing identity, evolutionary status, and gender identity in tangible form (both living and model), exhibitions encompassed a seemingly 'all-inclusive' and 'authentic' vision of India. What also becomes interesting is that this heterogeneous exhibition of India served several conflating and sometimes conflicting powers—capitalism, trade and industry, anthropological theory, imperialism, modernity and even Indian nationalism included. Building on Qureshi and Mathur's observations, I am interested in the ways in which the imperial identities on display, the roles in representing/speaking for the Indian subcontinent, and these synergising power structures are mutually constitutive and mutually unruly.

I also take the subject back to basics, and am interested in *how* identities were created in the exhibition space in the first place. To do this I bring a performance perspective to the subject. While acknowledging that displayed people were marketed and consumed as 'authentic', I view exhibitions as sites of fantasy and performance. I question the effect of staging and the consequence of space and embodiment in the production, presentation and interpretation of exhibited identities. By paying attention to the performative, I show that exhibitions played an important role in the inventive making of cultural, political and economic values—values that were created, perpetuated, and critiqued through display. (I understand 'performative' here as the nature of dramatic or artistic performance, rather than Butler's 'performativity', for example). I also importantly attend to the issue of embodiment—and, viewing spectators as key and active participants in the making of scenes, consider the dialogical production of identities and the production of embodied knowledge.

By attending to the dramatic modes through which exhibitions created identities, I unpack the relationship between performance and education that characterised nineteenth-century exhibitions and I chart the endorsement of performance billed as non-fiction. Exhibitions routinely offered a range of crowd-pleasing Indian entertainments that were established under the notion of public edification. The idea was that Indian entertainers would help the British public become better acquainted with India's population and would therefore better understand Britain's (self-proclaimed) duty to lead and civilise. This indicates the powerful branding of entertainment as education, as well as a conflation of political and consumerist enterprises. The exhibition of India in London typically featured a range of Indian identities—including premodern craftsmen, anthropologically shackled tribes and castes, and sexually immoral nautch girls—whose presentation and interpretation resided in the strategies of entertainment and imperialism, and also in a commercial taste for India in British culture. For example, the 1885 Liberty exhibition arose from an increasing demand for the East in British fashion, literature and culture. It was also a response to Britain's historic interest in India, not only politically but also culturally. Distant tales of exotic India had long infiltrated British society, and there was a historic and large market in Britain for visions and descriptions of the East, an interest appeased through a variety of media (Cohn, 1996: 9). During the eighteenth century, under Company rule, India became increasingly popular and was enjoyed in travel writings, memoirs, illustrated weekly newspapers and magazines, fiction, illustrated books, prints, drawings, Oriental scenes, architecture, department stores, fashions, and even in the home. Yet, it was during the age of the Raj that the demand for “all things Indian – Kashmiri shawls, village crafts, ancient Buddhist art, portraits of the Indian maharajahs, picture postcards of caste and ethnic types – was at an altogether different peak” (Mathur 2007: 6). In Britain, the Indian style became notably popular amongst the upper-classes; its vibrant colours and exquisite Oriental designs were an indicator of class, luxury, wealth and cultural acquisition. Nineteenth-century British designers frequently used Indian imagery as a source of inspiration, and Indian patterns were incorporated into ladies' fashions, hairpieces, fabrics, and shawls, while high-end department stores—including Liberty's—sold Oriental furniture, carpets and art works to

wealthy patrons eager for their slice of the opulent Orient. It was this demand, combined with Britain's political and economic control in India that led to the increasing presence of India in exhibitions. In fact these strands should be thought of as mutually constitutive.

Liberty & Co. was the first to organise the exhibition of Indian goods and peoples, the idea being that Indian people would show off the alleged intricacy and authenticity of their products. In order to achieve the objective, forty-two Indian performers were imported to feature in the exhibition's 'Indian Village'. Although the event generated, as Mathur (2007: 29/41) has emphasised, a great deal of controversy (the performers who had been recruited for display were seen to be visibly suffering on account of the severe cold, and there was a world-wide outcry of their usage), Liberty's idea of showcasing foreign peoples in their 'natural' environments renovated the landscape of displaying people and "transformed the dynamics of intercultural contact for both consumers and performers" (Qureshi, 2011: 255). Moreover, the enterprise inspired exhibitions that were hugely successful. Educating and thrilling the British public about its 'fellow subjects', India became a regular and immensely popular feature of London's exhibitions, and was regularly exploited by showmen for its crowd-pleasing potentials. Indian entertainers were included in the programmes of the 1885 Portland-Hall exhibition, the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition, the 1895 Empire of India exhibition, the 1896 Empire of India and Ceylon exhibition, the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition at White City, the 1909 Imperial International exhibition, and the 1911 Festival of Empire, as well as events held at Olympia, South Kensington and Earl's Court. Greater variety suggested not only superior spectacle, but also an enriched and 'authentic' experience of India.

Earl's Court's 1895-6 Empire of India (and Ceylon) exhibition was undoubtedly the largest and most majestic homage to India in the context of nineteenth-century exhibitions. Rebuilt in 1895 by impresario Imre Kiraly, Earl's Court's twenty-four acre site was transformed into a vision of India and included numerous attractions. Enticing audiences in the millions, the exhibition included an Indian-themed theatre capable of seating six thousand, a Ferris

wheel standing three hundred feet tall, Indian streets, a Mosque, an Indian Palace, as well as a range of exotic Indian entertainments: snake charmers, nautch girls, craftsmen, acrobats, and contortionists. Kiralfy's 1908 British-Franco exhibition, which attracted over eight million visitors, similarly presented audiences with India's "astonishing feats of magic and prowess" (*The Sunday Times* 25 April 1909; 12). White City featured 120 exhibition buildings, all constructed in an Eastern style, fun-fair attractions, pavilions and stadiums on a mammoth 140 acres of land that was also populated with living Eastern delights. A gleaming white marvel of the East, Kiralfy's celebrated White City was populated with rickshaw-drivers, jugglers, exotic dancers, musicians, and Eastern bazaars filled "with many brown artisans chatting, laughing and quarrelling, but intent all the while upon their handiwork" (Guide to the British-Franco exhibition, 1908: 47). The *Morning Post* didn't fail to notice "[t]he vivid replica of Indian life and scenes and the constant succession of entertainments" at the 1895 Empire of India Exhibition that, it continued, "have clearly appealed with irresistible force to the public taste" (6 August, 1895: 2). Titanic events were punctuated by smaller-scale exhibitions, including the Portland Hall and Albert Palace exhibitions, Olympia spectacles and missionary events, which similarly showcased exotic places populated by exotic peoples, and contributed to a cultural practice where audiences, re-cast as flâneurs, could look upon a theatrical rendition of the world and its inhabitants, and forge ideas about their own. As noted, these venues increasingly appealed to public recreation under the idea of education. As *The Standard* shrewdly remarked, "if the public are to profit by the educational facilities offered to them they must be tempted by the additional inducement of material enjoyment" (11 September 1884: 5).

My aims are to consider how, drawn into being during the height of the British Empire, the exhibition of India in London insists upon the invention of cultural identity, a public thirst for entertainment, as well as the creation and public maintenance of imperial themes central to the rationalisation of colonisation. It was through the exhibition of Indian entertainments that India became an educative and romanticised stereotype that could be 'known' and ruled. More crucially, exhibitions produced corporeal multi-dimensional stereotypes, and by



displaying craftsmen, ethnological models, nautch girls, spectacles and other Indian entertainments, crafted complex, dynamic and therefore more convincing ways of knowing, racialising, historicising and gendering India in the urban metropolis. Consequently, I will show that exhibition entertainments reveal how imperial themes were being produced through an entertaining British appropriation of Indian history, economy and cultural identity between 1851-1914.

## POPULAR IMPERIALISM

The importance of imperialism to the minds and lives of the nineteenth-century British public has been a matter of debate. According to Porter (2004), cultural references to Empire were not only marginal, they were socially insignificant; the British public caring little about imperial matters. Quite rightly, this argument is widely refuted. John MacKenzie (1984) argues that metropolitan manifestations of Empire became a persuasive 'popular imperialism' helping to create a worldview that was central to British perceptions of themselves as Empire-leaders and world superiors. In *India in London I* (largely) contribute to this argument. MacKenzie's 'popular imperialism' argues that the Empire infiltrated British society and was branded on a large swathe of cultural and daily life in the nineteenth century: in postcards, theatres, exhibitions, music halls, literatures and newspapers. MacKenzie contends that through this range of cultural sites the British propagandised themselves, glorifying and celebrating Empire so that it became an integral part of British social, political and cultural history, and was read as necessary.

Sites of cultural imperialism, as Gould (2011: 5) similarly stresses, offered Britain a sense of imperial status and encouraged nationalism. Gould argues that for those who lived in the nineteenth-century metropolis, the Empire "was spectacularly present, in the shows, exhibitions and plays that entertained and educated London masses" (Gould, 2011: 1). Exploring the role of nineteenth-century theatre in domesticating and inspiring patriotism for the Empire for a home audience, Gould emphasises that Empire was not only a political quest

but was also a cultural endeavour. “It is the cultural institutions of empire, those zoos, adventure tales, exhibitions, and spectacles – that motivate and expressed imperialism at the empire’s cultural, political, and economic centre” (Gould, 2011: 5). If the British Empire was to survive and grow, Gould maintains, then it could not be a vague “out there” abstraction, “[i]t needed to be brought home and engraved in the hearts and minds of the people in whose name great sums of money were spent and large numbers of lives were lost” (2011: 1). Gould (2011: 5) argues the case for cultural practices which may not *define* empire, but do *animate* it, asserting that popular culture became persuasive sites of imperial ideologies and practices. As Hall and Rose agree, “[t]he majority of Britons most of the time were probably neither ‘gung-ho’ nor avid anti-imperialists, yet their everyday lives were infused with an imperial presence” (2006: 2).

I accept that Empire-building was not only a military and political concern but was also a cultural project as a central premise of this thesis. Imperialism after all, as McClintock (1995: 5) also stresses, is not something that happened separately, or elsewhere. However, there is one important way in which I also transgress this argument. In particular I negate the prevalent presupposition that the ideology of colonisation was an omnipotent power. In doing so I also depart from the theories of Said, which form an accepted basis of both MacKenzie and Gould’s work. Said’s theories of ‘Orientalism’ have long been considered ground-breaking. Orientalism makes the distinction between the ‘Orient’ and the ‘Occident’ and transforms into an assertion of Western political and racial domination. Said stresses that the descriptions of the Orient as exotic, mysterious, ancient and savage are purely Western ideological constructions; being qualities which predisposed Europeans to rule over the peoples they classified as Oriental, and are reflections of imperialism and prejudice. Orientalism, Said argues, is a “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,” and has little to do with the Orient itself (2003: 3). It is the process of colonisation when Europeans encountered lesser-developed countries of the East and measured their civilisations and cultures as exotic, premodern and less evolved by comparison in order for political conquest. Considering themselves the

superior race, Europeans felt a duty to civilise and teach the East, and Orientalism became a style of thought “based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and “the Occident”” (2003: 2).

Exhibitions have widely been read as a forum for the objectification and normalisation of imperialism for large British audiences, frequently understood as highly successful visual renditions of the West’s imaginative yet powerful encounter with the East. By displaying colonised Others, exhibitions initially appear to construct unproblematic distinctions between the exotic/inferior body on display and the curious/superior spectator. For this reason, it is not difficult to appreciate why ethnological exhibits can easily be read through the lens of Said’s Orientalism. It should not be downplayed that British visions of the Orient, and the binaries that developed, were produced under the conditions of imperial power, were made relevant to that power, and were Western inventions about the self and Other. Certainly, the version of India being exhibited also fashioned coloniser/colonised oppositions, particularly those centred in tradition and modernity. As Dirks reminds us about colonialism more generally, “[c]ultural forms in newly classified “traditional” societies were reconstructed and transformed by and through colonial technologies of conquest and rule, which created new categories and oppositions between colonizers and colonized, European and Asian, modern and traditional, West and East, and even male and female” (1992: 3).

However, it is upon Orientalism that I propose a point of departure. Exhibitions were not only venues that were made relevant to the discourses upon which the colonised assumed a right to rule, but were also dynamic and unruly spaces that operated beyond imperial-inspired binaries and even imperial power. In making these claims I contribute to an alternative approach in postcolonial theory. Numerous scholars identify the issue that Orientalism assumes an endemic Western prejudice against the East. As Hoffenberg warns, whilst Saidian approaches importantly understand the power of cultural categories and appreciate that Europe’s developing knowledge of the Orient was anchored in influential imperial images, they have “downplayed the

dynamic process by which such imperial knowledge was formed and consumed” (2011: 57). McClintock similarly remains “unconvinced that the sanctioned binaries—colonizer—colonised, self—other, dominance—resistance, metropolis—colony, colonial—postcolonial—are adequate to the task of accounting for, let alone strategically opposing, the tenacious legacies of imperialism” (1995: 15). As Trautmann also argues, “[t]o say that colonialism and Orientalism are mutually entailed does not get us very far” (1997: 22); and as Cooper and Stoler (1997: 6) stress, colonialism was neither uniform nor omnipotent, and there were competing agendas for power that indicate hesitations about the legitimacy of the imperial enterprise.

Dirks also objects to Orientalism, arguing that in all its forms, “it shared fundamental premises about the East, serving to denigrate the present, deny history, and repress any sensibility regarding contemporary political, social, or cultural autonomy and potential in the colonized world” (1992: 9). This, he contends, leads to a constant reiteration of tropes that invent the inferiority of the East, the danger being that it overlooks possibility for resistance in favour of a totalizing power of the West. Dirks (1992, 2011) also views colonialism as neither as monolithic nor unchanging. He argues that colonialism came to be viewed as necessary through the construction of the colonial world, and was a response to the forces of science, progress and modernity in the face of the traditional and barbaric (1992: 7-8). Grappling with the complexities of colonialism and culture, and colonised and coloniser, he also argues that cultural forms were essential to “the development of resistance against colonialism, most notably in nationalist movements that used Western notions of national integrity and self-determination to justify claims for independence” (1992: 4). Dirks uniquely takes the domain of culture “as the locus of influence and change”, and views colonialism as the relationship between power and knowledge and culture and control (1992: 10-11). He thus develops a wider argument that colonialism is about a history by which categories of the colonised and coloniser, elite and subaltern, power and resistance, are created and deployed. Without trivialising colonial power, he views resistance as integral to colonialism. This is an important argument that I take forward into my interrogation of the exhibition of India. Thomas (1991) similarly raises the

issue that all intellectual and economic commerce is founded on reciprocal relations. He argues that this raises doubts about the simple us/them divide, and stresses a shared history and colonial entanglement.

Said's work has also been understood to treat the history of the colonisers, in a neglect of the colonised. It has been widely agreed that those who accept Said's theories tend not only to assume a fixed identity, but also view colonialism as "having brought civilization to the natives and so fundamentally altered the old order, postcolonial discourse characterises colonialism as the imposition of a Western power-knowledge nexus upon a society that knew little of exploitation and oppression" (Lal, 2014: 138). In the quest to recover the voice of the subaltern, and tell history from below, an alternative wave of postcolonial theory, including historians of the Subaltern Studies group, provides opposition to the neo-imperialist and elite historiography of India. Guha (1999) argues that Indian history has been dominated by elitism and calls for Indian history to deal with the forgotten groups on the periphery of society: women, peasants, the working-class and tribal groups. In the wake of Guha's work a number of scholars have discussed the subaltern and similarly take up the call for European perspectives on South Asian history to be re-examined. In *The Location of Culture* (2004) for example, Bhabha questions how subjects are formed in the 'in-between' space, and acknowledges that they are more than merely the sum of parts of cultural difference, and that the strategies of representation may not only be cooperative and dialogical, but may also be oppositional and conflictual. The question of identification, Bhabha argues "is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a *self*-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (Bhabha, 1994: 64). Bhabha's perspective offers alternative possibilities where he argues that cultural identities are most productive where they are most ambivalent.

Spivak (2010) meanwhile encourages—but also criticises—the efforts of Subaltern Studies, arguing that it suggests a solidarity of subaltern groups. She insists that the 'subaltern' is more of a problem than an identity. Spivak (2010: 21-81) contends that any attempts to ameliorate subalterns by giving

them a collective voice is dependent on Western intellectuals' attempt to "speak for" them, rather than allowing them to speak for themselves. She raises the problems of writing about cultures from universal frameworks, and particularity criticises Western epistemology, stressing that colonial domination is based on European knowledge and research. She argues that intellectuals such as Foucault and Deluze support Western economic interests, and questions how Eastern cultures can be written about without cooperating in the colonial enterprise. She also warns against well-intentioned attempts to speak for the subaltern, which she believes cannot escape the problems surrounding translation.

Following Spivak's criticisms, I feel that I must address my own identity. I am a White Western female theatre historian, and the question I must ask myself is do I have a 'right' to write about Indian history—albeit a history that resides in London and is also about British history? Am I contributing to Western impulse to talk about the Other in a Western language for the West? Am I falling into the same trap as Bret Bailey by writing about a culture and getting it all wrong? Spivak criticises European postcolonialists for focusing on exploitation, on inferiority, on the assumption that power lies only with the coloniser, for making India's history all about its short-lived encounter with the West, and as Spivak suggests, writing about and translating history in a support of Western epistemology and economy. One of the most relevant issues Spivak raises is her argument that even the most benevolent efforts of postcolonialism are in danger of suppressing the perspectives they aim to contest, noting that Western intellectuals have claimed to know the Other in terms of their oppression.

Perhaps my initial response should borrow from Cooper and Stoler's insights, since they recognise that conquest, exploitation, and subjugation "are old themes in world history" (1997: 1). Although I cannot step outside my own knowledge base, it seems to me that many postcolonialists often endow the West with more power than it actually had. Numerous scholars find problems in the assumption of totalising power. While my primary focus is on the British experience and the British making of Indian identities, and is not about

sourcing a 'true' Indian identity or voice, I am also interested in the disobediences that ensue through display, and in the unruly Indian subject at the heart of the Empire. Further, drawing from the works of Dirks and Thomas, I question the risk of continuing to speak in 'us' and 'them' categories. The exhibitions that staged peoples represent a communal history, which no one person has a unique or overruling claim to. There is of course a responsibility to recognise the historical practices which helped to formulate scientific and collective racism and condone imperial power, and much of my thesis attends to these issues. I therefore do recognise the Other in their oppression. However, along the way, and cumulating in my final chapter, I also attend to other powers, unrepresented pasts and remain open to places of historical agency within highly asymmetrical power relations. These nuances can be easily overlooked through postcolonial apologies (which may either urge for the omnipresence of imperialism or excuse the strategies of imperialism as opportunities) and the assumption of *totalizing* power—both of which, as other scholars explain, take over and obscure history. Instead, by viewing imperialism as complex and dominant but also partial, we may find not only the articulation of colonial power as it manifests through popular culture, but also its ambivalences, its limited nature, and even locate its unexpected resistances, which suggests a powerful yet unruly relationship between performance, colonisation and other power forces.

The questions that follow include: 1) were all British representations and interpretations of India formed within Britain's quest for power? 2) Did all forms of display during the nineteenth century work for the hegemonic order? By attending to questions such as these, I recognise the cultural project for control, and view Indian exhibits as relevant to 'popular imperialism,' yet I also pay attention to the dynamic nature of imperial knowledge in order to account for something else. This includes other conflating powers and also Britain's complex view looking East, the conflicting making of Indian status, the resistive subject, and even the fall of Empire. It is therefore possible to place the exhibition of India in London within the discourses of imperialism, within the changing approaches to British rule in India, and within the escalating rise of Indian resistance in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Exhibitions, as we

will see, actually make an excellent lens through which these contentions can be examined.

## EXHIBITION TOPICALITY

The exhibition of India in London indicates the performative, economic and political relationships embedded in imperial rule, exposing how identities come into existence through numerous power structures. What becomes most interesting is that exhibitions coincided not only with the height of the British Raj and with ethnological ideas about the evolution of humans, but also with growing resistance and India's political awakening against imperial rule. As Dirks (1992: 4) recognises more broadly, there is a relationship between power and resistance, and resistance ensues from power. This process is visible in exhibition display. For example, 1885 marked not only a new interest in exhibiting India with Liberty's display at the Albert Palace, but also a new political climate. The establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was a turning point in modern South Asian history, yet for the British the same year celebrated the conquest of upper Burma and, as Ian Copland (2001: 7) argues, the pinnacle of the British Raj's most mature form. And whilst the Raj still needed the cooperation of the Indian population as well as "influential intermediaries who could help them sell their message of improvement to the masses" (Copland, 2001: 7), it also needed the support of the public at home. Exhibitions acted as a forum for the objectification and normalisation of colonialism in the post-Mutiny era for large throngs of British audiences, and Indian displays played a significant role in constructing, and then at times critiquing, larger issues about political relations, colonial status, economy, modernity, identity, gender and race. Consequently, Indian performance in London reveals the cultural workings of imperial rule and its popular maintenance, but also begins to trace the cracks in the imperial façade, the anxieties and uncertainties of colonialism and modernity, and the embodied production but also resistance of power structures. As Mathur remarks, "as the display of India appeared more systematic and more powerfully executed during the second half of the nineteenth century, it also became more



politically contested and more fraught with tensions beneath the surface” (2007: 11).

A deeper evaluation of display also reveals the dynamic, sometimes ambivalent, and often reactive ways in which cultural identities were being produced, marketed and consumed through performance. Building on the works of Qureshi and Mathur, who have discovered how exhibited individuals acted as interruptions and even crises to the imperial hegemonic script, I similarly notice moments of ambiguity in the exhibition of people. However, I also show that it was not only individuals who contested the terms of their display, but also other ideologies and narratives that were embedded in their representational forms, in the wider social and political narratives they created, reflected, and in the environments they renegotiated. This attention acknowledges and explains not only imperial power, but also the loosening grip of imperialism, as it indicates and even provokes an evolving political atmosphere.

The issue here is not to condone a racist cultural practice, to suggest that exhibiting people was somehow beneficial to those people because it enabled their resistance, or to propose the equalisation of power. Rather, it is about acknowledging the complexities and nuances of exhibition display. I do not seek to downplay the significant contribution that the practice of exhibiting peoples made to the constitution of a Eurocentric opposition between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, to the re-production of colonised/coloniser oppositions, or to the creation and circulation of racial and cultural stereotypes central to imperial power and public justification of the Raj. This should not be taken as a postcolonial apology, that imperialism was somehow ‘not so bad.’ Instead, by paying attention to the ways in which live displays of India forged, reproduced, reasserted and on occasion unhinged the identities, I offer a more complex reading into exhibitions as sites of performance, and their significant contributions to the invention of identities and imperial discourse. In doing so I chart the power of imperialism in all its dynamic forms and creative manifestations—through performance, commercial enterprise, anthropological theory and mass-entertainment—and I pay attention to those historical

moments that became attached to the narratives which the dominant relied upon. Yet I also attend to the discourses and competing powers which exceed or subvert, and therefore begin to acknowledge India's very real struggle against imperial rule, which leaves traces even in the spaces in which the discourses Empire relied upon appear to reign so high.

## METHODOLOGY

In the scholarly landscape of exhibitions, the representation of India in its varied forms remains a relatively uncharted area. Collating the different forms of Indian display into one study provides new insight into the relationship between popular culture, identity, colonial status, modernity, science and imperialism, and suggests how these realms were culturally maintained. Consequently, the exhibition of India unlocks potential to re-understand performance and colonial history and the formation of racial attitudes in a subject that has been continually underestimated. Drawing upon anthropology, art history and social history, the range of Indian performance displayed in exhibitions also calls upon other disciplines, including performance theory, dance history, and feminist theory. This thesis is thus situated where a number of discourses—postcolonialism, anthropology and performance, among them—merge. After all exhibitions themselves dwelt in a persuasive combination of anthropological theory, education, performance, entertainment, science and showmanship; analysis should equally engage in these evidently conflating disciplines.

While an interdisciplinary approach provides the necessary theoretical tools for critical engagement, it is the primary material that tells us what these shows were about, provides clues into the performances that were included, and offers insight into their production and reception. Periodicals offer a particularly valuable source, and for lack of personal testimony are, as Qureshi (2011: 156) has similarly discovered, one of the only ways to tackle the question of interpretation. Other primary sources include guides, catalogues and articles,

which are also of significant value. Exhibitions were imagined, described and remembered in a range of material, including press reviews, promotional material, exhibition guides and catalogues, illustrations, photographs, memoirs and official records. I rely heavily on this archive, sourced from numerous museums, libraries, archives and online archives, to patch together information about what was performed, the reception of those performances, as well as the experiences of those involved. However, the material itself must be thought of as performative, and is therefore approached warily. Promotional material coaxed audiences' knowledge, instructing them how exhibits should be viewed and interpreted. Further, the archives do not offer a full account of events, and very few personal accounts were ever recorded. Consequently, the historical record provides neither an unbiased nor full image of these shows. Nevertheless, this archive should not be underestimated, since this is all that remains from what were ephemeral events, without which we know very little about fleeting but highly persuasive forms of popular culture.

Each chapter delves into a key performance style that was collectively showcased on exhibition sites. A fluctuation between performance, anthropology, education, science, entertainment and theatre thus ensues, and this may feel uneven or awkward to my reader. However, just as these styles synergised in the exhibition space, so my chapters oscillate between the theatrical, scientific, educational and entertaining character of exhibition display, and thus chapters reflect how these genres were conflated in the exhibition experience. Chapter One 'Staging Identities' focuses on the 1895 Empire of India exhibition and considers the importance of exhibition space and spectatorship. Engaging with 'theatricality' and performance theory, including Richard Schechner's (2006) 'make-believe' and 'restored behaviour', it considers the *mise-en-scène* of exhibition spaces; the architectures, stages, costumes and movement of spectators, which together provide a more comprehensive idea of the performative and theatrical presentation of identities, indicating how the displayed were created and comprehended through space. Chapter One considers how exhibitions interpenetrated with and produced discourses that Empire relied upon—mainly a romantic, exotic and premodern view of India. In many ways this chapter reconsiders a more

basic question of *how* identities were created for exhibited peoples. I unpick some of the complex dynamics of spatial appropriation in and for entertainment, to ask how a particular space impinges upon the production of cultural identities, and view the process ultimately as theatrical. Furthermore, by acknowledging exhibition space as theatrical, I stress the importance of the audience who animated and created the exhibition scene.

Building on my argument that spaces are produced by the individuals who inhabit them, subsequent chapters take a closer and more in-depth look at the specific Indian performance forms that were regularly showcased in London's exhibitions. Each Indian entertainment—be it theatre, craft display, ethnological models, or nautch girls—offered and constructed different aspects of Indian identity by and for Britain through which India was known and subjugated. Constructing a powerful and allegedly 'all inclusive' representation of India, these components also often coalesced with contemporary topics of the period. They show the connections between popular culture, political strategies of imperialism, anthropological theory, trade and even nationalism in the Indian context. Chapter Two attends to the version of India being created in exhibition spectacles, and considers how theatrical productions were read in/added meaning to the context of the exhibition at large. Similar to representations of India on the popular British stage, exhibition spectacles exploited a version of India's past that justified British rule on both moral and historical grounds. Exhibition theatre thus helped to rouse imperialist ideals as well as the practices of romanticism and entertainment of the Other. Yet, exhibition spectacles also operated as increasingly contentious forms of popular imperialism. Interpenetrating with the growing power of the British Raj in a post-Mutiny era, as well as the rise in Indian nationalism in the last decades of the nineteenth century, spectacles trace not only the perpetuation and creation of stereotypes on the exhibition stage, but also the controversies of performances and in particular the political crisis over appropriate forms of representations. These themes map onto and even act as stimuli to the snowballing uncertainties of the imperial enterprise, as well as growing resistance of the increasingly mobilising elite.

Chapter Three explores the exhibition of educational, ethnological and ethnographic displays. Both ethnological displays in the decades around the mid-nineteenth century and a variety of living Indian entertainments later in the century show that India was far from peripheral to racist nineteenth-century ideas about the evolution of human races. In this chapter I argue that the exhibition of both static models and living entertainments were layered in anthropological epistemology that was useful in the rhetoric of imperialism. I pay close attention to the relationship between anthropological knowledge of India and exhibitions, which not only helped to popularise anthropological knowledge, but also made the British public into physical inhabitants and producers of that knowledge.

Chapter Four turns to the exhibition of Indian craftsmen, who often breathed life and meaning into Britain's definition of India's premodernity and the 'primitive.' Viewed sitting, or squatting, over their work, Indian craftsmen were largely encountered as part of a crude and pre-industrial economy. They contrasted Britain's own modernity in manufacture and for British spectators stressed India's industrial inferiority. However, although inventive and romanticised, craft enticed not only visions of exoticism and primitivism, but also initiated other pressing anxieties and fears in Victorian culture. Engaging in range of contemporary debates about the arts and crafts, colonisation and industrialisation, Indian craft demonstration drew unforeseen tensions, and operated as an asymmetrical contributor to 'popular imperialism.'

Chapter Five attends to the exhibition of nautch girls. Translated through a British perspective, the nautch girl (dancer) in London was racialised and gendered. The exhibition of nautch rendered the Indian woman sensual and brazen for admiring British spectators, upon which notions of Indian femininity, its sexual decadence, its corrupting influence and its immorality lingered, and upon which erotic and interracial fears were projected. The exhibited nautch girls interpenetrated with larger political debates and growing social fears about sexuality and racial purity, and represent a very specific and historically contingent way Britain perceived race, gender, sexuality and Empire. However, with the performer's body written upon, Western values found their

embodiment in the dancer, yet her exposure also reflected and constructed, and to some extent resisted those values for a home audience. Looking at reception suggests that broader ideas of Indian femininity were being both embodied and broken through display. In turn the exhibition of nautch girls exposed the illusions that lay in viewing and creating the Other.

Chapter Six is interested in the narratives being imposed on exhibited people and in issues of invention and translation. Having thus far focused on the consumers and interpretations of performance, in this chapter I attend to the participation and resistances of exhibited people—to consider how actors upheld and contested the terms of exhibition. Without neglecting the wider meanings, impacts and hierarchical conditions attached to those shows, I turn to the participants involved in exhibition display. Picking up Qureshi and Mathur's thread, I consider, where possible, the experiences of Indian performers recruited to entertain exhibition audiences. However, in this final chapter I not only expand investigation over a greater range of exhibitions and performance forms than Mathur's study, for example, I also argue that certain exhibition agents expose Indian mimicry of British values of liberty, democracy, freedom of speech, as well as India's own agency and move into mobility/modernity. In order to reassert the relevance of individuals to our understanding of the past, and to acknowledge alternative power structures also dwelt in exhibition display, I trace the agency of exhibition actors against the early stages of Indian resistance. Most pertinently, the activities of certain individuals put on display, including their complaints and legal actions, suggest that those people worked within resistive systems that resided in the ultimate rejection of British rule.

Chapters chart the relationship between performance, science, commercialism and imperialism, and collectively consider how exhibitions helped to yield a seemingly complete view of India as they produced a range of images that interconnected with the desires, powers and themes of Empire. However, chapters also increasingly identify exhibition entertainments as contested sites—recognising displays as both producers of imperial values and as catalysts of imperial uncertainty. An argument develops that a historic,

ethnological, cultural and gendered identity was created for India—in part through exhibitions—at the same time as display helps produce unexpected discourses. On another note, I should also explain that each chapter does rely upon both secondary and primary sources, since each draws on topics discussed elsewhere and in different contexts—including postcolonial studies, theatricality, anthropology, dance scholarship. For this reason, in an unorthodox fashion, each chapter includes a literature review of its own, within which the exhibitions offer new/original material and discussion. This approach is necessary since there is no single ‘field’ that my work draws on, but instead is more interdisciplinary in style. Consequently, my introduction is shorter than the normal PhD thesis, and lacks in a lengthy literature review, whilst most chapters are slightly longer.

## CHAPTER ONE STAGING IDENTITY

A complete transformation of the Earl's Court grounds has taken place, and what touches us much more is that "the splendours of India" are "to be brought to our doors." We should be inclined to welcome anything which brought a true conception, not merely of the splendours, but of the realities and the veracities of Indian life.

—The Empire of India Exhibition. *Daily News* 27 Monday 1895

The 'Indian City' at the Earl's Court 1895 Empire of India exhibition was marketed as a "true conception" of Indian life (ibid). On an unprecedented scale, Earl's Court's Indian City was devised as an "absolute reproduction of the principle features of all the great cities of India" (*The Standard* 13 December 1894: 6). It was built in an Indian theme and according to exhibition organisers enabled audiences to visit India without having to leave London. Reviewers eagerly agreed, and the press extensively praised the exhibition for crafting Indian "realities." Earl's Court was much admired for its inclusion of "an extensive group of buildings thoroughly representative of the native modes of life and habits" (*The Standard* 27 May 1895: 2). It was commended for its 'lifelike' Indian streets, "along which gaily-dressed natives may be seen driving camels, elephants, and other beasts of burden, while on every hand are buildings of distinctly Oriental type, most of them being tenanted by Indian and Burmese workmen, busily engaged at their various handicrafts" (*The Standard* 28 May 1895: 2). Even the Anglo-Indian would not, so it was claimed, be able to find fault with the city's accuracy. Exhibition creator, Imre Kiralfy, insisted that the Indian City, "will remind the Anglo-Indian visitor that he is now transported to the North-Western Punjab" (Kiralfy, 1895: 38). It was in the Curry House, where "the Anglo-Indian visitor may refresh his inner man with his favourite Eastern dishes, prepared by a staff of Indian cooks, and placed before him by Native servants" (Kiralfy, 1895: 10).



The Empire of India exhibition was the first in a series of annual exhibitions held at Earl's Court, and marking a new and epic phase in Earl's Court events was also the first large-scale exhibition dedicated solely to India. Under the direction of exhibition organiser Imre Kiralfy, the existing buildings at Earl's Court were torn down with the ambition to create something that could be used for several years (Kiralfy, 1895: 9). Renewed, the site was populated by craftsmen, exotic entertainers, elephants, monster pythons, 'wrestling' lions, camels and bullock drivers imported all the way from India, as well as fairground rides, art works, lighting displays, and East India Company artefacts. The self-styled intent of the exhibition was to source and present 'authentic' India, which meant an India unaffected by colonisation, and an India that could be viewed as contained by its own tradition and culture. As Qureshi states, though more broadly, mock architectures and indigenous villages "provided spectators with new opportunities to view displayed peoples within ostensibly authentic environments...and became associated with visual extravagance" (2011: 268). They also, as we will see, brought specific conditions of knowledge-production about identity.

For the Victorian British public the image of authentic India was constructed vibrantly through exhibitions, wherein Indian exhibits showcased a perceived authenticity of Indian culture and identity. The authentic India that had been constructed contrasted with British identity while also showcasing a condition that served to make India pre-modern and subordinate. Since exhibitions made repetitive claims about showcasing authentic objects and bodies, there are important questions regarding what authenticity is. What constitutes the authentic? Against what is authenticity created and how can the authentic be distinguished from the inauthentic? Exhibitions offered viewers so-called authentic producers who made objects using traditional methods, objects that were themselves understood as being inherently authentic. Nevertheless, exhibitions also traded mass-produced inauthentic reproductions that were also being offered as authentic. An interplay and blurring between the authentic and the inauthentic thus ensued. Yet, even the more sincere authentic handmade product must be thought of as myth that is socially defined, one that shifts meaning across time, and one could argue it is an

invention in part of the exhibition. How does one handmade vase, for example, become authentic and another inauthentic even if traditional methods are used in its production? As Vannini and Williams state, “[a]uthenticity is not so much a state of being as it is the objectification of a process of representation, that is, it refers to a set of qualities that people in a particular time and place have come to agree represent an ideal exemplar” (2003: 9). Representative of a wider scholarship on authenticity, Vannini and Williams (*ibid*) explain that authenticity changes as culture changes; meaning the tastes, ideals, definitions, values and practices of authenticity are unstable. Historic ideas of collecting and exhibiting authenticity played a role in creating the definitions of authentic objects. Contemporary anthropology observes that the historically inauthentic can be remodelled into something authentic. The point being stressed here is that authenticity, much like the scholarship that deals with the invention of tradition, is generated in social ideals and social experience and changes definition in different times and spaces. Objects “evoke ideas, realise images, and are a fundamental node in networks between people and places” (Geurds, 2013: 2).

While acknowledging the uncertainty of authenticity, my more specific concern here is that what was being invented through the Victorian exhibition was an authenticity that was a fantasy on another level of invention; one being defined by the West. The authenticity presented in exhibitions was a sterilised and modified version of India that was largely accepted as inherent or static, yet really was a theatrical devise of space and scene, despite the wealth of authentic objects on display. Furthermore, exhibitions looked to frame authenticity and in doing so not only played a role in the invention of particular authenticities in which India played no part, but also transformed those authenticities into a marker of cultural status that easily transformed into a method of power and control in venues designed to entertain and instruct.

Although drawn to ‘authentic’ foreign lands, nineteenth-century exhibitions were highly imaginary and selective presentations of place. An excellent paradigm of this, Earl’s Court’s Indian City erroneously drew on and created stereotypical imageries of India as a place of exoticism and premodernity.

However, although claiming realism, the 1895 Indian city was not a true copy of any location, but was an embellishment, if not a total fantasy of place that was framed 'real.' Full of 'authentic' busy streets showcasing 'genuine' natives in their typical clothing, the Indian City was a theatrical effect compromising of exaggeration, anachronism and appropriation of India that transformed India into a consumable commodity. For this reason, authenticity at Earl's Court was an invention of show-business that created a fictitious cultural pleasure for the larger British public in order to secure crowds and boost profits. It follows that the authenticity of India at Earl's Court was an attribute that can be linked, as Wickramasinghe describes more broadly, "to a collective dream which calls for material proof" (2003: 70). Kiralfy's Indian City conjured images of India that resided in a collective *British dream*, and by employing Indian master craftsmen, consulting Indian art experts, importing building materials, goods, art works, economic products, animals and people from India quenched a public thirst for 'true' visions of the exotic East. With little frame of reference, since the vast majority of spectators had never been to India, the city's 'realism' was accepted with barely any question, cementing a range of stereotypical images and values in the public imagination as truth. As Qureshi explains, an inherent problem in displays "is the failure to acknowledge that such displacement has taken place" (2012: 210).

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Focusing on the 1895 Empire of India exhibition through a theatrical framework, in this chapter I am interested in how exhibition spaces and architectures, exhibited bodies and their costumes—the exhibition theatrical *mise en scène*—all under the premise of authenticity, impinge upon the construction and physical habitation of stereotypes that operate as cultural 'truths' and 'authentic' colonial forms. I ask: how is authenticity and identity constructed? What is at stake in the exhibition of so-called authentic places and authentic identities? What forms does 'authenticity' take, and what are its commitments and effects? When asking these questions I urge that in order to gain a deeper understanding of the exhibition of people, their presentation and

interpretation, they must be realised within the context of space, architecture, staging and spectatorship. Bringing a performance framework to the subject, I consider the dramatic nature of display through the lens of Schechner's 'restored behaviour,' and emphasise that the performers on display had very little say in their own image or interpretation. Much like the colonial native in photography (which I will outline further later), I understand the identities of displayed people as having been devised through exhibition staging. Significantly, I will also draw links between this identity-making and the broader ideas of identity that Empire relied on, which enabled audiences to enact their roles as colonisers.

By stressing a relationship between performance, space and interpretation, I also contribute to museological studies; a paradigm that recognises that the spatial contexts in which artefacts are placed structures the viewing and interpretation of the objects. Vergo (1989), for example, questions the experiences that visitors are offered in museums. He argues that collecting has a political, ideological or aesthetic dimension, explaining that objects acquire different meanings in different contexts. The chapters collected in *Colonialism and the Object* (1998) meanwhile, consider the influences of colonialism on the ways objects are understood. The chapters written by Barringer, Flynn and Swallow in particular connect the historical role of exhibitions, museums and art collections in the representation and support of the colonial project. These authors trace the intersection between colonialism, museums and objects in order to show how museum spaces transformed into mechanisms of power. In doing so, they complement Said's work, which makes connections the realms of culture and imperialism. *Curating Empire* (2012) explores the roles played by museums and their curators in representing the British imperial experience. Highlighting a relationship between museum collecting and the policies and practices of empire, the essays in the anthology collectively argue that the nineteenth-century museum's acquisition, presentation and dissemination of knowledge "became intertwined with the promotion of commerce and, consequently, the development of empire" (Longair and McAleer, 2012: 2).

The relationship between museums, exhibitions, ethnological display and colonialism is also raised by MacKenzie (2010), Karp and Levine (1991) and Coombes (1988; 1994). Coombes (1994) argues that museum, missionary and ethnographic displays shaped the public's perception of Africa. Yet, she also shows that although perpetuating stereotypes, African displays were not a simple reproduction of imperial ideology. Similar to Qureshi (2011), Coombes argues that while 'savagery' may have been the West's prevailing image of Africa during Victoria's reign, this was also a heterogeneous view (Coombes, 1994: 2). Qureshi (2011) more directly questions how context and promotion structured viewing in the context of exhibited peoples. Qureshi accepts that "[m]useums necessarily divorce objects from their original context: in doing so they ascribe meanings to such objects that they never would otherwise easily obtain" (2012b: 210). She argues that the showmen who staged foreigners created a "publicly accessible network of artefacts in streets, exhibition venues and the press, which not only shaped shows' receptions but also implicated those strategies in broader racial attitudes" (2011: 48-49). In her contribution to *Curating Empire* (2012: 207-224), Qureshi considers the role of the museum in curating empire for the public, and stresses the centrality of context in creating meaning for the object.

In order to evaluate the version of Indian culture being created and presented in exhibitions, my understanding of space accepts the arguments of museology. However, by drawing heavily from scholarship on theatricality I also show connections between museology and performance theory. In doing so, I insert far more firmly the importance and significance of spectatorship and embodiment into the understanding of space and interpretation. Borrowing from 'theatricality' (a term I will outline further shortly), I view exhibition space as performance space that is social, and argue that exhibition space was produced by theatrical components—staging and architecture, costume (which structure the performance and direct identity)—but also by *the individuals who inhabit them*. Hoffenberg (2001: 28-29) briefly notes that visitors were agents in the construction of imperial identities and were not passive observers. I stress more firmly the significance of embodiment; I argue that by entering and populating the exhibition scene, audiences co-created colonial identities. By

accepting the lessons of museology and theatricality, I assert that that there is an integral dialogue in meaning-making between body (both the exhibited body and the spectator) and exhibition space, both of which are central to the formation and maintenance of colonial identities and cultural definitions being drawn. Abiding by but also furthering the arguments presented in museum studies, in this chapter I urge that exhibition space—those entertaining Indian palaces, chaotic bazaars, craft shops, jungle scenes and Indian architectures—shaped and authenticated the imaginary and cemented an image of India that was then populated and made consequential by the audience. By engaging with theatricality I argue that the significance of exhibition space is that it allowed the audience to become active participants and producers of colonial identities. That the spectator, through their participation and embodiment of exhibition space, co-created identity is an integral argument that subsequent chapters rely and build upon.

## THE THEATRICALITY OF DISPLAY

Before turning to theatricality (as a term) and outlining its use and relevance to the matter of exhibiting people, it must first be noted that other scholars have, if only briefly, inferred the theatrical modes (as a style) through which exhibited identities were created and exaggerated. Mitchell's (1989) discussion on the exhibition of Egypt in Europe in the late nineteenth century is particularly useful. Although an older critique that has evaded citation in more recent scholarship, Mitchell shrewdly argues that exhibitions created a 'reality-effect' of an ordered world put on display for visual consumption. Looking at the showcase of Egypt in the West, Mitchell views exhibitions as the creation of a real place to be viewed and experienced, which, he argues, is process that can tell us about the West and its treatment of the outside world. Probing the 1889 Paris Exposition, Mitchell contends that the production of 'authentic' Cairo, complete with a chaotic bazaar, dancing girls, donkeys and a market populated by 'natives,' however realistic, "always remained distinguishable from the reality it claimed to represent" (1989: 223). Even though the painted scenery was made dirty, the donkeys were imported all the way from Cairo,

and the Egyptian pastries on sale “tasted like the real thing”, the Egyptian street remained only a Parisian copy of the original (ibid: 223-4). Mitchell asserts that there is something paradoxical about the simulated fantasy and the real, which points to a blurring of boundaries and shows the outside world to be “rather like an extension of the exhibition” (1989: 224). It follows that Orientalism “is not just a nineteenth-century instance of some general historical problem of how one culture portrays another, not just an aspect of colonial domination, but part of the method of order and truth essential to the peculiar nature of the modern world” (Mitchell, 1989: 236). Certainly, by portraying and re-fashioning culture, exhibitions created spaces in which the boundaries of truth, reality and fantasy blur. As Chapter Four will discuss further, the interplay between exhibition and city produced new meaning for the colonised and the coloniser, as well as for modernity and tradition. Therefore we cannot draw clear distinctions between the realm of representation and an external reality. There is another issue that Mitchell very briefly alludes towards, yet fails to develop to any significant extent. That is that the theatrical nature of exhibition displays as a style that helps *produce* an “external reality” and power in that formulated reality.

Goodall (2002) explores the ways in which nineteenth-century theories of evolution were taken up in popular culture (her book is situated in a scholarship that I engage with further in Chapter Three). However, while Goodall agrees that exhibitions were inherently performative, she is more interested in how popular culture operated in and often parodied scientific study. Other academics also sporadically refer to the performative techniques used to exhibit people in nineteenth century London. Qureshi (2011) intermittently refers to the sceneries of exhibited peoples, arguing that through scenic modes the exhibited body was exaggerated as it was also ‘evidenced’ as occupying the lowest rungs of human evolution. Qureshi (2012c) has also drawn links between theatrical scenery, travel literature and the exhibition of people, arguing that displayed people became living examples of travellers’ tales. She appropriately contends that scenery geographically located displayed peoples and appeared to illustrate their lives. In part of a larger book Qureshi argues that managers and showmen “were able to frame

displayed peoples using developing techniques in theatrical scenery” (2011: 116). She recognises that although shows marketed performers as unmediated representations, displayed peoples were choreographed and managed (2011: 122). For example, Barnum insured that during the exhibition of Tom Thumb, the furniture was larger than normal to make him appear all the smaller (Qureshi, 2011: 102). Mathur (2007) similarly sporadically uses the terms ‘performance’ and ‘theatrical,’ noting lighting that evoked an exotic experience for exhibition visitors at the 1885 Liberty exhibition. Maxwell (1999: 7) meanwhile considers the participation of both exhibitions and colonial photography in creating the stereotype. She argues that through exhibition and image, colonised peoples were represented as savage, in the process reassuring the home market of their own claim to ‘civilisation.’

While on occasion using the terms ‘theatrical’, this body of scholarship overlooks the academic significances of the word. Of course theatricality holds connotations of fakery and false representation, in which realism, mimesis, exaggerated or illusive styles of behaviour, as well as interpretive means, modes and models of representation are all key players. Yet, in theatre and performance studies theatricality has also been understood as a social milieu and as a mode of representing social action. This does not mean that theatricality is limited to the theatre, or even to performance. On the contrary, theatricality is widely comprehended as abstracted from the theatre itself, yet inclusive of the semiotic codes of theatrical representation, or as “a definitive feature of communication” (Davis and Postlewait, 2003: 1). Theatricality also importantly comprises of the governing gaze of the spectator. As Reinlet explains:

This space of theatricality requires both the gaze of the spectator and the act of the other, but the initiative lies with the spectator. This theatricality is an experience, then, that is not limited to the theatre, but is an aspect of life that appears whenever its minimum conditions are met.

(2002: 207)

In particular, space and spectatorship are central components of theatricality. Theatricality correlates with the scholarship on space and performance, which



has long accepted that the physical conditions of performance are an essential part of the study of theatre and performance. The founders of Theatre Studies, including Max Herrmann's 1931 essay 'The Theatrical Experience of Space', raise space-related questions, and understand that far from being passive recipients, audiences are active components of the performance. The essays collected in Fischer-Lichte and Wischstutz's (2013) book similarly look at theatrical spaces and the politics of space in performance, and are interested in how performances take over and transform space. Carlson also views theatre as a sociocultural event "whose meanings and interpretations are not to be sought exclusively in the text being performed but in the experience of the audience" (1989: 2). He argues that the way the audience interprets the action is not governed only by what happens on stage, but also by the places of performance. Burnes also describes theatricality as:

a theater of social action and social values—an arena... in which it is possible to study manifestations of the social values, forms and conventions of society, and also the images of social reality which people of different kinds and at different times have constructed for themselves.  
(1972: 5)

Burnes helpfully draws from the idea of "life as a stage, and of the stage as a representation of life, and of social life as unreal" (1972: 3). She argues that theatricality is a process which supports or subverts the norms of a society and is thus an understanding of the relationship between theatre and social life. McAuley (1999) agrees that theatricality is a relationship between the performer, spectator and space.

Understandings of space also correlate with Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*. Interested in the different dimensions of space, Lefebvre argues that space is a social product. Every society produces social spaces within their historical contexts. Lefebvre argues that social space incorporates "social actions, the actions of subjects both individual and collective" and that space works "as a tool for the analysis of society" (1991: 32/33). I refer only to a small part of Lefebvre's highly sophisticated deliberations about space, in order to stress that spaces are produced by the people who populate them. As numerous scholars show, theatricality is an experience that creates a space

where the possibilities of constructing values are implemented and tested, an experimentation which is crucially created not only *for* but also *by* the audience.

By attending to the dramatic modes that contained the exhibition of people—the spatial arrangement, stages, scenery and costumes—I explore the production of cultural forms and norms through space and spectatorship. Although visitor responses are difficult to obtain, I consider the audience to be part of the scene, and am interested in how, just like the exhibited body, they help create and animate it. I also accept that theatricality is not limited to the theatre, for the exhibition space was not the space of theatre in the traditional sense. Audiences did not show up to watch a performance, but to gaze upon the ‘authentic’ things and the people of the world. Although a performative showcase of place, exhibitions were marketed as spaces of realism in which ‘reality’ and ‘identity’ were promoted, constructed and consumed. More simply, in this chapter I use theatricality in order to assess the dramatic means through which colonial identities were posited for performers and made meaningful through space and spectatorship. With a focus on the 1895 Empire of India exhibition, I consider the design and layout of exhibition space, the movement of the audience and specific stage spaces of exhibited peoples to consider the spatial architectural ways the identities on offer were shaped and presented as ‘real.’ In doing so, I acknowledge the audience as key participants in the creation of space, place, culture and identity. I show that the theatrical space of the exhibition enabled visitors to participate tangibly in British occupation of India, and to embody—and therefore experience and inhabit—colonised/coloniser identities. For, as exhibition sites became the physical place of make-believe framed real, they enabled participatory spaces of discovery, travel, of colonial oppositions, and bodily attainments of codified imperial statuses that were playing out elsewhere in the Empire. In this way, as a relationship between space and sovereignty occurs, the exhibition transported the British public into the roles of active explorers and colonialists of India. Through attendance, viewers became enactors of a ‘reality’ image produced by and for Britain. Thus exhibitions were integral to the way in which Empire was not only justified and run, but also how the roles of the coloniser

were made meaningful, embodied and populated by a home front. This makes the politics of performance all the more sinister, and all the more effective, since it calls the spectator into the creation of identities as it reveals the creativity and inventiveness of racial stereotypes and colonial definitions upon which imperial power was founded.

There are two main arguments that I make in this chapter, as well as one issue that I indicate here and expand upon in subsequent chapters. The first argument is that exhibition space shaped meaning and the spatial production of fantasy as cultural authenticity. The second is about the audience population and creation of scene. While Qureshi (2011: 16) argues that Londoners were the makers and users of spectatorship, I argue that spectators also *create* the roles being assigned to both exhibited bodies and themselves, roles that reflect and reproduce broader colonial statuses. Finally, however, I also urge that as exhibitions help produce socio-political patterns of Empire, they also exceeded and subverted cultural frames of reference, and begin to operate beyond prevailing imperial ideology.

## ARCHIVAL EVIDENCE

Probing the theatrical-framed-real production of colonial identities in exhibition spaces, in this chapter I rely upon and engage with a range of archive material including exhibition maps, guides and press reviews. Exhibition maps and publications tell us how audiences were encouraged to move around the space, and the design and layout of the exhibition shaped and directed the encounter with displayed peoples so that they could be understood as museum pieces, as historically subjugated, compliant, premodern, and above all, in a rampant appeal to Victorian tastes, authentic. My concern here is not about the reception or experience of individuals. As Qureshi (2011: 181) has also noted, most consumers did not leave behind a testimony of their experiences. Instead, what I am interested in here is the modes through which people were exhibited and viewed, and how those modes created discourse and meaning on a more general scope. For lack of individual testimony, I

therefore turn to other archive sources in order to consider the relationship between exhibitions and their audiences.

The photographic collections of Indian performers from the 1895-6 Empire of India (and Ceylon) exhibitions, until now overlooked in the literature (now held at the British Library and The National Archives) offers a particularly valuable source. Having evaded attention in scholarship, the photographs offer visible clues into how people were staged and exhibited. This is not to suggest that the images offer an entirely accurate visual record of the exhibition. The scenes not only exclude the crowds, noise, smells, or wider sceneries of the exhibition, but have also been noticeably directed for the camera. For example, the craftsmen in the photographs included throughout this chapter gaze into the lens as they pose at their work; they are visibly paused in actions that should require their concentration and movement. Nevertheless, although the clearly staged for image (motionlessness being a technical necessity of Victorian photography), the photographs were taken as a documentation of the exhibition. Indeed, many of the photographs I engage with here, which are from the 1895 Empire of India exhibition, are the personal copyright of exhibition organiser Imre Kiralfy, and constitute his record of the event. Thus, despite their limitations, the photographs helpfully reveal the scenes that appeared at the exhibition, showing what audiences in the millions encountered.

## SPACE, MOVEMENT AND AUTHENTICITY

The layout of the 1895 exhibition, the way spectators were encouraged to move through it, as well as the exhibition architecture, stages, and the bodies on display, are crucial in the tangible and theatrical production of veracity, and expose how a commercial and politically potent fantasy was not only being produced but was being framed as documentary truth. The architectures and layouts of exhibition spaces, and movement of the viewer, endorsed the versions of identity that were on offer and framed the theatrical description of culture as museum-like objectivity. That audiences looked upon exhibited

bodies in relation to other display is crucial to the meaning of the displayed and to their so-called authenticity.

Fig 1.1 Guide to the Grounds.  
Official Catalogue of the Empire of India exhibition: Earl's Court, London, S.W., 1895

Although it seems likely from the map of the 1895 exhibition, as seen in Fig 1.1, that the exhibition grounds were free-flowing, a route was described in the Official Guide and in Official Catalogue written by the exhibition's director Imre Kiralfy, and was described in countless newspaper reviews. For those who meandered without the guide and at their leisure, meanwhile, the footprint of the exhibition, as seen in the map, mostly naturally followed the itinerary Kiralfy explained in the opening of the Catalogue.

As well as forging oppositions between chaos and order, modernity and tradition, technological entertainments and low-tech body performance, the exhibition space also played a leading role in the formation of a place

designed to re-produce India 'faithfully'. The design and layout of the exhibition established a factual premise through museum pieces and art works, to what transformed into entertainment and fairground. Exhibition visitors arrived to 'The Ducal Hall,' which was dedicated to the wares manufactured for the Indian market. The Ducal Hall gave view to several buildings of Indian architecture, and led on to 'The Queen's Court', which exhibited Indian crockery and the Indian Curry House. Outside the Curry House there was a lake upon which floated a fleet of "small Indian barks, propelled by electricity" (Kiralfy, 1985: 10). Next was 'The Queen's Palace' which contained fine art and loan exhibits from Indian Princes, relics from the East India Company and paintings, including works by Indian artists and 'Eastern' scenes by famous American artist Edwin L. Weeks. The exterior of the building was white, "in resemblance of the famous Indian Palaces" (ibid: 10). 'The Queen's Palace' was more of a museum space, and set the tone for a factual prospect to what later transformed into fairground spectacle. 'The Rhemba Gardens' located by the Queen's Court was lit at night by means of electricity, and included an illuminated fountain. The gardens themselves meanwhile, contained Indian plants and flowers - a natural and Indian antidote and opposition to industrial innovation. After the Queen's Palace, audiences entered 'The Electrical Machinery Hall' which showcased nine "locomotive-type boilers" and lamps of "2,000 nominal candle-power each" and seven projector lamps for the illuminated fountains (ibid: 12). This particular attraction offered 'behind-the-scenes' electrical evidence of British progress, reminding audiences of the ingenuity and mechanical prowess that went into creating the sensations of the exhibition. Audiences were then channelled over a bridge that led to the next section of the exhibition, divided from the previous buildings by a railway line, the icon of modernity, passing in between. A left turn over the bridge took visitors to the impressive 'Empress Theatre', which was capable of seating a colossal 5,000 people and featured the operatic spectacle *India* (discussed further in Chapter Two). Turning right, meanwhile, led to the next main section of the exhibition.

The first building after a right turn was the 'Imperial Court Gardens,' which contained Indian manufactures expected to be of "great interest to the

thousands of European visitors”, after which sightseers were instructed to continue southeast through the ‘Indian City’ (ibid: 12). The Indian City contained an Indian Jungle constructed by the famous Mr. Rowland Ward, Indian jugglers, a ‘Burmese Puöy’ of Burmese artists, as well as songs and dances. There followed a ‘Native Bazaar’, an ‘Indian Tea House’, ‘The Mosque’ (see Fig 1.3), a ‘Bombay Street,’ an ‘Indian Tea House’, ‘Bamboo Shops,’ an ‘Indian Carpet Factory,’ and a ‘Hyderabad Street.’ These scenes sporadically featured shops populated by artisans who gave “practical illustrations of the industries of their native Provinces” (Kiralfy, 1895: 13). Throughout the city “local colour and animation are given to the strange and fascinating scene by the introduction of Elephants, Camels and Cattle, which pass through the mimic Town as their wont in that strange land beyond the sea” (Kiralfy 1895: 14). Visitors could even hire a ride on those elephants or camels, “and when the fronts of the craftsmen’s shops are crowded several deep a rapid glance at these groups of workers can be obtained from the superior elevation of a camel saddle” (Kiralfy 1895: 357). While machines and spectacle technologies represented Britain, India was represented through chaotic premodern streets and traditional bodies. The Indian City led on to the ‘Elysia,’ which contained a collection of popular entertainment buildings, including Indian snake charmers, musicians, jugglers, acrobats, fakirs, ‘monster pythons’ and ‘wrestling lions’. The Elysia was followed by the ‘Gigantic Wheel’, standing a pioneering three hundred feet tall, and contained forty carriages, each which could take forty passengers. The Wheel led lastly to further gardens.

The idea of authenticity was achieved architecturally. Earl’s Court claimed it transported visitors out of London and into a life-like Indian city, and design continuously made claim to veracity and realism. So desired was the reality-effect that measures were taken to block out London altogether. Fig 1.2 shows the painted scenery at the exhibition, which was devised as an extension of the Indian scene and to inhibit views of London. “The visitor will notice” described Kiralfy in the exhibition catalogue, “that his illusion is not disturbed by the sight of outside buildings, these being entirely excluded from view by painted scenery, which, as it were, shuts him out of London, and leaves him to

luxuriate amidst Indian scenes” (Kiralffy 1895: 11). That the exhibition was congratulated in its recreation of India points to the transformation of a reality-effect into reality. “To transport the visitor as if by magic from the sombre surroundings of London life into the midst of one of the thriving and picturesque cities of the East is no doubt a very daring task to undertake”, informed *The Morning Post*, “yet this is the work which Mr. Imre Kiralfy has set himself to perform, and he has performed it with remarkable success” (28 May 1895).

Fig 1.2. Painted backdrop of Indian buildings at the India and Ceylon Exhibition.  
1896 British Library 888(82)

Before going further, it should be noted that the premise of authenticity was not thoroughly estranged from a veracity that managers sought to pursue. Exhibition organisers went to lengths to reproduce ‘reality.’ Authenticity was so



devotedly pursued that exhibition buildings were constructed using imported materials from India. For example, Manager Harold Hartley turned to Proctor Watson, agent India, who secured some “old houses in Poona” for the exhibition, which were sent to Earl’s Court and were used to build “a really typical and realistic Indian Village” (Hartley, 1939: 71). Some exhibition architectures were even built by Indian master craftsmen. ‘Natives of Bhera and Punjab’ worked on the Durbar Hall at the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition (these same natives could also be found demonstrating their craft for the 1895 Empire of India exhibition (Kiralfy, 1895: 364)). At other times, architectures were overseen by Indian art experts, whose endorsement acted as further legitimisation of place. Sir Purdon Clarke and Indian art expert Sir George Birdwood, for example “whose knowledge of Indian art and industry was possibly unrivalled” supervised the construction of Earl’s Court’s Indian-styled buildings (Hartley, 1939: 71).

However, whilst architectures attempted to recreate an original context, authenticity was not only given new meaning through exhibition but was performative. Scenery contrived place and an external geography, transporting visitors out of London and not into India but into an Indian dreamworld. Although sourcing authentic materials and skills, the simulated geography was a warped image of the place on which it made reference, excluding other realities of India (including poverty, famine, trade exploitation and the damaging effects of colonisation) in favour of romanticised versions that were more picturesque and entertaining.

## STAGING AND MAKING THE BODY

Exhibition spaces framed exhibited bodies as ‘real’; space in this sense both created meaning for and authenticated the exhibited body. The exhibition catalogue declared that the Mosque, seen in Fig 1.3, had been built for the “Mahomedans who are sojourning at Earl’s Court”, and claimed that “[a]ll the characteristic parts of a town mosque have been faithfully represented” (1895: 363). It went on to comment that it was in the Mosque where “the pious Mussulman is seen with his face turned toward Mecca, engaged in his

devotions, and no profane foot is allowed to enter the sacred precinct” (Kiralffy, 1895: 13).

Fig 1.3. Photograph of mosque, Indian city. Empire of India Exhibition, with natives, palanquin and bullock cart.  
Copyright owner of work: Charles Imre Kiralfy. The National Archives

More pertinently, the stage-spaces where people were exhibited inscribed their meaning. Exhibited Indian performers were assumed and validated in spaces that had often been chosen—and employed—with the idea of ‘faithfully’ representing India and its cultural identity. Far from this, however, exhibition architecture created majestic and romantic visions of India and also designed a space that insisted on India’s premodernity. The spaces that staged displayed craftsmen, seen in Figs 1.4 and 1.5, for example, were made deliberately minimal, bare and shabby, providing basic and unsophisticated spaces for the displayed, and in doing so designated a cultural condition for the exhibited body.

Fig 1.4

Photograph of puggree maker. Empire of India Exhibition. Squatting on carpet with box on left of picture.

Copyright owner of work: Charles Jones Kiralfy  
The National Archives

Fig 1.5

Photograph of potter. Empire of India Exhibition, with vase on potter's wheel.

Copyright owner of work: Charles Imre Kiralfy  
The National Archives

The workshop seen in Fig 1.4, for example, acted as an indicator of the puggree-maker's identity, making him an all the more genuine and interpretable commodity. The architecture and space which contain him, its design, structure and its furnishings, were imaginatively produced in order to recreate an 'authentic' space of work for the observed subject to live out his primitive daily life, supposedly as he would have done in India. (As Chapter Four will discuss further, these scenes transported the Indian body into a premodern geography that worked in opposition to the city space that contained it.)

These spaces also formulated a more traditional stage-space, in which the performer inhabits the stage and the audience, separated, observes. As a three walled box, the performing spaces construct what we could now think of as a fourth wall, and this itself produces nuances of realism familiar with the idea of stage naturalism developing in the 1880s by pioneers including Émile Zola and Henrik Ibsen. However, unlike theatre, exhibited workshops were offered and consumed as an accurate rather than staged form of ‘true life’—as audiences observed ‘cultural authenticity’ rather than a play. Audiences did not show up for a performance, but to an exhibition that operated more like a museum than a theatre. Nevertheless, although potentially lost to the spectator, the theatrical elements are clear. Like the fourth wall, exhibition staging comprised of dramatic strategies designed for an audience. Even the aesthetic qualities of the scene, interplaying with light and dark, expose a certain theatricality. Whilst the potter in Fig 1.5, for example, wears a simple black outfit and turban, his workshop is white, and the contrast increases his visibility. The scene itself also reveals itself as carefully composed. The stage-space, its simplicity, the props and tools, helped to generate a traditional view of India contained as an opposition to Western modernity.

## AUTHENTIC BODIES

As with architecture, an ‘authentic’ performer was also sought and propagated in the exhibition space. According to exhibition manager Harold Hartley, the recruitment of genuine Indian entertainers for the 1895 exhibition had been arranged by Mr. Proctor Watson, agent in India, who successfully sourced “about two hundred native craftsmen representing all the principle arts and industries of India ; also troupes of jugglers, dancers, etc” (Hartley, 1939: 71). Strengthening the perception of authenticity, these performers arrived to England with all their own tools and materials.

Fig 1.6  
Photograph of modeller in clay.  
Empire of India Exhibition, showing 3 models standing on box.  
Copyright owner of work: Charles Imre Kiralfy. National Archives

The craftsmen in fig 1.6, for example, allegedly came to London with all the equipment he used in India. According to Hartley, who was in charge of the performers during their stay at Earl's Court, lengths were even taken to meet the demands of the performers' needs, including supplies of cobras procured in India for the snake charmers (ibid: 75). However, although often employing 'genuine' performers, the exhibition space contrived the performers' identities and containing them excluded the realities and experiences of the life on display. In doing so exhibitions obscured any knowledge of who the performers on display actually were, or their own experiences in the world, whilst claiming that was precisely what was being achieved. This in turn indicates a cultural stereotype (the premodern, the traditional) the exhibited body had little choice but to enact. And as an identity was posited scenically, the performers become spatially abstracted from their larger social contexts

and transported into broader imperial-inspired cultural definitions. Consequently, although often recruited from Indian villages, and although narrating at least a partial reflection of cultural skill, the performers' identities were drawn into a new narrative as their 'lived life' become indistinguishable from their 'performed life.'

These people and places made real could be considered within the sociology of classification and the notion of ostension. Classification has been an important line of enquiry amongst sociologists, who are interested in the processes that assign objects into categories—the groupings, typologies, the production of ideal types, and so on. Ostension, meanwhile, considers the understanding of 'things' through showing, gestures, actions and movement rather than words. Yet, perhaps Schechner's 'restored behaviour' (2010: 50) is a particularly useful tool for understanding how exhibited identities were being re-imagined. Restored behaviour can "exist in a nonordinary sphere of sociocultural reality... it can be a special kind of behaviour "expected" of someone participating... restored behaviour is symbolic and reflexive: not empty but loaded behaviour multivocally broadcasting significances" (Schechner, 2010: 51). As the main characteristic of performance, 'restored behaviour' is a behaviour that has been cut and edited as if it were a filmstrip. Those strips of behaviour can then be edited, rearranged, embellished, elaborated, and/or concealed, and consequently acquire a new life and meaning. "The original "truth" or "source" of the behaviour may be lost, ignored, or contradicted – even while this truth or source is apparently being honored and observed" (Schechner, 2010: 50). Performed behaviours are structured, scripted actions, which exist separately from those who perform the behaviour. Characteristics can then be altered, reshaped and changed so that the self can act in/as another.

It follows that exhibited identities may be assembled out of bits of actual life, but they are also crafted out of historical reproduction, the context of the exhibition, and the new meanings of the geographical present. This is not to deny that the performer must be offering something of themselves; revealing something of their identity, but instead appreciates the theatrical elements,

which may be exaggerated, embellished, or fabricated. As noted, subaltern resistance and protest, widespread famine, poverty, peasant unrest, grain riots and uprisings of hill peoples are just a few 'realities' that are denied in the exhibition scene, whilst other narratives, including premodernity and exoticism, are elaborated. Yet, despite these edits, the performers are made real within their domain; and the interpretations or meanings are actual, even if the actions are false.

The exhibited person is then located between what Schechner has identified as 'make-believe' and 'make-belief.' The 'make-believe' actions are those in which an actor on stage assumes a role where the distinction between the real and the pretend is clear. The performance of 'make-belief' meanwhile, refers to every day actions, such as racial, gender or professional roles and "create the very social realities they enact" (Schechner, 2006: 42). As these distinctions blur and become indistinguishable, the pretend and what is real is distorted, and it is not always possible to separate one from the other. In exhibition a 'make-belief' is being created, and the spectators don't know that the social and personal worlds are being performed. In this process the imaginary causes the actual, and the theatrical, edited life and falsification seems to be truthful. Consequently, anachronisms, the intrusion of cultural values and stereotypes are verified. As Schechner comments about performers more generally: the liminal areas of 'characterisation,' 'representation,' 'imitation' and 'transformation' "say that the performers can't really say who they are" (Schechner, 2010: 4). This indicates a collapse in the distinction between reality and fiction and the interplay of realities, which inevitably imposed new ideologies and meanings onto the performing body.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC PERFORMANCE

The identities on offer in exhibitions mimic the familiar scenes of colonial photography, which similarly crafted colonial identities as objective 'make-belief' and facilitated mass-public access to them. Identifying colonial photography a little further will aid understanding of how exhibitions shaped

meaning for exhibited people. Towards the end of the nineteenth century photographs of colonised peoples were increasingly available to the masses. Photographs could be purchased for a shilling, and to hold a photographic collection in one's own home became highly fashionable (Maxwell, 1999: 11) That shilling view soon transformed into the penny postcard, making colonial identities even more available (Mackenzie, 1984: 20). Distributed to a British public thanks to mass-printing technology, colonial photography was a powerful medium through which the West captured and viewed the identities of the East. However, like the exhibition, photographs also disseminated fictitious images. Chaudhary (2012: 6) explains that the 'natives' who appeared in colonial photography were often asked to pose in tribal outfits, or even naked, allowing photographers to present an 'authentic primitiveness' which they supposed to be true. Photographers thus propagated a native that was, as Maxwell describes "wedded even more firmly to the stereotype" (1999: 10).

Crucially, colonial photography was not just public medium, but by the mid-nineteenth century was fast becoming a prominent feature of the political and administrative landscape. From the 1850s, British photographers began documenting India for the home market at the same time as administrator-anthropological efforts, under the likes of Herbert Risley, embraced photographic documentation in a quest to know India well enough to rule it. Photography was thus utilised in India as another mode through which differences between the coloniser and colonial subject could be objectively known and evidenced. Yet, as numerous scholars have discussed, photography made a powerful claim to authenticity and impartiality as it produced an idealised body politic in which the colonial subject becomes a distinctive feature of the imperialist mind. As although colonial photography was celebrated for capturing 'realities' and 'truth,' it changed the nature of perception and was, as Armstrong (1991) explains, a visual fiction transformed into documentary truth. As Chapter Three will discuss further, photographs of distant lands and peoples were also often displayed in nineteenth-century exhibitions, publicly certifying a politically-inspired fantasy that had before been more privately collected. The exhibition of living bodies, meanwhile, seized and re-produced a native who evoked the visual fictions of



photography, and captured an embodied version of image while bringing it persuasively to life. Continuing to arrest a visual fiction framed non-fiction, exhibitions thus breathed three-dimensional, physical and social life into a two-dimensional fantasy. This insidiously gave the 'native' spatial presence and 'truth', and created a convincing, living, moving picture of the colonial scene. More significantly, however, tangible space enabled spectators to inhabit that scene, so that the audience is not simply receptive, but an active consumer.

## EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY: SPECTATORSHIP & CLOTHES

Fig 1.7. Photograph of Empire of India Tea House.  
Empire of India Exhibition. Bullock cart in foreground, attendants in front of building.  
Copyright owner of work: Charles Imre Kralffy  
The National Archives

Fig 1.8. Photograph of Lucknow Street, Indian City  
Empire of India Exhibition, White City, London 1895 Empire of India Exhibition.  
Copyright owner of work: Charles Imre Kiralfy  
The National Archives

Figs 1.7 and 1.8 expose the population of performer and spectator in the exhibition space, both of whom inhabit and create the scene. Both images reveal theatrical space and the active presence of the audience. Unlike the workshops that staged craft display, or by extension a traditional theatre space, the division between the audience and exhibited body in this part of the exhibition space is undefined, and the boundaries between acting and non-acting become even less clear. Both photographs capture the Indian themed architecture of the exhibition—the creation of place— and both show the population of the scene by the Indian performer and the European spectator. The exhibition thus transforms into a site-specific or promenade theatrical space, in which the spectator is free to move and encounter at their leisure. As Qureshi (2011: 164) describes, the opportunities audiences were given for interaction with performers was important for the commercial success of shows. What is also significant, however, is that in this space audiences are

active participants, and therefore creators rather than mere observers of the scene that is immersive and interactive.

It is thus not only the colonised 'native' who comes to life in exhibition, but also the coloniser, which in turn points toward a correlation between theatrical space and ideological values of Empire. As Allain and Harvie remind us about theatre space more generally, dramatic social space "produces social effects and meanings that are, in turn, ideological" (2005: 206). As a theatrical space, exhibitions reflected, generated and most crucially enabled embodiment of the social, cultural and bodily imperatives of the voyeur, whose look was one of meaning and power. As Kaplan argues, "[l]ike everything in culture, looking relations are determined by history, tradition, power hierarchies, politics, economies. Mythic or imaginary ideas about nation, national identity and race all structure how one looks" (1997: 4). As suggested, however, the exhibition wasn't only a space of looking; it was a space of inhabiting. The 'native' was not the only identity being embodied and brought to life in the exhibition scene, it was also the colonising visitor, who was free to stroll, meet, encounter, observe, discern and interpret.

As visitors populated exhibited India, public proprietorship of the colonial land was evoked and authorised. The 1895 exhibition scenically reproduced the British occupied territory of India within the boundaries of London, with the effect of re-colonising India and making the British public into active inhibitors of the staged colonised space. In many ways this politics between space and sovereignty—the interplay of staged British India within the physical space of the metropolis—formulated a potent manifestation and extension of what Said (2003: 49-73) has described as 'Imaginative Geography.' This term explains how regions became poetically owned through dramatising the difference and distance of the Orient in relation to the self. Imaginative Geographies create the difference between the Occident and the Orient, producing the reality they describe, yet are representations, desires, fantasies and anxieties of those who create them. Said argues that the myths that are ascribed actual places, which work for the justification and maintenance of colonial

endeavours, remain attached to those places. They are the articulations of Europe, “whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries” (Said, 2003: 57). Although I later critique Said’s theories, I also understand exhibitions as spaces of ‘Imaginative Geography’, since they created a range of images of India that disseminated imperial agendas. However, I do also assert that exhibitions created an arena in which the British public could actively and performatively participate in social, cultural, and power relations, and act out their roles as colonisers of colonial India. Albeit theatrical, exhibitions facilitated a public’s inhabitancy of India, and therefore permitted audiences a role in exploring, discovering and claiming it, without having even having to leave British shores.

The audience populace of the imagined India is key; the population of spectator being crucial to the articulation of oppositional and hierarchical identities. These oppositions were performed, constructed and made consequential by the spectator. And as those who viewed became part of the stage themselves, they created, enacted and actualised the social worlds being performed; social worlds not autonomous to the exhibition ground, but reflected and made consequential to the themes of the colonial enterprise. Once inside Earls Court’s grounds, visitors entered a stereotypical fantasy that verified a broader set of cultural definitions, such as the premodern and exotic, at the same time as they entered as space that produced inhabitable and dialectical identities of the colonised/coloniser. As Bhabha explains more broadly: “The question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a *self*-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image” (1994: 64).

Figs 1.7 and 1.8 indicate the relational construction of identities and their body aesthetics, as their subjects (both spectator and performer) operate and perform as stereotypes. As seen in the images, colonial identities appear as easily understood typecasts. The ‘natives’ who drive the bullock carts are dressed in turbans and simple white tunics; the visitors stand back to observe

in their black Victorian clothing. This enabled the exhibition visitor effortlessly to create and incarnate their roles as colonisers of the colonised who appeared different, exotic, premodern, inferior. The spectator therefore populated and occupied the Indian space (just as the British in India were doing), as they helped to define and create colonial oppositions. Consequently the spectators were active participants in the systems of body politic and of power.

## COSTUME & CLOTHING

These images show that the clothes, or costumes, of exhibition performers were central to the establishment and distinction between the Indian performer as 'native'—the ruled subject—and the British spectators—the rulers, especially in spaces that did not clearly separate audience from the performer. Fig 1.8 shows bullock drivers posing in the streets of the 1895 exhibition. As previously noted, the Victorian spectators contrast with the performers' simple white dress, in their black suits and top hats. This clothing is symbolic of asymmetrical power structures within the exhibition space and beyond, yet also must be recognised in this context as a theatrical devise. It was common for exhibition managers to seek out and propagate the identifiable (and entertaining) 'native', and clothes provided an essential marker of ethnic origin (Qureshi 2011: 199). Similar to the scenes of colonial photography, costumes were routinely imposed upon exhibited people. The photographic collections from the 1895-6 Empire of India (and Ceylon) exhibition, held in the British Library and National Archive collections, also suggest that costumes were imposed on exhibited peoples, showing a repetition and uniformity of clothing amongst the performers. In spite of any associations with traditional clothing, these costumes marked the wearer's identity as an authentic 'native.'

Clothing played a central role, both inside and outside the parameter of the exhibition, in identifying the Indian performers as 'authentic' and as 'native.' During the summer months, numerous outings for the group of nearly two hundred Indian and Burmese performers were arranged by exhibition manager

Harold Hartley to landmarks including Windsor, Hampton Court, and Kew. Stepping outside the confines of the exhibition permitted the performers a more diverse experience of London, yet also extended the barriers of their display as they were validated and paraded as cultural and commercial icons of the 'real' East. Hartley noticed the promotional work their outings generated, commenting: "dressed in their native, highly coloured and picturesque costumes, they made a splendid advertisement for the show" (1939: 78). The performers' clothing here not only signified their identity, but it also differentiated them from the Indian population living in London—a population that included a diverse group consisting of lascars (sailors), ayahs (nannies), servants, students, and professionals in the institutions of law, politics and medicine (Visram, 2002: 44). Although the Indian population in London was growing over this period, Indian exhibits, attired in 'native' clothing, permitted spectators a lengthier stare on Indian subjects, and gratified curiosity over what was 'real' India.

The making of the native through clothing was also symbolic of broader power relations and colonial statuses. Although the archival record does not reveal the answers to questions such as who chose the 1895 performers' costumes, or what kind of participation the wearer had in their own self-image making, or even if their costumes actually represented what they wore as individuals in their lives outside the exhibition, it is important to consider clothing within the symbolic power relations in which they were given meaning. Colonial dress is a subject that has its own lengthy history, and clothing in the colonial context has been broadly recognised for its symbolic value. Dress as Thorald tells us "is one of the most powerful outward indicators of identity and social status, being at the intersection between the individual and the collective, between the intimate sphere (the body, the individual choice of clothes) and the social and political ones (the use of dress as an indicator of belonging to a certain group, or as a means of cultural resistance)" (2015: 44-45). As Wickramasinghe (2003: 1-3) similarly explains, political and economic meaning are assigned to clothes in the colonial context, and clothing transmits a variety of colonial meanings that 'signify.' Indeed, clothing signifies national identity, modernity and tradition, power and even resistance (the swadeshi movement, discussed

further in Chapter Four, being particularly important). Clothes also became the expressions of colonialism. As signifiers, and in the consolidation of Crown rule, clothes visually marked colonial status and power. The British used clothes as an emblem of authority, and to define and visually assert their claim to superiority and legitimacy (Cohn, 1996: 106-62). The assumption being that knowledge of identity could be read through what a person was wearing, or not wearing. For example, as if to affirm their claim to civilisation and dominance “one of the first impressions formed by British travellers to India in the nineteenth century was one of nakedness of the Indian” (Cohn, 1996: 129). Nakedness, as Tarlo (1996:34) agrees, was not only shocking to Europeans but also confirmed notions of evolutionary inferiority—India’s supposed backwardness and barbarism—in the face of British respectability and progress.

Clothes were vital in forging oppositions during a new regime of power, and as the practice of maintaining Englishness reached new levels, clothing styles became a crucial representation of disparity and power. As numerous scholars (including Cohn, 1996 and Collingham, 2001) have observed, increasing regulation of the body combined with the transfer of power to the Crown prompted a more decisive separation between the rulers and the ruled in India. Cohn (1996) explains that clothes are embedded in the highly unequal relationship between rulers and ruled at this time, the British in India believing that Indians should look Indian and British should look British. He examines how the British sought to reinforce their distinction from the Indian population through their own clothes and the ‘Oriental’ dress of their subjects. He discusses, for example, how the Sikh turban was standardised as a result of British attempts to identify Sikhs in the army to more generally argue that clothes hold significance because they are conceived as containing the racial and cultural essences of those who wear them. Furthermore, while it was under Company rule the Anglo-Indian, dubbed the ‘nabob,’ was famed for adopting ‘native’ custom and dress, after transfer of power ‘going-native’ was more forcefully frowned upon. “[I]t was Queen Victoria herself who suggested that civil servants in India should have an official dress uniform” (Cohn, 1996: 127). This uniform was bleak and consisted of dark coats, simple shirts, and

plain trousers, and marked a more complete separation between Britain and India and a new system of power. While the British suit came to represent sensibility, authority, progress, power and manliness in the West, the nearly naked or simply dressed Indian converted into the British man's antithesis and therefore could more easily be judged as his inferior.

Exhibitions occurred during this era and enabled the home audience to participate in the social structures and oppositions that were forming in India, partly around clothes. At the Empire of India exhibition for example, the performers' clothes provided a codified framework of imperial hierarchy, and made it visually readable and inhabitable to a general British public. Clothing clearly marked and differentiated the performer and spectator, and reproduced the articulations and expressions of power described above. The performers' clothing as well as the spectators' signposted a condition that was maintained within the exhibition ground, as both performer and spectator related to body politic being consecrated in India. Therefore, exhibition clothing not only played a central role in the tangible re-production of native/conqueror differences in the metropolitan sphere, it also enabled public embodiment of the visual and authoritative manifestations of colonised/coloniser cultural codes.

Although clothes enabled bodily discovery, and therefore participation in the expressions and regimes of power, they also on occasion disrupted the systems they operated in. By insisting on the ambivalence of the development of identity in performance, the issue expands Qureshi's important point that in the scholarship on exhibited peoples "race and empire are assumed to be explanatory factors rather than historically specific developments that require further explanation" (Qureshi, 2012c: 32). For example, clothes not only permitted incarnation of colonial status, but also—if only in fleeting and less candid ways—allowed for other kinds of complexities and appropriations, which not only evoked, but at times also unsettled stereotypes. Indian Jugglers, for example, stipulated a great deal of variety. Their near-nudity, although presenting a state traditionally linked to a British idea of savagery, did not always feed broader codified frameworks.



Fig 1.9 Gymnast  
from the Bombay  
Theatre of Varieties  
at the India and  
Ceylon Exhibition,  
London. *Unknown*  
1896. Photo  
888/(56) British  
Library

The exhibited bodies of male gymnasts demonstrated muscular strength within the European canon of ideal and stereotypical manliness. This opposes the widespread notion, that Hyam (1992: 202-3) and others have identified, that especially in the nineteenth century from British perspectives, Indian men appeared effeminate and physically weak. Instead, the gymnast in Fig 1.9 flexes his muscles to show off his might, in what can be considered a clear fulfilment of the European archetypal version of maleness; strong, physically burly, macho, powerful and proud. We can be left wondering, where is the feeble 'native' in this picture? At other times, clothing enabled cultural exploration and experimentation.

Fig 1.10 Elephants with passengers at the India and Ceylon Exhibition, London. *Unknown* 1896. Photo 888/(39) British Library

Fig 1.10 shows patrons smiling at the camera from on top of the elephants. The groups of women who occupy the two elephants on the left and middle of the image are seen wearing saris over their Victorian dress. Certainly, their dressing up enabled cultural role-play, adventure, discovery, domination, and possession. It also indicates a reverse mimicry—a coloniser impersonation of the colonised—which on the one hand stands as a double articulation that the colonial subject is given only a partial presence, and is being represented within the authoritative discourse of the colonised. Yet, on the other hand, cultural cross-dressing also played with cultural estrangements by enabling the wearer to play with their identity. Indeed, the cross-dressing suggests that, similar to the burly Indian in exhibition, the exhibition appropriation and transgression, and an opportunity to ‘try-on’ identities during a time of colonial expansion and imperial anxiety. This suggests that both performers and audiences created and transcended binaries between East and West in the

exhibition space.

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Exhibitions were theatrical spaces that were offered as authentic, and under the premise of authenticity transformed a fiction into what was offered as cultural truth. They therefore rendered India, as a place, culture and body, a popular commercial commodity, and created and maintained a set of stock images that prevail in the modern Western imagination. Exhibitions also played a role in the construction of knowledge by the British colonisers. For, although operating as venues of entertainment, exhibitions were not autonomous from the realm of political desire or from imperial expressions of power. Indeed, the so-called authentic experiences offered by the exhibitions to public audiences, including the authentic Indian scene and the authentic Indian native, reflected and produced a version of India that was commercially entertaining, and a version that operated within a world-view. As exhibitions helped invent authentic lands and bodies that resided in British ideological values, they allowed audiences better to incarnate their roles as colonisers. It follows that the audience who attended and inhabited the exhibition space played their roles in creating the space, its identities, culture and also colonisation.

The co-creation of identity and power by space and spectatorship is a result not only of the 1895 Empire of India exhibition, but also to other exhibitions that I discuss in later chapters. Indeed, the signposting and invention of identity, as well as theatricality and spectatorship, is the foundation upon which other chapters develop, and all draw on the premise outlined here that the audience are not only the consumers, but also the producers of coloniser/colonised identities. At the same time, this chapter has begun to pay attention to the subversions that theatricality of space makes possible. By considering the making—but also indicating briefly the breaking—of stereotypes, the creation and maintenance, as well as the exceeding and

resistance of cultural forms is suggested. These pockets of conflict in imperial discourse manifest more strongly through the spectacles that were performed on exhibition sites. On one hand, as Chapter Three will show, exhibition theatres performed a strong imperial ethos in which Indian history was known and claimed. Yet on the other, exhibition spectacles also chart the growing crisis of imperial rule. Interpenetrating with both the growing power of the British Raj in a post-Mutiny era and the rise in Indian nationalism in the last decades of the nineteenth century, spectacles trace not only the creation and perpetuation of stereotypes on the exhibition stage, but also the contentions that ensue. As Chapter Two explains, exhibition spectacles stimulated the political crisis over appropriate forms of representations and map the instability of the colonial enterprise.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PERFORMING INDIAN HISTORY ON THE EXHIBITION STAGE

Fig 2.1 The Empire of India Exhibition  
*The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times 25 May 1895.*

As we have seen in Chapter One, Victorian exhibitions created versions of India that were framed as authentic reproductions of place, and coalesced with cultural expressions that Empire relied upon. Exhibitions also became increasingly titanic in conception as the nineteenth century wore on. In order to attract crowds and secure profits, exhibitions that fell in the decades that concluded the nineteenth century and began the twentieth went to great lengths to produce entertainment on colossal and pioneering scales. The 1895 Empire of India exhibition at Earl's Court, for example, opened ceremoniously

by H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge, occupied a dizzying twenty-six acres, where the “pleasure-seeker will find full scope for his desire for amusement” (*The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* 25 May 1895). Earl’s Court was a feast of Oriental architecture; a theatrical invention of India in which spectators actively participated in the production of colonial identities. It was also a pleasure of the senses and a site of fairground frivolity, which included lakes, waterfalls, a ‘Giant Wheel’ that could carry 1,200 people three hundred feet in the air, as well as camels, boats and shops (as illustrated in the promotional artwork featured in Fig 1). It was impossible, reviewers remarked, to see all of the grounds in just one visit. Earl’s Court attracted mass audiences—who flocked in their thousands daily—and the grounds were so crowded that “the public bumps up against you on every side” (*Pick-Me-Up* 6 July 1895).

Yet, there was an important attraction at this exhibition site that deserves further evaluation under the premise of theatricality, in which a fantasy of place transforms as cultural truth. The melodramatic spectacle *A Grand Historical Spectacle – India*, staged at the heart of the Empire of India exhibition, produced entertainment on an unprecedented scale, and was an important way in which India was represented and imagined within the exhibition arena. It was not only the entertaining Indian ‘native’ who was being captured, invented and propagated in exhibition, it was also India’s history. It was at Empress Theatre, the largest theatre of its kind in the world, where “the past and present history of India” was “presented in a series of brilliant pictures” (*The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* 25 May 1895). Conceived as a truthful tale of Indian history, *India* was congratulated as “the most gorgeous series of spectacles London has seen in modern days” (*The Bury and Norwich Post, and Suffolk Standard* 24 September 1895) and was applauded as “a powerful addition to the many attractions at this notable pleasure resort” (*The Era*, 31 August 1895). Despite notable advertising puffing, audiences of *India* undoubtedly witnessed one of the biggest and most spectacular theatrical extravaganzas of its decade. Taking their seats amongst an audience of five thousand, *India*’s spectators were thrilled with scenes, songs and dances shown on a monumental scale, as they allegedly learnt

about the “most important incidents of Indian history” (Kiralffy, 1896: 15). The production, as we will see, was a colourful, magnificent and entertaining piece of commercial grandeur and imperial propaganda.

That *India* was showcased within the grounds of the Empire of India exhibition is crucial. The representations found in *India* added to the repertoire of Indian performances in the exhibition playground that also presented authentic craftsmen, nautch dancers and jugglers. *India*, therefore, was not only another great spectacular, but was made meaningful in—and gave new meaning to—the context of an exhibition at large that had cast India as its main theme. Built for the exhibition, the Empress Theatre occupied a prime location at Earl’s Court, and most of the spectacle’s spectators would have undoubtedly also visited the exhibition. As Gregory similarly argues, *India* presented the “historical matrix within which the exhibition should be read.... the propaganda value of the event was considerable, and the reflected image of imperial nationhood significant” (1991: 153). The spectacle devised a supposedly ‘truthful’ account of Indian history, yet a more accurate appraisal would have been that it served the prerogatives of capitalist consumer culture as it reinvented history in a dissemination of the ideologies on which imperial power was founded.

Earl’s Court’s *India* is not the only spectacle of interest in this chapter. From the middle of December in 1913 the Empress Hall at Earl’s Court was scheduled to stage a new spectacle, *The Romance of India*. This production is also crucial, not in spite of but *owing to* its censorship. Although it was never staged, the production offers important insight into the collision of theatre with its wider political sphere, and urges a reassessment of how depictions of India on the nineteenth-century stage have been understood in contemporary literature. Drawing on ludicrous stereotypes that were a common feature of Victorian theatre, *The Romance of India* was a melodramatic tale of Indian history. The spectacle included scenes of Indian religious ‘evil’ and proposed the restoration of peace, liberty and freedom through Britain’s rescue of India. Unlike *India* however, *The Romance of India* was never staged. Taking the thrills of savagery to an extreme, the production was scrutinised by the Lord

Chamberlain's Office which was becoming increasingly sensitive to the potential offensive of loyal Indians.

Although a largely overlooked spectacle, Lahiri (2000: 83) argues that *The Romance of India* provides important insight into how India was depicted in British theatre in the period. According to Lahiri (2000: 83), portrayals of India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries propagated grotesque and evil images, juxtaposed with the 'Godliness' of British justice. He is by no means erroneous in his argument that the narratives of cruelty, human sacrifice, barbaric ritual, and brutal *sati* practices that were featured in *The Romance of India* were characteristic of theatrical productions involving India in this period. Many productions, including *Indian Prince* (1897), *The Nautch Girl* (1891), *Jewels of the East* (1910), *Indian Pickle* (1919), and *The Eye of Siva* (1923) propagated these themes. Nevertheless, I do urge that it is worth being more sensitive to the reception of the stereotype, as well as its production. While themes of conflict and barbarism were persistent in *The Romance of India*, Lahiri not only overestimates their dominance, but also fails to acknowledge the significance of the production's censorship.

The Lord Chamberlain's authorised intrusion into popular culture was a reality of nineteenth-century theatre, yet *The Romance of India* was met with an unusual level of objection. This objection marks an important tension in the interactions of entertainment, politics, and cultural stereotypes. What becomes significant is that the controversy surrounding *The Romance of India* carried the representation of India outside the exhibition site, where it collided with and influenced political relations during a particularly unsettled political epoch. Indeed, what is so important about the failure of the 1914 spectacle is that it elicits the wider political concern over offending the rising and potentially mobilising Indian elite during a period of increasing political turbulence. Exhibitions are thus exposed as sites of debate and rebellion; their representations spawn conflicts and generate unruly prospects in the creation of cultural definitions and in the worlds of popular culture and politics.



In this chapter I turn to the super-colossal type of theatre: the spectacle. By focusing on two shows produced for Earl's Court, I review how titanic dramatic narrative, historical tales, and accounts of civilising were attached to the representation of India within the exhibition arena, helping the British public become acquainted with a version of Indian history. The first spectacle I explore is the 1895-6 spectacle *India*, which amazed audiences with its size and ingenuity as it authorised an inventive history that, although producing ambiguous stereotypes, was nothing short of imperial in flavour. I then turn to *The Romance of India*, which was intended for Earl's Court in 1914. By tracing the success of *India* and the failure of *The Romance of India*, I show another way in which Indian identity was invented and rejected in the British imagination, and through the exhibition arena. These two productions also trace the changing face of British rule, which is not only reflected in but is affected by popular culture. Similar in content, these two spectacles chart the making and increasing crisis over appropriate forms of representations, as well as the growing instability of the Raj regime. While they both offered electrifying entertainment, they also acted as sites of socio-political conflict, transformation and intolerance.

#### EXHIBITION THEATRES AND INDIA ON THE POPULAR BRITISH STAGE

The 1895-6 *India* and the failed 1913 *Romance of India* were not the only spectacles that were performed on exhibition sites. Many theatrical productions were staged in theatres built within exhibition grounds. In 1872 the Crystal Palace opened a theatre capable of accommodating an audience of four thousand. It staged operatic and dramatic plays, including *The Lilly of Killarney* (1872), *Blue Beard* (1894), and the Festival of Empire's highly celebrated *Pageant of London* (1911) said to include an outstanding fifteen thousand performers. Similarly, Earl's Court, home of *India* and *The Romance of India*, hosted a multitude of successful productions, including the *Red Shirt and Indian Chief* (1887), which instigated fame of 'Wild West Shows' in Britain,

Frank Fillis' *Savage South Africa* (1899), which accompanied the Greater Britain exhibition, and a reproduction of the Moulin Rouge at the Paris in London exhibition (1902). The Kiralfy brothers were equally keen on integrating spectacles into their exhibitions. Imre Kiralfy produced *Nero* or *The Fall of Rome* (1891) at the Venice in London Exhibition, *Columbus and the Discovery of America* (1893) at World's Columbian Exposition, as well as many successful shows at Earl's Court between 1895 and 1908. At White City Kiralfy built an open-air theatre where Bollywood-style extravaganzas were performed to audiences of up to three thousand. Opening in June 1908, *Our Indian Empire* was performed at White City's theatre twice daily where apparently the whole Indian empire had "been ransacked from north to south, and from east to west, to collect the cleverest of Indian performers – over a hundred in number, who will perform their astonishing feats in the large ring" (Official Guide, 1908: 48). Imre Kiralfy's brother Bolossy had similar successes including *Constantinople* (1892-3) at Olympia, *Le Voyage de Balkis* (1902) in Paris, *The Tribute of Balkis* (1903) in New York as well as *The Durbar of Delhi* (1904-5).

Although producing their own distinctive and outlandish style, exhibition spectacles acted within the trends of the popular theatre. Productions routinely included gaslight, magic slides, glass plates, huge moving panoramas and dioramas, catering to a theatre-going public who "felt that a drama could not succeed by the power imagination or the power of words alone" (Booth, 1981: 2). In particular, the popular British stage frequently exoticised Eastern visions, and appealed to growing demand for entertainment. It did so under the guise of authenticity and public education, often to the benefit of commercial *laissez-faire* culture and popular imperialism. Gould describes:

with authentically dressed casts in the hundreds, rifle and cannon fire, full-sized replicas of Buddhist temples, live horses, and patriotic music,....[theatre] bridged the gap between documentary verisimilitude and spectacular entertainment, systematically exploiting all available visual technologies in a constant quest to satisfy an English public eager for ever-more elaborate displays of empire.

(2011: 2)

Typically inclusive of state-of-the-art visual effects, moving scenery, impressive lighting and titanic stages, theatre became an indicator of ingenuity and progress, and was closely linked, as Mackenzie (1984: 46) contends, to pride in technological achievements.

Numerous scholars agree that theatrical depictions of distant places became associated with spectacle, delight, mystery, industrial progress and Empire. Gould, (2011), Ziter (2003), Gregory (1991), Hall and Rose (2006), Booth (1981), Bratton (1991) and Richards (2016) all agree that themes of empire and imperialism littered nineteenth-century theatre. They also typically insist that nineteenth-century melodramas, with their colonising heroes and colonised villains, were not only hugely successful (with many imperial-themed productions running performances in the hundreds), they also inspired patriotism for Empire. For example, Richards identifies that productions at Drury Lane “frequently took their cue from military events in the empire” and reflected and responded to imperial politics (2016: 181). Gould identifies over 300 plays that dealt with imperial issues and explains that, otherwise only vaguely imagined, Victorian theatre gave concrete form to “those remote people and places that had “absent-mindedly” become attached to Britain” (2011: 1-2). Bratton agrees that Victorian theatre helped to identify coloniser/colonised difference and demonstrated for the British public the parts they were meant to mimic in their Empire (1991: 5). The nineteenth-century British stage continually responded to imperial concerns, and allowed them to live on. Between 1857-8 the British stage hosted a wave of plays about the Indian ‘Munity’, yet “mutiny-themed plays continued to appear in London theatres throughout the remainder of the century” (Gould, 2011: 2). Furthermore, as Gould suggests, nineteenth-century theatre offered a point of contact between the worlds of mass-popular culture and political regime. As McClintock (1995: 4) has said, the domains of economic production and racial difference are reciprocally related. The stage contributed to the cultural project for control, reflecting, like music halls, a dominant imperial ethos and patriotism that appealed to all classes as it revolutionised stage technology, entertainment and profits on unprecedented scales. Hugely popular, theatre

was a site of mass-entertainment that helped to forge a self-identity and a sense of social order. As Bratton stresses “[p]erformance will enter the consciousness of the participants... and may therefore influence their construction of their world... affecting the way they see themselves and other people, how they think about the world around them and their place in it” (1991:1).

The Victorian stage was a unique product of nineteenth century culture and its echo undoubtedly provides a glimpse into the spirit of the times. Featuring exaggerated characters, sensational plots, orchestral music and songs, stages that could hold casts in their hundreds, audiences in the thousands, as well as state of the art mechanical sets and dazzling effects, Victorian theatre went to great lengths to impress and attract audiences as it ‘educated’ and promoted Empire. Eastern topics, as Mackenzie (1984: 48) and Yeandle (2015: 132-135) write, became common on the Victorian stage and in pantomime. Indeed, pantomimes were also incredibly popular sites of spectacle that operated within topical commentary of news, not only reflecting but helping to produce public opinion (Yeandle, 2015: 127). Whereas during the eighteenth century interest in representing the Other manifested as a will to maintain that Other for the purposes of gratifying sensations of wonder (Ashley, 2000: 77), during the nineteenth century, as Singleton (2010: 351) agrees, imperial themes became the West End’s most common, insidious and distinguishing features.

Productions featuring India, including *Indian Prince* (1897), *My Friend From India* (1896), *Prince from India* (1906), *The Nautch Girl* (1891), *Behind the Veil* (1910), *Jewels of the East* (1910), and *Indian Pickle* (1919), were typically melodramatic in nature and evoked visual spectacle, exoticism, savagery, fear and danger. Productions regularly included scenes of Indian devil work and human sacrifice, where white heroes and black demons were offered as points of identification. As a result, the popular stage routinely re-produced a superstitious, sinister and religiously evil India. Yet the demonising of India in theatre was not a sole product of nineteenth-century theatre. A ‘monsterish’ side of India has a lingering history in literature and art as well as Orientalist/anthropological thought. There was a reciprocal—though

disparate—relationship between these media. In the British imagination, India was often conceived as a dark, destructive and evil place. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literatures including poems, non-fiction and historical and anthropological works, were often full of lurid depictions of Hindu religious practices. For example, a dangerous version of India had long been described in traveller's tales, which often appeared as inserts in popular newspapers, and typically told tales about Indian *sati*, nakedness, and turmoil. British writing on India, including the works of James Mill and Henry Maine, meanwhile, frequently pervaded “descriptions of moonlit temples crowded with grotesque statuary; filthy, half-naked fakirs both repelling and fascinating innocent English maidens” (Adas, 1989: 172). Likewise, the Orientalist impulse (which will be discussed further in Chapter Three), was seized by theorists including Elliot and Hunter and their contemporaries, believed that the once-prosperous Indians had become degenerate through tyrannical superstitions. Hunter for example assumed that caste was the creation of the Aryan race, which had been led astray from Christianity (Bayly, 1995: 200). Novels and poems—from Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, Dryden's *Aurung-Zebe*, and Beckford's *Vathek* to Southey's *Curse of Kehama*, Moore's *Lalla Rookh* and Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*—similarly disseminated India “as a realm of fabulous riches and cruel potentates” (Brantlinger, 1988: 85). Artworks also played a role in this vivid imagery. Mitter (1977: 9-10) has traced the history of European reactions to Indian art, where he links images of Indian Gods to the Devil. He argues that from the earliest date the Christian church taught that all pagan religions were the works of the Devil, and that imageries of the Devil in the Middle Ages began to draw from diverse sources. “[C]lassical monsters and gods, Biblical demons and Indian gods were all discriminately lumped together” (Mitter, 1977: 10).

Stirred by the image of India in a range of historical cultural media and anthropological thought, India's core remained an unknown, mysterious and possibly threatening prospect to a late nineteenth-century British public. India existed as a site of excitement, thrill and fear—the central components of melodramatic entertainment—during a time when India was also becoming increasingly important to Britain economically and politically; thus explaining

why India was Victorian theatre's most common topic. In many ways the spectacles featured on exhibition sites followed trend: they often exaggerated themes of delight and danger prevalent on other stages in the pursuit of colossal and crowd-pleasing entertainment. Bolossy Kiralfy's *The Orient* for example, performed at Olympia in 1895, combined operatic spectacle with exhibition-like pageantry, and exploited fear of the Other for the satisfaction of entertainment in London's major exhibition hall. The spectacle included "native sacrifice scenes... fire-worshippers.... priests with symbols of their idolatry... Fetish men.... Negro grotesques... and grotesque athletes" (*The Morning Post* 22 December 1894: 5). Exhibition productions also routinely marketed their dramatic narratives as factual and educational. For example, promotional reviews urged that *The Orient* was a representative illustration of the varied life, custom, trade and pastimes of the 'barbaric splendour' of the East in bold claims of verisimilitude.

In many ways, *India* and *The Romance of India* fit comfortably within this theatrical landscape. Both spectacles were visually compelling productions conceived on colossal scales, and both disseminated imperial ideology. However, these productions also suggest that as audiences were entertained with themes of conquest and ownership of India, they were also presented with characters who began to conflate the dichotomies between East and West. Therefore, *India* and *The Romance of India* are especially significant productions, and offer new insights into the realm of spectacle production, and to contemporary understanding of how India was represented on the nineteenth-century British stage. More significantly still, they not only reflected, but also provoked an imperial ethos that was powerful whilst burdened with tension under the surface. By exploring this matter further, I stress two matters of importance: The first is that spectacles offered another representation of India within the exhibition showground and constructed another facet of Indian identity. The second is that spectacles resided within the British approach to colonial rule, which was neither fixed nor fully hegemonic, rather was dominant and responsive. As Kiralfy's *India* points towards, and the failure of *The Romance of India* determines, spectacles were not entirely free from

antagonisms; they reflect not only the spirit of their times but a political climate that was having to adapt in order to hold on to power.

## INDIA – A GRAND HISTORICAL SPECTACLE

*India* at Earl's Court spawned inventive and entertaining renditions of India's history that have been so far understood as working in the service of imperialist rhetoric. Chakravarty (2006), Gould (2011), and Qureshi (2011) have all responded briefly to *India - A Grand Historical Spectacle*, whilst Gregory (1991) has written a more comprehensive chapter about it. These scholars commonly agree that the spectacle justified British rule on both moral and historical grounds, and composed the fantasy of British heroism, its moral duty and supremacy, and constituted Britain as a historic, philanthropic and civilising force in Indian history. Yet, even Gould (2011: 169) confesses that "there is undoubtedly much that remains to be said about this play." A 'historical' account of India's thousand-year war-ridden history, from 1024 until Queen Victoria's proclamation as Empress of India, *India* was not only spectacular, it reasserted, as others have argued, hegemonic discourses centred in imperialism. That it also paradoxically demonised Indian religious practice as it venerated India's Emperors has been overlooked. That *India* presented audiences with a relatively complex vision is important, because in doing so it engaged in themes of unity, peace and civilising discourse, all of which worked insidiously for a new era of commercial entertainment and imperial power. As the production rendered India dangerous and safe, Othered and familiarised, far away and close, stress points in imperialist narratives are revealed – all of which points to new regimes of power and the role of theatre and exhibitions within them.

In order to understand the colossal scale as well as the capitalist and imperial spirits that dwelt in the spectacle *India*, we must look not only to the context of entertainment of this time (as outlined above) but also to its creator.

Hungarian born Imre Kiralfy, who was one of the most successful if not *the* most successful exhibition organiser of the Victorian and early Edwardian era,

produced and directed both the 1895 exhibition and the spectacle *India*; Kiralfy's "showy extravagance not only influenced human displays but significantly changed the nature of world's fairs" (Qureshi 2011: 107). In partnership with his brother Bolossy until 1887, Imre Kiralfy's show business career started at the age of four. As a youth he studied magic, music and even civil engineering. It was in Paris, as Kiralfy's brother Bolossy described, where the Kiralfys learned the theatrical modes of realism that was "dominating French drama" (Bolossy, 1932: 68), and there that the Kiralfys discovered a style they later incorporated into melodrama. Kiralfy described the Paris' International Exhibition at the Champs de Mars as "the supreme achievement in the way of pageants and exhibitions" (Kiralfy 1909: 647).

The Kiralfy brothers were the eldest of seven siblings born in the 1840s in Budapest during the Hungarian Revolution, and had changed their name from Königsbaum to escape recognition as the sons of a revolutionary. As young men they toured Europe, performing as specialty dancers, before arriving to America in 1869, with family in tow, where they carved their career together in spectacle-producing (Tenneriello, 2013: 97). Imre declared that he noticed "instantly that the great popular want in America was spectacle" (1909: 647). Combining realism and spectacle, the transatlantic Kiralfy brothers converted "American theatre audiences to enthusiasts for the French style of musical spectacle" (Bolossy, 1932: 93). Thanks to their heady blend of melodrama and realism, their joint twenty five year-long career in America was remarkably successful, with accomplishments including *Excelsior* (1883), *The Fall of Babylon* (1887), *Nero and the Burning of Rome* (1888), as well as Imre's most celebrated achievement *America* (1892). *America* was one of the biggest money-makers ever known, netting over one million dollars in only seven months. "America," I am told," remarked Kiralfy, "marks an epoch in the history of the stage. On its commercial side, at all events, no such average of receipts has ever been recorded before" (Kiralfy, 1909: 648).

Part of the Kiralfys' success resided in their quest for scale. Each production looking to surpass the last, their spectacles characteristically included state-of-the-art effects, mechanised scenery, innovative lighting arrangements, vast



scenic displays, and enormous groupings of dancing girls. The Kiralfys also became famous for their storylines, which often “followed fables of democratic colonization through virtues of patriotism, religious tolerance, and moral fortitude” (Tenneriello, 2013: 101). Whether set in America, Italy, South Africa or India, the Kiralfy spectacles were stories of religious persecution that stood as an opposition to Western evolution, science and social progress. Despite all their achievements however, it was in America that the brothers’ relationship fell apart. Bolossy confessed that 1886 “was one of the most turbulent years of my life – Imre and I parted company. Like most serious conflicts, it had both immediate and long-brewing origins” (1932: 127). After the failure of Bolossy’s solo production *the Siege of Troy* for Chicago, Imre was furious, writing to Bolossy that he had “RUINED THE FUTURE OF OUR CAREERS” (ibid). Although pursuing separate careers from then on, and arguably even rivalling one another, the Kiralfy brothers continued to share a love of spectacle, and, although Imre’s career has long over-shadowed his brother’s, each made a significant mark on the entertainment business.

After the success of *America*, Imre returned to England, his partnership with his brother over for good. Yet their separation clearly only spurred Imre’s ambitions. Predicting that London could offer him even more long-term success, he took over and redesigned Earl’s Court exhibition grounds with a twenty-one-year lease. There he produced in succession: the Empire of India Exhibition, India and Ceylon Exhibition, The Victorian Era Exhibition, The Universal Exhibition, Greater Britain Exhibition, Woman’s Exhibition, International Exhibition, The Military Exhibition, Paris in London, and his greatest triumph, White City, which welcomed nearly eight and a half million people and included one hundred and twenty exhibition buildings.

### *INDIA AT EARL’S COURT*

The 1895 Empire of India Exhibition marked the beginnings of Kiralfy’s success at Earl’s Court, and was a triumph punctuated by his spectacle *India*. The Empress Theatre opened on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1895, and was an

impressive attraction of the exhibition in its own right. The theatre was decorated in an Indian style, and could seat five thousand people at each showing, with every audience member guaranteed an uninterrupted view of the stage. *India* was performed twice daily, at 2:30pm and 8:30pm, lasted approximately three hours, and ran for two seasons—longer than any other of Kiralfy's plays.

Imre produced *India* not long after his then estranged brother's sensation *The Orient* (1894-5) at Olympia. Coincidentally or not, Bolossy's production at Olympia was enjoying success at the same time as Imre was formulating plans to use India as subject for his up-coming exhibition at Earl's Court. Described in exhibition posters and promotional material as "a mammoth and original terpsichorean and lyric spectacle and water pageant" and, in true Victorian style, "the grandest show on Earth" Bolossy's spectacle was hugely successful due in large part to the public's thirst for visual extravagance and Eastern topics. *The Orient* incorporated performing elephants, dances of the 'Amazons', moving spectacles, mechanical and scenic novelties, elaborate cities, temples, and a vast assortment of impressive costumes. The stage was filled with performing elephants, gymnasts and clowns on roller-skates. It also included "a vast collection of scenes and incidents representative of various phases of the East" (*The Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 December, 1894). It opened on Boxing Day 1894, had a cast of 2,500, and welcomed audiences in the thousands. Spectators were invited to Olympia two and a half hours before the show started in order to enjoy the numerous attractions, including a bazaar, a jungle, indigenous arts and crafts, and seventeen tableaux known as the 'side-shows' of Olympia. These included a Syrian swordsman, an Indian jungle, an Aladdin's Palace and Eastern Magic.

Like his brother, Imre was exploiting India as a source of spectacle and entertainment and so-called public edification. Kiralfy (1896: 15) wrote that the Empress Theatre enabled him;

...to present those combinations of colour and groupings on a large scale which so greatly add to the perfection of our creations.... India

also gives me an opportunity for pictorial display – splendid pictures and combinations of colours, of which I am so fond, and to which I devote almost as much time and study as the composition of the play itself; for, while the ploy and action stimulate the minds of the spectator, its harmonious colouring, its light and shade, its touches of artistic feeling, as well as its beautiful music, cannot fail to captivate the senses and move the heart...

*India* was certainly more spectacular and far more successful than *The Orient*. After its opening, the press was full of nothing but applause for *India's* visual achievements: “the success of *India* has been so phenomenal that it scarcely needs a *sacer vates* to sing its praises,” declared the Era (31 August 1895). “Nothing so beautiful on so large a scale has ever been seen” (*Times*), “A feast of procession, music and colour” (*Telegraph*), “The biggest theatre in the world and the greatest show on earth; a hackneyed phrase, but true in this case” (*Daily News*), “A spectacle which, in a point of costly magnificence and artistic beauty, has not been witnessed within the recollection of the most inveterate sightseer” (*Sunday Times*). *India* was an instant hit, welcoming approximately one and half million people in six months (Gregory 1991: 153). Part of the reason for the spectacle’s success was that Kiralfy hit the crucial sweet spot between pioneering spectacle and so-called verisimilitude.

*India's* success undoubtedly rested on its almighty scale and technological innovation. As the press suggests, nothing so titanic or impressive had been seen in Britain before. The theatre itself was a building of magnificence and an icon of modernity. Standing one hundred and seventeen feet tall, it contained a stage measuring three hundred and fifteen feet wide and one hundred deep. Its five thousand capacity remained unsurpassed, even in Kiralfy’s later shows. With *India* as his subject, Kiralfy took the possibilities of spectacle to another level. As Gregory (1991: 152) writes: *India* presented distinct differences from other nineteenth-century plays that dealt with India because of Kiralfy’s obsession with scale. Kiralfy spared no expense; the size of his spectacle was exceptional and included a cast, according to promotional material, of one thousand professional performers. Despite issues of exaggeration (as Robert Sugarman (2007: 6-8) argues, Kiralfy had a knack for making casts appear much bigger, where through multiple costume changes a cast of only several

hundred transformed into a cast of over a thousand), there is no denying the impressive scale of Kiralfy's spectacle. 'Re-enactment' processions included enormous numbers of musicians and dancers, who filled the stage in the hundreds. The scenes were vast: "the number of people who take part in it is so large, the final grouping of the crowd so varied, and the scheme of colour so rich and dazzling that it is quite impossible for the eye to take it in at one glance" (*The Era*, 31 August 1895). The stage palpitated with horsemen, elephants, guards in gleaming armour, jesters, camels and dancing girls whose movements and costumes combined in "huge masses" and produced "astonishing kaleidoscopic effects" (*Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* 25 August, 1895). The stage itself, designed by architect Allen O. Collard at a cost of £57,000, was "conceived as a larger version of Olympia" (Gregory, 1991: 158). It was split into two, one stage elevated over the other, with the lower stage built on tracks so that it could be moved backwards and forwards. The painted sceneries, attached to ropes, were controlled by electric motors and the orchestra was placed on a large platform suspended from the roof. The height of visual marvel was achieved when a portion of the stage was converted into a lake, representing Portsmouth Harbour, upon which small boats sailed around a steam ship. For all its visual spectacle however, *India* was a historic tale of war and peace. Designed not only to amaze the eye, but to stimulate the mind, *India* included ten scenes devised to recite "the most important incidents of Indian history with fidelity to life" (Kiralfy, 1896: 15). This so-called accurate rendition of history marketed sensation as realism, and conflated entrepreneurial and political desires. For as *India* dazzled, so it also supported themes of Empire, including the notion of civilising and the glorification of Crown rule.

#### A SERVICE TO IMPERIAL DISCOURSE: THE PLOT

The curtain's opening revealed a large chorus, adorned in Indian costume, grouped around the Queen Empress. To the tune of the national anthem, the Chorus sang an ode to their Empress:

Eastern Empress! Western Queen!  
Thou, whose stainless flag is seen  
Fluttering under every sky!  
Thou, whose sceptred Majesty  
Sways the seas and rules the lands !  
Here, to-day, thy India stands  
Mindful, grateful, on this stage,  
Calling back each bygone age

The Mahmud's fight and Somnath's fall;  
And the Mogul in his hall;  
And Jehanghir's gorgeous day ;  
With stress of fierce Mahratta fray;  
Till Victoria's influence comes  
Silencing the battle drums

(“India" At Earl's Court". *The Era*, Saturday, 31 August, 1895)

The ode celebrated a fantasy of Indian gratitude, and commemorated Queen Victoria as a heroic figure whose flag is ‘stainless,’ whose guardianship ‘pure.’ Summarising what was going to happen in the play, it made an important statement about how the spectacle should be interpreted: that Indians were “Mindful, grateful” and that Crown rule had/would ‘silence’ the battle drums in India. It also established a sense of fate by revealing to the audience that Queen Victoria was going to rescue India before the spectacle starts.

The ode was followed by Scene One—the invasion of India by Mahmud, “Sultan of Ghazni.” It was inspired by Rev. Hobart Caunter’s *The Romance of Indian History*. A panorama of devastation and warfare, the scene depicted Mahmud conquering India. The stage was filled with actors in the hundreds, while horses charged, fires burned and semi-naked ‘natives’ grasped spears and shields, killing one another in a civil war that raged in front of a backdrop of temples and an over-sized statue of Shiva looming over the destruction. Scene One was a visual feast; a prospect of religious war and savage carnage, brought about by Indian ‘idols’ and religious antagonisms.

Extending themes of religious tyranny, Scene Two showcased savage human sacrifice and religious immorality. In this scene a corrupt Brahmin priest initiates a ‘*suttee*’ (widow burning), telling a widow victim clinging to her child,

that he will save her if she gives herself to him. Although the widow chooses to honour death, the priest takes her as his prisoner. Mahmud saves the widow, and three Guiding Spirits—Love, Mercy and Wisdom—appear to guide India “through the terrible stages through which she will have to pass” (Kiralffy, 1896: 17). The cause of the spirits is to defend and guide India “Till dawns for her a brighter day” (ibid), which as the ode already revealed, comes in the form of Crown rule. During Scene Two “Akbar and the English Merchants, 1599” and Scene Three “Voyage on the Jumna River” Akbar, a great Mughal is applauded by the chorus of the Guiding Spirits. Three English merchants sent on behalf of Queen Elizabeth attend these celebrations. Akbar distributes his silver, jewels, and precious stones, offering each of the three Englishmen the choicest gems in a symbolic act of allegiance, and a suggestive collaborative transfer of Indian wealth and power to the British. In Scene Four Jehanghir, who refers to himself as ‘the King of England’s royal brother’, strengthens these themes of peace and cooperation (there is also an important suggestion of ‘brotherhood’ between the British and higher caste Indians here, and is an issue that will be discussed further in Chapter Three). Legitimizing the British inheritance of Indian power, Jehanghir welcomes Sir Thomas Roe, one of the most important early travellers to India, to his audience. Jehanghir showers Sir Thomas Roe with gifts, offering audiences another act of Indian loyalty and allegiance given willingly. The Guiding Spirits depart, believing their work is done and peace and wisdom restored.

However, in the absence of the British and Guiding Spirits, war in India rages once again. Act Two, Scene 5 “Nearing the Gates of Swarga” and Scene 6, “Sivaji, the Mahratta Chief, 1670,” see a battle between Mughal and ‘Mahratta’ soldiers over a Hindu temple held by the ‘Mahrattas.’ At the foot of a Hindu temple, as the Mughals prepare to ambush the Mahrattas, a Mughal general takes attendance from a Mahratta officer. The disloyal Mahratta offers to capture Sivaji’s (the Hindu Mahratta chief) wife for a sum of a thousand rupees, promising that he will destroy Sivaji’s power. The Mughal general accepts, but when Sivaji’s wife is brought to him, he recognises her as the daughter of a Mughal emperor. Meanwhile, during attempts to free his wife,

Sivaji realises he is duelling against his own son, and the 'squabbles' between Mahratta/Mughal rulers become even more nonsensical.

After the Mahrattas defeat the Mughals, the Guiding Spirits return to celebrate Sivaji's victory. Again, however, they are mistaken in their trust that India can remain in peace. Whilst Vishnu creates a "Hindu Paradise" in Scene Seven with the aid of deities Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati, that paradise cannot be sustained under either the Maratha or Mughal Empire. Scene 8 "Portsmouth. Departure of Troops for India, 1858" finds British troops departing for India on a steam ship. Before they leave, news that the Munity has been trampled reaches the departing soldiers, whose journey is now to celebrate and uphold Crown rule, which becomes the liberator of Maratha/Mughal conflicts. Scene 9 commemorates "The Imperial assemblage at Delhi, 1877" whereupon the Guiding Spirits rejoice:

Joy, oh, joy! Our task is done  
India's happiness is won!  
Back to heaven we may fly,  
To our dwelling in the sky  
(Kiralfy, 1896: 35)

Homage is made to Queen Victoria, as she is pronounced Empress of India. The Guiding Spirits return to their celestial plane for good, India now under the safe guardianship of England. In the final scene "Grand Apotheosis - Victoria. 1896" Victoria's takes over the role of the Spirits and ensures final and complete peace in India.

#### HISTORICAL VERISIMILITUDE

Although a sensational production that was jam-packed with visual delights, Kiralfy pledged that his exhibition would strengthen Britain's political ties with India. He remarked in the Official Guide that "the Englishmen would learn more about India, and that the various peoples of that country would appreciate the interest which was being taken in their native land" (Kiralfy

1895: 9). Kiralfy thus insisted on a relationship between entertainment and education. In doing so he vindicated his own commercial endeavours and political viewpoint. Furthermore, he justified the commercialisation of India through the premise of 'public education' and 'historical verisimilitude' inspired in part by Kiralfy's love for the theatrical modes of realism in French drama. His style clearly appealed to a public taste, and Kiralfy's lessons were widely accepted as factual. Accommodating Kiralfy's pledge to the edification of the public, *India* was congratulated in reviews not only for its stage innovation, special effects and scale, but also for being:

...a lesson in history, an appeal to patriotism. It throws a flood of dazzling light upon the nature and characteristics of our fellow-subjects of the Orient. It helps to the understanding of the complex problems of government we have set for ourselves in India. It aids to a fuller comprehension of that Oriental nature always so full of a mysterious charm for us, so hard to understand, so necessary to know if we would discharge as a nation our great responsibilities as administrators of our Indian Empire.

(*The Standard*. 21<sup>st</sup> May 1896)

Indeed, the press endorsed *India* by applauding its 'educational' and 'relationship-building' substance. *India*, claimed *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, "instructs us with regard to England's historic connection with our vast Indian Empire" (24 August 1895: 122).

Being "a lesson in history" *India* proliferated and enabled public participation in a central condition of British imperial power; the knowing of India in order to rule it. Patrons were reassured that not only was the spectacle entertaining them as it 'penetrated' Oriental nature, they were also encouraged that being knowledgeable about India was the only way to govern it successfully. Understanding "the complex problems of government we have set for ourselves in India" (op.cit.), *India* thus coalesced with a new era of power in the late nineteenth century, during a time when anthropological-administrator efforts were being commissioned in India in order to document and rule India (See Chapter Three for the relationship between exhibitions and ethnographies).



At the same time as thrilling audiences and helping them 'know' India, *India* rewrote a sensational and imperialistic Indian history. Gould (2011, 169) attests that the spectacle selected which parts of history to celebrate, and which to forget. Two centuries of British military activity in India were overlooked and reduced to one brief, highly celebrated, but obscured conquest over rebel forces of the 1857 Indian Mutiny. War, disorder and religious chaos appeared to be exclusively the fault of disputes between Hinduism and Islam, in which Britain appeared to play no part. The way in which the Mutiny was depicted is particularly revealing of a denial of British involvement in bloodshed. When news that the rebellion had failed reached Portsmouth Harbour in Scene Eight, troops departed not for war, but for victory, in a celebration of military conquest that denied violence from Britain's hands. Conflict between Indians and British, as Gregory (1991: 171) points out, was remarkably restrained.

Conflict between Indians themselves however was remarkably *unrestrained*. Audiences of *India* were encouraged to interpret Indian history as an unrelenting site of religious civil war that drummed to divine power and farce. Marathas/Mughal wars rage in front of temples and gods, as corrupt characters capture and condemn women, and Marathas are discovered to be Mughals, and Mughals are discovered to be Marathas. Britain had long perceived the religious character of India as "inherently divided against itself by the mutually exclusive Hindu and Muslim communities" (Gottschalk, 2013: 7). Caste was seen to commit to social 'backward' values that the modern world had lost, becoming a marker for India's essential difference to the West. Feeding this view, the battles between Marathas/Mughal armies in *India* not only intensified a sense of British moral and religious conquest in India, but they inserted Britain as peaceful, liberating and united force. All the while peace in India is unobtainable even under India's diplomatic rulers. A synopsis in the Official Programme, written by J. Talboys Wheeler, summarised that:

The history of the people of India, apart from religious development, would lie in a nutshell. The Rajputs conquered the aboriginal tribes and formed them into kingdoms and empires. The Brahmans distributed them into castes, and riveted the fetters of castes by associating them

with the worship of gods and religious obligations. Buddhism flourished in India, but failed to break up the caste system. The Muhammadans came and established their empire, and then tried to force the Hindus to abandon Brahma and idols and embrace the religion of Koran. But the persecutions of Aurungzebe were followed by the rebellion of the Hindus, the uprising of Mahrattas, and the decay and dismemberment of the Mogul empire. **Finally the English have appeared upon the scene and delivered the people of India from the oppression of anarchy, and established the reign of order and law.**

(Kiralfy 1895: 1, bold font my emphasis)

The plot of India, as summarised on the first page of the Official Programme, coaxed public opinion to believe in the historical right and necessity of British colonial rule on the basis of India's religiously enthused wars. *India* advocated the demise of religious war and the triumph of colonialism—the raising of India from its barbaric roots, and its relief from savage systems by Crown rule. As Cohn argues more generally “[t]he British rulers assumed that Indians had lost their right to self-rule through their own weakness, which led to their subjugation by a succession of ‘foreign’ rulers, stretching back to the Aryan invasions, and, in the more recent past, to the British conquest of the preceding imperial rulers of India, the Mughals” (2012: 166).

Broadly speaking, civilising discourse was essential to the justification of Empire and ‘moral superiority’ explained why the British ruled India (Bolt, 1971: 159). It was the basis of Britain's acquisition of power, and even under Company rule “the idea had become paramount that Britain had acquired a special trust or obligation for civilizing India” (Brantlinger, 1988: 76). As Bolt argues more broadly ‘moral superiority’ became “the Englishman's sole justification for being in India” (1971: 159). Civilising mission thought condemned India, as Watt explains, “to continually try and catch up to the British rulers and ‘European civilization’, which claimed to be—and was widely accepted as—the universal or ‘silent referent’” (2011: 1). This reflects a much wider scholarship on the ‘civilising mission.’ Brantlinger, Bolt and Watt, MicClintock (2013), Cooper and Stoler (1997) and Fischer-Tiné and Mann (2004) agree that self-legitimation was an inherent aspect of colonialism. As Mann (2004: 4) explains, the civilising project, which included ‘improvement’

and 'moral and material progress,' was at the core of colonial European power and became the official doctrine during the heyday of imperialism. The civilising project implied that colonised people were incapable of self-rule and in need of moral uplift. "From the beginning of their colonial rule in India, the British regarded the country and its people as subjugated by political regimes that they characterised as 'Oriental despotism'" (Mann, 2004: 5). The century-old oppression of Indian people became the justification for British rule (ibid). By focusing on India's domestic conflicts and showing only friendly colonial encounters between Britain and India, *India* strengthened the notion of British altruism. Along the way it re-wrote the 'Mutiny' from a site of horror or shock into a diplomatic and peaceful achievement over India's domestic conflicts. The Mutiny was not a site of revulsion of rebellious sepoys, nor was it a British act of ferocious retribution that scholars say characterised Mutiny-themed dramas. Rather it reflected a new order of power.

Queen Victoria emerged as a liberator of Indian wars. Her reign was celebrated as a peace-bringing and victorious destiny over India's war-torn past in the celebration of a new regime of power in the post-Mutiny era. By commemorating Victoria, *India* made the female body important to civilising discourse, and played a role in the maintenance and popularisation of Victoria as Empress and saviour, inspiring patriotism as well as civilising discourse. Meanwhile, this British altruism was made all the more potent through sites of Indian savagery. The benevolence of Queen Victoria, for example, rested on and was punctuated by the oppression of Indian women. The representation of *sati* (misspelled by the British suttee) in *India* is particularly significant. Serving entertainment and imperial regime, the scene thrilled and horrified as it evidenced British so-called civilising duty. Illustrating *sati* also raised an explicit division of morality between the ruler and the ruled, and reiterates how Indian women became central in civilising discourse during colonialism. Although this is an issue that I discuss further in Chapter Five, it is relevant to note here that during the nineteenth century the British used *sati* to define moral divides between the ruled and rulers. Indeed the British "made the abolition of *suttee* the mask and means of its own imperialism" (Morris: 2010: 7). An integral component of the civilising project, *sati* was viewed as a barbarous, savage

and religiously tyrannical act against Indian women. The tradition marked for the West India's cultural failure, and largely legitimised Britain's 'moral' superiority. The practice of *sati* was banned by law in 1829 and its prohibition has been widely understood by contemporary scholars as a British attempt to control and exert authority over Indian elites (Major, 2011: 3). The widow herself, meanwhile, as Mani (1998: 1) observes, was marginal to the debate over whether she should be allowed to live or die. Meanwhile, as well as being a potent political rhetoric, *sati* was also a particularly 'sensational' custom that was regularly exploited for the thrills of entertainment in British popular culture. "With its immolation of a living women in a raging fire, *sati*... catered to the English obsession with death as spectacle" (Metcalf, 1995: 96). Proliferating the practice as the savage act of corrupt priests, the depiction of *sati* in *India* was a site of terror and oppositional moralities. The 'suttee' scene abided to both the entertainment value of the tradition as well as a colonial narrative that viewed *sati* as a denial of 'free-will' of the Indian widow. *India* therefore helped the *sati* play a disproportionately prominent role in British thought and Indian history, as it horrified and re-rendered the tradition a brutal Hindu act in which the woman remains a passive victim.

However, the scene also holds other political reflections. Coerced against her will by a corrupt Brahmin priest, Kiralfy's widow in *India* appeals for a rescuer. What becomes interesting is that this rescuer comes in the form not of the British but the Indian man. In 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Spivak argues that the abolition of *sati* has been understood as "a case of white men saving brown women from brown men" (2010: 50). Even the white women from missionary movements did little to produce an alternative understanding, and Spivak views *sati*, as others have, within the frames of white patriarchy (ibid). Yet, Spivak also recognises "immense heterogeneity" in the discourses that surround *sati*, as both colonial and independence discourses about the protection of women "becomes the establishment of a *good* society" (2010: 50). Spivak's highly sophisticated essay reviews *sati* from a feminist methodology and she engages in a complex critique of Marx, Foucault, Delueze, and Derrida. While it is important to keep in mind the complex silencing of women through the abolition of *sati*, it is also useful to consider a

little further *how* and *if* imperialism is “marked by the espousal of the woman as *object* of protection from her own kind” (Spivak, 2010: 52), and how these discourses played out in popular British representations.

*Sati* was seized in British political thought as a British colonial heroism against the persecution of Indian women, which in a larger sense was “essential to the self-image of the Raj” (Metcalf, 1995: 96). However, *India* suggests that the act was not only about ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’ in as much as it was about ‘brown men saving brown women from brown men’ where questions of appropriation and mimicry come into play. Whilst the depiction of *sati* in *India* certainly dramatised all that was thought wrong with Indian society, the widow’s rescuer comes in the unlikely the form of Mahmud. This transported *sati* into the core of Indian religious war, yet interestingly it also disassociated British response to the practice. This is not to suggest that *India*’s version of *sati* was not expressive of what was being framed as an ‘uncivilised’ cultural practice, rather that it was also expressive of a quarrel in Indian elitist thought, with the British distancing themselves from that quarrel. As Mani explains, *sati* was used as “a significant occasion for indigenous auto-critique” (Mani, 1998: 2). While some Indians believed that *sati* was authorised by tradition, others believed that it was not sanctioned in ancient texts (Grimes, 2002: 302). In a complex tangle of politics and morality, tradition and modernity, allegiance to colonial rule and contestation, *sati* remained a disputed site during the nineteenth century. It impinged, as Major has pointed out, “on various nationalist and imperialist discourses throughout the colonial period” (2007: xvii). It has “evoked a disproportionate level of interest ... primarily because its social and political significance goes far beyond its actual occurrence” (Major, 2007: xvi). As the issue was taken up amongst the Indian population, the attention to a practice that only affected a tiny minority not only intensified, but the British became divorced from the pro-*sati*/anti-*sati* conflict that they initiated. Kiralfy’s portrayal of *sati* similarly disconnected British interest in the *sati* debate. Estranging Britain from what became an extremely contentious subject amongst the Indian male elite, *India* pitted *sati* against a Hindu/Muslim religious war. And as the Hindus become culpable for barbarism, *sati* is re-transported as a point of social immorality and religious

tyranny in Indian history, whilst the force of British colonialism is again rendered non-invasive and necessary.

Ultimately, *India* denied conflict between Britain and India as it made a resolute case for civilising. Violence and tyranny are banished to a history that Britain played no part in, while peaceful and cooperative colonial encounters between Britain and India are used as the only points of reference in British-Indian relations. Unity and salutation of British rule and the female Empress Victoria emerge out of a darker Indian identity pre-colonialism and pre-European contact. Indian characters gradually became less violent and more 'civilised' as Britain's presence in India increases. The conqueror Mahmud emerges as a liberator of women from *sati* when he rescues the widow from the priest in the opening of the spectacle, yet he is also corrupt, deceitful and blood-thirsty, ruthlessly sacking the city Somnath. Conversely, as prosperous Mughal rulers Akbar and Jehanghir connect themselves more firmly to Britain, themes of peace, virtue and respectability proliferate. When British presence departs, raging conflict between Mughal and Mahratta soldiers ensues once more, and final and lasting peace is only achieved through transfer of power to the British Crown.

The relaxing of the 'evil' Indian who was a common feature of nineteenth-century drama is of importance. *India* not only featured India's domestic conflicts, it appealed to imperial ideology including that of rescuing and conquering. It also eased outrageous Indian characters that were such a frequent image on the popular theatre at large, reflecting a new regime of power in which the British were increasingly required to demonstrate their respect to loyal Indians (a prerequisite of the continuance of power discussed further shortly). Showcasing India as a once savage and then subjugated culture operated within yet also transgressed the binaries of good and evil, us and them, as it reinforced notions of civilising, voluntary collaboration, and a British inheritance of imperial mantles. For Bhabha (1994: 95) the process of ambivalence is central to the stereotype. He says that ambivalence enables the stereotype to be repeated in its changing world and is a mode of knowledge and power. This process becomes clear through *India*, whose

emperors were an alternative to common stage portrayals of India as grotesque, superstitious, immoral and barbaric. Furthermore, framed in historical truth, *India's* Indian rulers attached Britain to India historically and constructed a relationship based on loyalty and allegiance. The production thus remodelled stereotypes that were responsive to an era of power that was facing Indian demands for increased removal of the British in Indian affairs. This evolution of the stereotype, as drawn in line with new orders of power, becomes clearer through an examination of *The Romance of India*.

### THE ROMANCE OF INDIA

*India - A Grand Historical Spectacle* was a huge success. In 1913, nearly twenty years later, comparable narratives were attempted in a new production *The Romance of India*, also meant for Earl's Court. *The Romance of India* similarly combined the moral imperatives of melodrama with spectacle, featuring exaggerated religious stereotyping and imageries of savagery and violence. Scheduled for Boxing Day of 1913, the show was greatly anticipated by the press. However, despite the excitement, it was never staged. The production's inclusion of gross religious anachronisms and antagonisms sparked unease amongst an already-concerned Lord Chamberlain's Office, and following the recommendations of the India Office, it was refused a license. Yet, precisely due to its prohibition, the spectacle is extremely valuable, revealing the complex processes involved both in the production of stereotypes and the increasing political unease of theatrical representations of India during a new era of power that *India* only insinuates. Whilst Kiralfy's *India* revealed ambiguity in the performance of cultural/moral differences, the failure of *The Romance of India* indicates that stereotypes were being challenged in surprising and antagonist ways in response to the growing resistance to colonial authority.

Although it was never staged, the general appetite for spectacle combined with the excitement of promotional material in the press suggests that *The Romance of India* had all the potential for success. The *Illustrated London*

*News* expressed excitement for the up-coming “new and elaborate spectacle” (1<sup>st</sup> November 1913). Following a series of promotions there was widespread bafflement that the spectacle had been denied a licence, and the public and press alike wondered what the objections were about. An outraged member of the public wrote a letter to the India Office expressing her dissatisfaction that “the ban placed upon Mr. R. Caton Woodville’s gorgeous Eastern spectacle has not been removed” (cited Judicial and Public Department records. Subject “The Romance of India” File No. J.&P. 4644 1913). The issue also made headline news in numerous papers. *The Daily Sketch* (29<sup>th</sup> November 1913) wrote a contemptuous headline article about the censorship, whilst the *Morning Post* scoffed that “[t]he India Office still refuses to sanction the production of “The Romance of India” at Earl’s Court,” even though “every effort is being made to meet the objections” (5<sup>th</sup> December 1913). Thus the ‘failure’ of the spectacle cannot be held accountable for public unpopularity concerning the dramatic treatment of India. Rather its failure was on account of political reactions under a new order of power.

Notwithstanding a general absence of records relating to the productions that were refused a license by the Lord Chamberlain, Nicholson (2015: 102) does cite *The Romance of India* in his extensive study, where he notes that the spectacle caused concern among India Office officials who worried about the impact of the spectacle on political relations. This, Nicholson argues, did not reflect public sensitivity, rather it “was based on political and strategic imperatives” (2015: 103). However, when looking at the India Office Records at the British library, which holds archive material concerning the rejection of *The Romance of India*, it becomes clear that there is much more to be said about this failed spectacle. The archive crucially contains the activities involved in the spectacle’s prohibition, including letters sent between the Lord Chamberlain’s Office, the India Office and Director C. Woodville, a collection of press reports, and the three scenarios that were submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for approval. This archive offers insights into the role played by the India Office in dramatic representations of India, and show ideological conflicts between the desires of popular culture and of political relationships. Whilst the spectacle’s producer (and the public) thirsted for sensation,



oppositional immorality, and ludicrous Indian caricatures, other reviewers—including political bodies—found these representations problematic. This conflict reflects political tensions of the time, as Nicholson suggests. These conflicts were not only reflected but were affected, and whilst Kiralfy's *India* points towards the production of stereotypes that were already transgressing binaries, including good/evil, civilised/uncivilised, saviours/oppressors, the failure of *The Romance of India* stresses a rapport between popular culture and socio-political milieus. This rapport demands for *The Romance of India* to be contextualised within the political issues of its time, and underscores the changing nature of British rule.

I should add here that while I am interested in the enforced adaptations to the original script, my aims are not to make conclusions over what was offensive (the arrogant and ludicrous treatment of Hinduism is clear to a modern reader), but instead to trace what others considered offensive and what had to be altered in response in the re-negotiations over suitable cultural forms on the popular British stage.

### THE THREE PROPOSALS

The first proposal for *The Romance of India* consisted of six scenes, commencing with a prologue titled 'India's Darkest Ages'. According to the initial scenario, the audience would enter the theatre to a tranquil and picturesque scene of Indian men, women and children who were grouped beside a fountain that lay in front of the Taj Mahal. Having taken their seats, spectators would see this heavenly panorama devastated. According to director Mr. Caton Woodville, savage human sacrifices to the terrible "Siva Mahá-Diva... the Hindoo God, the Destroyer" were to tear the scene to pieces (*Illustrated Daily News*, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1913). A promotional drawing, illustrated by Woodville (who was both director and artist and drew frequently for the *Illustrated London News*) was included in the *Illustrated London News* in November 2013 (Fig 2.2, next page). The artwork is a visualisation of the scene 'The Worship of Siva.' Woodville described it as follows:

In the centre of the stage, with curtain drawn behind it, stand a great figure of the terrible Siva, the Hindoo god, the Destroyer, its mouth throwing out flames. Before it is the holy fire prepared by the priests, who are chanting weird dirges. Enter a procession headed by players of tom-toms and other native instruments. Nautch girls dance before a palanquin on which is seated the Evil Genius of India, his throne encircled by a serpent and having about it fakirs and lepers. Then come ghoulish beings dragging women and children to be sacrificed to Siva.

*(Illustrated London News 1 November 1913)*

Fig 2.2: A Spectacle for Earl's Court "The Romance of India," as It Will Be Seen in the Empress Hall. *Illustrated London News* 1 November 1913

A thrilling and exotic image of Eastern barbarism and savagery, Woodville's illustration—due to come to life at Earl's Court Empress Hall—shows two priests pulling a women and a child towards the flames, above which rests a statue of Shiva (which, being one of Woodville's first misrepresentations, is actually Kali). Meanwhile, the Evil Genius, commanding and decadent, lies back on his throne, overlooking the scene. About him stand guards wearing armour and grotesque masks, as a victimised and desperate woman throws herself into a bow before him.

The horrific scene was to be saved by a 'beautiful' white female character. Heralded by abrupt European music and carrying aloft the 'cross-hilted sword of Christendom', the woman, called the 'Spirit of Conquest,' prevents the sacrifice of women and children to Shiva, and the Evil Genius "flies in dismay" (IOR/L/PJ/6/1290, File 4644). The Spirit of Conquest is an emblem of Queen Victoria, whose identity is revealed in the final scene, and who continues throughout the plot to be the touchstone of Christianity, Britishness, morality and philanthropy.

Scene One, set in 326 B.C, finds the resurfaced Evil Genius dressed as a Maharaja and enjoying a nautch dance. After the nautch performance, a procession of Indian men, women and children enter the stage and bow before a "car of Juggernaut." The Evil Genius laughs and signals for the juggernaut to run them down. At this moment the Spirit of Conquest interrupts with the army of Alexander the Great, and Evil flees once again, after which India is refused to Alexander. Scene Two shows a funeral pyre where a widow prepares herself for death. Just before the widow sacrifices herself upon her husband's corpse, Conquest appears to rescue her. The widow bows in gratitude to Conquest, but priests seize her and drag her towards the funeral pyre. Vasco da Gamma rushes in and tries to save the widow from death, fails, and she is handed to the executioner. The corpse of the husband rises, revealing himself as the Evil Genius, before sinking once again into the ground. The format is repeated in the next three scenes, each of which show the wickedness wrought by the Evil Genius and the rescue of tragedy by the Spirit of Conquest, including scenes that feature Queen Elizabeth, the Black Hole of Calcutta, and the siege of Lucknow. The final scene commences in complete darkness, and the Evil Genius is revealed by red light. He is entertained by nautch who perform "a wild dance". Conquest duly appears, now dressed as the Empress, and British and Indian forces join together to defeat the Evil Genius once and for all, after which they celebrate in a durbar together.

## REJECTION AND THE INDIA OFFICE:

Woodville never intended to apply for a license, believing that because his spectacle was wordless he did not need to. However, concerns were raised after a series of press promotions were run—including his own image in the *Illustrated London News*—and Woodville was forced to submit a proposal to the Lord Chamberlain, who in turn sought the advice of the India Office on the potentially offensive content of the spectacle. There is a long history surrounding play censorship, in which licensers regularly cast themselves into the roles of interpreters of public conscience (Stephens, 1980: 2). The Lord Chamberlain's Office's regulation of the stage was a reality of British Theatre, and the Office's requisition of advice from outside authorities was a fairly common protocol (Shellard, Nicholson and Handley, 2004: 16). Questions of decorum, meanwhile, were frequently applied to narratives that posed a political threat, meaning that in the history of stage censorship, many of the tensions of the age are thrown into focus through licensers' decisions (Stephens, 1980: 3). Under the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, identification in performance thus becomes linked to questions of not only of culture and desire, but also of politics.

This relationship is clearly evident in *The Romance of India*. Woodville's spectacle came to attention soon after the Lord Chamberlain had received complaints about offensive stereotypes propagated in other plays. Henry Irving's proposed *Mahomet* (1889 and 1890) was perceived to be insulting to Muslim traditions and was halted initially in Paris on the grounds that it would stir political difficulty, and later in London after further protests were made in both Britain and India (Tenens, 2008: 49-63). Bolossy Kiralfy's *Constantinople* (1892-3) similarly offended members of the Turkish Government who were deeply insulted by Bolossy's harem scene. Comparably, the Chinese Embassy made protests against a melodrama set in Hong Kong that was being performed at the Strand only weeks before press promotions were run for *The Romance of India*. Officials from the Chinese Embassy believed that the stereotypes found at the Strand could be accepted as authentic by the British public, and therefore wished to see them removed. That the complaints made

by the Chinese Embassy were received in the same weeks that Woodville's proposal was being reviewed undoubtedly underwrote reactions to Woodville's production (Nicholson, 2015: 103). The evil Indian characters and religious conflicts included in *The Romance of India* alarmed the Lord Chamberlain's Office, which was already uneasy that theatrical productions set in foreign countries were upsetting political relations. As a result, the Lord Chamberlain's Office sought advice from the India Office, who confirmed that the spectacle was likely to cause offense, and the first proposal was banned under the ambiguous premise that the Lord Chamberlain could exercise his right "whenever he shall be of the opinion that it is fitting for the Preservation of good Manners, Decorum, or of the Public Peace" (cited Stephens, 1980: 10).

On behalf of the India Office, George Birdwood—an authority on both India and exhibitions—played a leading role in the refusal of Woodville's first proposal. Born in Bombay and educated at Edinburgh University, Birdwood was appointed to a position at the India Office in 1879. A well-known Indian art expert of historic and contemporary landscapes, he advocated the ideas of the Arts and Crafts Movement, which under prominent designers and thinkers in Britain, including William Morris, took up the cause of the preservation and protection of Indian artisans from industrialisation. Alongside his contemporaries Ananda Coomaraswamy and E.B. Havell, Birdwood was one of the greatest champions of "emerged as a major critic of the evils of Western industrialisation" (Mitter, 1977: 236). Author of *The Industrial life of India* and other important works on the ancient records of India and the East India Company, Birdwood was not only an India Office Official and an expert on Indian art, but was also an exhibition veteran who had been involved in curating Indian sections at international exhibitions between 1857 and 1901. He was even on the board for the Honorary Committee for Advice for the Empire of India exhibition and instructed Kiarlly on *India's* 'historical facts.'

Recommending that the production should not be granted a licence, Birdwood urged that it was both offensive to, and misrepresentative of India. He found the script for *The Romance of India* highly odious, remarking that the "antagonism of the Christian and Hindu religions is enunciated in each scene,

which from a historical stand point the scenario is full of anachronisms and grotesque misrepresentations of facts” (IOR/L/PJ/6/1290, File 4644). Birdwood’s comments were also published in *The Times*, which reported that *The Romance of India* “had given him [Birdwood] great pain” (November 27<sup>th</sup> 1913). According to the article, Birdwood thought that “it was most undesirable that a representation, incorrect and fanciful, of sacrifice on a somewhat wholesale should be exhibited in London as typical of the Hindu religion” (ibid). That each scene in Woodville’s proposal was founded on a historical event yet the narrative followed fictitious events about an Evil Genius clearly insulted Birdwood, who found the consistent struggle between the Indian Evil Genius and the Spirit of Conquest nothing short of misrepresentational and antagonistic. Clearly it was not only theatre managers who believed that theatre should operate in verisimilitude.

Unlike Kiralfy’s *India*, *The Romance of India* included direct conflicts between ‘moral’ Christianity and ‘evil’ Hinduism. Featuring repetitive battles between Evil and Conquest, Woodville’s proposal consistently portrayed India as a barbaric, evil and corrupted culture, and Britain as an enlightened political and religious force. The Indian characters were either monstrous, bringing destruction on all they touched, or they were helpless victims at the mercy of savagery. The British characters, by contrast, protected and defended under the banner of ‘Christendom’. Woodville’s first script revolved around British defeat of India. It celebrated British Evangelical liberation of cruel forms of barbarous custom, sacrifice, fanaticism, military revolt and unrelenting evil. In particular, Birdwood thought it antagonistic that a Christian civilising mission emerged triumphant in Woodville’s plot. He was also deeply concerned by scenes of savagery and sacrifice. While stressing that there were multiple insults throughout the proposal, he counselled that Woodville’s depiction of *sati* was especially offensive. Birdwood advised that the sacrifice of women and children to Shiva would be “most painful to Hindus and other Indian residents within the United Kingdom” and that such a scene would “create ill-feeling among His Most Gracious Majesty the King’s loyal subjects of India” (IOR/L/PJ/6/1290, File 4644). That Birdwood had endorsed *sati* in Kiralfy’s *India*, and yet protested against the depiction in *The Romance of India* stands

as an intriguing contradiction. Birdwood's ideas about *sati* were evidently inconsistent. However, his ambiguity is also representative of attitudes that are dependent upon their socio-political context. In particular, Birdwood characterises the changing discourses on *sati* as he became sensitive to offending the 'loyal subjects of India' during an era that was facing increasing discontent amongst Indians.

Rendering visible the frictions that bubbled under the surface of the Raj, Birdwood believed that if staged, Woodville's spectacle would offend loyal Indians. His concerns were raised during a time when the Raj was becoming increasingly confronted by Indian demands for equality as well as Indian nationalism. In the years leading up to Woodville's proposed production, a large section of the educated Indian elite had begun to assert more strongly their equivalence to their rulers, and approximated, as Chatterjee argues, "the given attributes of modernity" (1993: 10). The beginning of the twentieth century was a complex landscape in terms of political relations and power and resistance, and there was a large number of Indians who were still loyal to the Raj. This group often appropriated British ideologies in the service of their own power, and 'British' issues including *sati* concerned them. Indian social reformers, for whom the legality of *sati* occupied a special position (Mani, 1998: 42-3), wanted to be 'progressive' and began more openly to disparage traditional 'savage' practices that persecuted women. Operating within British ideas about morality and society, which resided, in part, in the treatment of women, the Indian elite therefore measured the so-called backwardness of their nation within the British discourses of morality.

Of course I am talking about general trends of thought here. Mani (1998: 45-46) assesses the reform efforts of the loyal Indian elite within the framework of teleology and economism, critiquing the assumption that this group were the bearers of a 'universal' bourgeois consciousness during the early nineteenth century. She attests that the Indian intelligentsia "took a bewildering array of positions" (1998: 46). However, what becomes important here is the British retreat from the *sati* debate during a tense political epoch. This suggests that the idea of civilising could no longer frame the British approach to power in the

way it once had. Furthermore, it shows that the Indians' assertion of their moral and political equality demanded a British response in order to sustain their loyalty. As Metcalf (1995: 160) argues, although the British rarely believed in equality between themselves and Indians, and continued broadly to view India as a land filled with poverty, disorder and disease, neither could they ignore the increasing demands from Indians for increased political representation in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. This was to launch an assault "upon the ideology of difference itself" (ibid). As Metcalf stresses "[t]hroughout, as the British put together an ideology for the Raj, they had to contend with the internal contradictions that bedevilled it, above all those between an insistence on India's difference, and a similarity they could never entirely repudiate. As time went on, these tensions grew ever more unmanageable" (1995: 160).

Indians' assertion of their equality instigated crucial changes in political relationships. In order to appease feelings of discontent, Indians were granted greater political power towards the end of the century. In 1892 for example, Dadabhai Naoroji, a Parsee from Bombay, became the first Indian to be elected to Parliament in Britain, whilst only three years later M. M. Bhownagree, also from Bombay, was elected as Conservative MP for Bethnal Green. Meanwhile, the Indian student population in England was also growing, as were women's rights. Cornelia Sorabji, an Indian Parsee Christian, became the first woman to study at Oxford in 1889. The educated elite in particular were becoming more fractious in their positions as 'babus' and many wanted to see India freed from its political and economic shackles. This was a powerful group, and as Birdwood warned, potential offense could easily sway their loyalty. At the same time, India's quest for greater political power was not always peaceful. Although India's struggle for independence was characteristically non-violent, by 1905—following Cruzon's partition of Bengal—a far more violent approach to resistance was taken (Kumar, 2003: 74). Between 1905 and 1910 India "was in ferment" (Kumar, 2003: 75). Response to the partition on Bengal in 1905 witnessed not only a more forceful rejection of colonialism but also a growth in nationalist movements. For Britain that unrest was exemplified in 1906, when Madan Lal Dhingra shot



India Office Official Sir Curzon-Wyllie, as an act of revenge for the murder of Indians by the British Government in India.

This shift in political and social relationships was a necessary evolution of British power, especially since the rising Indian elite was developing a growing political consciousness and nationalist sentiment. What becomes interesting, as Woodville's production reveals, is that these tensions were also being represented in—and influenced by—popular culture. Set within a tense and evolving political atmosphere, the perpetuation of social, religious and moral differences on the cultural scene became increasingly problematic. Dramatic depictions that emphasised the difference of the rulers and the ruled were potentially offensive to the Indian elite, who were becoming more reactive to Britain's claim to power and civilisation. It was precisely in response to the escalating political power and the displeasure of the Indian elite that Woodville's proposal was met with such unease—Birdwood's main concern, after all, was offending loyal Indians. In reply, Officials wanted to see a mediation of evolving relationships, and India could not just be characterised as a savage culture. To quell potential feelings of dissatisfaction, discourses of unity and peace over violence and difference were not just suggested but were *demande*d in order to act sensitively in a new, unstable and potentially rebellious order of power.

Mr. Caton Woodville, *The Romance of India's* director, had spectacularly failed to react to the political and social realities of his time. Unlike Kiralfy's spectacle at Earl's Court, Woodville's proposal was written with free reign of wild imagination. The production's failure therefore resided in part in the issue that Woodville was unrestricted by the obligations imposed on other productions. Kiralfy's *India* for example, was chaired by both Government officials and Indian Maharajas, and Kiralfy had been careful to act sensitively toward this audience. Woodville meanwhile, did not have Indian committee members to consider or consult, and was unconcerned by—and totally oblivious to—offensive representations.

## DISPUTE & THE SECOND PROPOSAL

After the initial scenario for *The Romance of India* was rejected, a revised version was quickly submitted. On the 6<sup>th</sup> December a Committee consisting of Colonel Sir David Barr, Sir George Birdwood, Sir Krishna Gupta and Lieut. Colonel Sir James Dunlop Smith met to consider the modified proposal. Together they unanimously reported that the proposal, even as revised, “could not fail to arouse indignation among Indians”, that the alterations “in no sense remove the adverse criticism of the Hindu religion, its “ritual sacrifices”” (IOR/L/PJ/6/1290, File 4644). Birdwood was greatly dissatisfied by the alterations Woodville had made to the script, declaring that the changes were “trivial and inadequate” and the response to his objections were poor. He was outraged that Woodville’s original script had been copied out virtually word-for-word. All Woodville had done, as Birdwood rightly concluded, was remove the human sacrifice, Siva and the battle of Plassey, renamed the Evil Genius the “Spirit of Darkness” and Conquest the “Spirit of Light and Progress”. How retitling characters would help to eradicate the antagonism of Christianity and Hinduism baffled Birdwood, since little else about the revised proposal had changed. Upon receiving Birdwood’s report, the Lord Chamberlain informed the Earl’s Court syndicate that he could still not grant the spectacle a licence, and the proposal was rejected for a second time.

The rejections demonstrate a conflict in popular and political taste. Whilst Birdwood found Woodville’s spectacle’s stereotyping highly offensive, Woodville thought Birdwood’s objections were unfathomable, and simply could not understand how *The Romance of India* could be considered insulting. In reaction to the protests surrounding both his first and second proposals, Woodville wrote a letter to the editor of *The Times* in which he defended both his spectacle and himself. In it he claimed that “every possible care has been taken to eliminate anything which might hurt the susceptibilities of the Indian, and there is absolutely nothing in the production at which any fair minded person could take exception?” (*The Times* 29<sup>th</sup> November 1913). Believing himself to be knowledgeable and culturally sensitive, Woodville argued that he was “acquainted with every phase of Indian life” (ibid). Collaborating with

Woodville's outrage, the press were also displeased by what were regarded as 'Indian' protests to the spectacle. An article published in *The Times* (9<sup>th</sup> December 1913: 8) singled out India Office Official Sir Krishna Gupta, describing him as a Hindu member of the Secretary of State's Council, and a distinguished English authority on Indian life and customs. By pronouncing him an expert and an educated man, a certain credibility was granted to Gupta's objections to the spectacle. Yet, being singled out implied that objections to the spectacle were purely an 'Indian' response. The press almost wholly overlooked the issue that all those on the board of protesters apart from Gupta were English, and led by Birdwood, or that the spectacle was offending not only Indian but also British Officials.

Similar to Kiralfy's view of *India*, Woodville believed *The Romance of India* was a celebration of the "good work" Britain had brought to India, claiming it was "purely historical". Yet he also asserted that the elements of Hinduism were "purely mythological", which he believed any educated Indian would understand, and therefore could not be offended by. "[Y]ou might just expect the cultured Englishman to object to the old Druidical rites being represented on an English stage" argued Woodville (*The Times*, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1913). Growing increasingly frustrated by the objections, Woodville fretted that a very large section of the British public throughout the country would be led into believing that his spectacle was offensive, and worried that it wouldn't ever be staged (*The Times*, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1913: 8). Like the many articles that covered the issue, he simply could not see where the antagonism between religions lay, arguing that he never, to any large extent at least, touched upon religion, even in the first scenario. Concluding another letter, also published in *The Times*, and with a large dose of sarcasm, Woodville added "a word of thanks to George Birdwood for the interest he has shown" (ibid).

Despite his frustrations, Woodville eventually answered Birdwood's objections. On the 8<sup>th</sup> December the India Office received the third and final proposal, which was checked by both Birdwood and Gupta, and was immediately passed as harmless by the Secretary of State's representative. Finally responding to Birdwood's criticisms, Woodville made significant alterations to

his earlier proposals. By the third proposal, the good/evil divide had considerably eased, and narratives of unity and loyalty flourished. Although the Evil Genius (renamed the “Spirit of War”) and Conquest, (renamed “Spirit of Light and Progress”) changed little, other characters greatly altered. Conquest was now followed by banner bearers of all the nations of the world, “both East and West” and was surrounded by European and Indian girls as well as Indian Nobles, whilst India and England came together to join forces against Evil. Replying to Birdwood’s major objects, Woodville had removed all scenes of sacrifice, including *sati*, and he had eliminated all scenes of death, destruction, deities and extremism. Scene Two, featuring Alexander the Great for example, no longer featured a juggernaut car, but instead the Spirit of Light and Progress disrupted a nautch dance.

Meanwhile, as Indian characters became ‘good,’ European characters became ‘bad.’ The third proposal suggested that Vasco da Gama was bringing war and disruption to a peaceful and content India, and in unity with India, the Spirit of Light and Progress stood against him. In the final version, as Vasco and his troops enter, Indians rushed to follow in astonishment at the sight of the strange men (“never seen before”). Disturbing the voyeuristic look, Vasco appeared as the unfamiliar Other. The Black Hole of Calcutta was also eliminated from the final proposal. Instead, a group of Indian and British traders, officials, women and children filled the stage. To the ensemble the Spirit of War would demand “the education of Bengal”, whereupon the spirit of Light and Progress entered and Spirit of War’s sword was removed. In the final scene British and Indian troops come together in union to ensure peace.

Despite Woodville’s alterations and the India Office’s approval, Woodville’s spectacle was never staged. In January 1914, at a time when the production had already been in rehearsals for over four weeks, the project collapsed. Unexpectedly, the downfall had nothing to do with the controversy between the India Office and Woodville, or issues of censorship. The company in charge of the spectacle, The Hindustani Syndicate Ltd, had gone bankrupt, bringing the unemployment of Woodville and over one hundred actors. Putting aside the unexpected grounds for the eventual failure of *The Romance of India*, what is

so interesting about the spectacle is the dilemma and adaptation of the stereotype under a tense and uncertain political landscape that feared offending loyal Indians. Carrying ideological views and values, stereotyping, as Pickering emphasises “may operate as a way of imposing a sense of order on the social world” (2001: 3). The Stereotype of the Other often reinforces and maintains social myths. However, in world of constant change, the stereotype itself is forced to be flexible, and over time has to be modified. The conflict over the stereotype was at the core of disputes over *The Romance of India*. Whilst the initial stereotyping sought to maintain religious, social and political structures as necessary, oppositional and fixed, Woodville’s cultural forms were contested and defeated, as authorities could no longer tolerate their binary nature. The stereotyping of evil Indian characters in Woodville’s first proposal was problematic not only because they were offensive, not only in light of complaints after the strand’s production about Hong Kong, but also because, like the Mutiny dramas of the 1850s, the stereotypes sought to thrill and horrify. Increasingly, that was to pose a problem over the potential offense of Indians. In order to reduce threat, the Lord Chamberlain’s Office required a more complex vision of British-Indian relations than Woodville’s initial stereotyping allowed.

The conflict also had to do with issues of security and patriotism. Believing that the British public could easily accept those stereotypes as authentic, Officials believed in their possible power and impact on the public who needed to know India as ‘safe’ and valuable in order to feel patriotic for Empire. As Woodville’s alterations transgressed India’s supposedly unchanging political and social positions, they also constituted new ideal, if still imagined, roles for India in Britain’s Empire. Similar to Kiralfy’s *India*, Woodville’s final script endorsed collaborative, cohesive and peaceful relationships. That is not to deny that the play still implied a lack of civilisation to a civilised state, achieved by a heroic white Christian European race; however, it more firmly placed the Indian Empire as cooperative, so that it was read as an integral part of British social, political and cultural history, and could be understood as appreciated and necessary. That in turn would form the image of a unified Empire, offering British audiences a desirable sense of their—as well as Indians’—new imperial

status and fitting more comfortably in newly evolving strategies of imperial power.

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Responding to political tensions and cultural changes, spectacles offered increasingly unsecure stereotypes, which discoloured us/them dichotomies and good/evil oppositions, and certainly did far more than perpetuate an evil and grotesque India. Whilst spectacles' stereotypes offered audiences a sense of order of the social world, they were also forced to be flexible within their changing social and political climates, posing a complex and unsecure form of identification that did more than inspire patriotism for Queen and Empire or pacify Indian identities following the events of 1857. As British-Indian relationships evolved during the growing power and resistance to the Raj, popular culture not only symbolised new political systems, but also provoked their tensions, helping to create new roles for the colonised and coloniser. Spectacles thus contributed to the construction of culture, which itself could not be sustained as stable or discrete. Within the growing –yet increasingly unsteady—grip of the British Raj in a post-Mutiny era, and the rise of Indian nationalism in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and in order to fight for continuance of power (even on the British stage) India was not suffered as a 'barbaric' or 'savage' civilisation.

Spectacles are only one of an assortment of ways in which India was being represented and known in/by exhibition spaces. There were other exhibition displays that were rooted far more strongly in education and 'fact' than entertainment and spectacle. While Indian 'history' was being produced through spectacle, Indian 'race' was being produced through exhibited ethnological models, which were another common feature of exhibition sites. Publicly authorising racial and cultural differences, exhibition ethnological displays performatively engaged with and produced anthropological theory. In doing so, exhibitions helped create a 'scientifically' proven inferior within both professional and public thought. As Chapter Three will discuss,

anthropological exhibits suggest that while India could not be fully rendered a degraded or evil civilisation, it was made racially and scientifically inferior in the British imagination. This uplifted 'loyal' Indians as well as India's ancient and 'high' civilisation as it reasserted notions of civilising, white racial superiority and British imperial power.

### CHAPTER THREE THE MAKING OF RACE IN PERFORMANCE

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, and into the first decade of the twentieth, the public was thirsty for sensation and authenticity. London's exhibitions offered it to them with a variety of exotic Indian entertainments. These entertainments included spectacles, Indian art works, produce, museum pieces, Indian jungles and gardens. More enigmatic, and far more interesting to the throngs of visitors, however, were the Indian entertainers, who included jugglers, snake charmers, nautch girls, rickshaw drivers, gymnasts, sorcerers, wrestlers, sword swallows, and conjurers whose skill in "deceiving the eye and bewildering the senses" delighted audiences (*The Era*. 17 October 1885). Indian performers, like the theatrical spectacles discussed in Chapter Two, were entertaining commercial attractions and were often showcased under the premise of verisimilitude and public education. More specifically, while spectacles instructed the public about Indian history, the educational aspect of Indian entertainers lay in the notion that they offered so-called comprehensive examples of India's heterogeneous population. For instance, the forty-five 'natives' of the Albert Palace exhibition, including Indian craftsmen, jugglers and nautch girls, were applauded for representing all of India's "different castes and creeds" (*Illustrated London News*. 21 November 1885). The 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition similarly showcased a wide assortment of Indian craftsmen, as well as life-like casts of Indian natives, which according to reviews gave even "the most idle visitor at least some idea of the immense variety of thought and taste, as well as race and customs, which are to be found in our Indian Empire" (*The Graphic*. 8 May 1886). Later, the performing Indians at the Empire of India exhibition were praised as "the largest and most representative colony of her Majesty's Indian subjects ever seen in this country or in Europe" (*The Standard*. January 14 1896: 3). The exhibition of Indian people in Victorian London entertained thousands, often millions, as they allegedly exposed 'all' of India's racial diversity.



Spectacles performed on exhibition sites spawned versions of Indian history that were useful to the ideology of imperialism, and staging 'lessons' made powerful claims to objectivity and veracity. Indian entertainers functioned within a similar premise of the public's education and in the construction of cultural/historical 'truths.' Yet they also authorised an anthropological-like discovery of India's racial, religious and geographical variety. Exhibitions presented embodied experiences, even to the most "idle" visitor (op.cit.), of the supposed anthropological differences between the coloniser and colonised.

The exhibition of India's 'diversity' however, forms the second of two main areas that I will discuss in this chapter. The first area lies in an earlier time, when exhibitions were similarly interested in India's racial heterogeneity, but were also more theory-driven and looked directly at educating the public in the science of ethnology. Between 1854 and 1886 exhibitions—in particular the Crystal Palace events—were performative sites of ethnological theory-making. For example, when the Crystal Palace moved to Sydenham, the Natural History Court included life-sized models of Tibetans, 'Dyaks' of Borneo, 'Negros,' Indians of the Amazons, Greenlanders and East Indians. Under the curation of armchair ethnologist Robert Gordon Latham, these models were devised to present mid-nineteenth-century ethnology to the public; ethnology being understood at the time as "the science, not exactly of the different *nations of the world*, but of the different *varieties of the human species*" (Latham, 1854: 5).

Alongside the other Indian entertainments under consideration in this thesis, ethnological displays of life-sized models were a mode through which India was being represented in exhibitions, which although theory-driven were also performative. Between 1854 and 1886, exhibited models, which included not only Indians but a wide collection of ethnicities, were designed both to educate and entertain the people. Displays were described as "instructive" and "amusing" experiences of the science of mankind's evolutionary and racial variety (A Guide to Crystal Palace and Park, 1856: 117). They were "understood" and "admired" (*Liverpool Mercury*, 16 June 1854). The life-like figures representing people from across the globe, collected together,

embodied and brought to life ethnological theory in the public's easy-access of scientific theory. Furthermore, as spectators viewed in the shoes of physical anthropologist, they were invited to identify comparatively 'high' and 'low' stages of evolution through the models' physiologies, including the breadth of the cheek-bone, the flatness of the nose, and the distance between the eyes, as well as the hair and skin colour. Communication thus arose through corporeal and dialectic performance, and differences did not need to be explicitly explained since "the groups to which the visitor is directed sufficiently tell their own tale" (Latham, 1854: 5). While the ethnological models were said to differ from one another, "[s]till more do they differ from such groups as Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, and other Europeans as may collect around them" (1854: 5-6). The visitors' own population of the scene in this sense was crucial, for it was they who represented the European 'variety' of the human species. Unlike the displayed, the viewers' freedom to 'collect around' the models enabled them to inhabit, perform and co-produce a hierarchical ordering of the world's people. Moreover, as representatives of the European race, audiences not only had the power to look, move and judge, without be reduced to objectified or static form, but their evolutionary status, unlike the models', was in free movement.

## EXHIBITING MISSING LINKS & SAVAGES

Several scholars have highlighted how the exhibition of peoples in nineteenth-century Europe popularised scientific theories of human evolution. Literatures concerned with the phenomenon of human zoos, for example, have extensively identified the scientific ideas of evolution that permeated living exhibits. In the context of Africa, scholars argue that the African bodies put on display were routinely and repetitively offered as examples of less-evolved savages, and, appearing as 'proof' of a scientific primal 'missing link' between humans and animals, were widely accepted by scientific and public audiences as a less evolved race (Blanchard *et al*, 2013; Boetsch and Snoep, 2011; Corbey, 1993; Rydell 1993). Raymond Corbey maintains that through exhibition colonial natives emerged as "characters in the story of the ascent to

civilization, depicted as the inevitable triumph of higher races over lower ones and as progress through science and imperial conquest” (1993: 341).

Numerous scholars show that race science was not only reflected in but also developed through the exhibition of African peoples in Western countries. Qureshi (2011: 186-7) argues that displayed peoples played a significant role in the development of ethnological theory and the remaking of ‘race’ for both professional and lay audiences.

Across Europe and North America living exhibited peoples were routinely displayed as zoological curiosities, often inside menageries and alongside monkeys. Anthropologists, who performed tests and bodily measurements upon exhibited ‘specimens’ in front of audiences, publicly ‘evidenced’ notions of evolutionary inferiority. The techniques of anthropometry were regularly conducted in front of crowds to compare the bodily features and measurements of African ‘specimens’ with those of apes. For physical anthropologists, skull measurements were central in ‘proving’ different brain sizes, which were linked to mental capabilities and the identification of different races in a new racial biology. By ‘evincing’ the ‘missing link’, ethnological exhibits delivered embodied object lessons of new works on human evolution to both specialist and non-professional audiences. Scientific theorists used displayed bodies throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, a practice that for ethnologists helped to prove ideas about human evolution. John Conolly’s 1855 publication *The Ethnological Exhibitions of London* argued that exhibited foreigners were evident of the “manifestations of human intellect and modifications of human development in various parts of the same globe, and illustrative of man’s unwritten history and progress” (1855: 6). Conolly claimed that exhibited peoples from colonised countries were “beings on the lowest scale of mankind” (ibid: 8). During the series of conferences and lectures at the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition, organised by Francis Galton, Dr R.J Mann similarly thought that the group of exhibited Kafirs were of a “barbarous and low state of civilization” (Anthropological Conferences on the Native Races of the British Possessions, 1886: 178). Robert Knox also exploited exhibited peoples as verification of his scientific theories, again bonding the reciprocal link between theory and display. In 1847, preceding his

major publication *Races of Man* (1851), Knox gave a lecture about the 'natural history' of African 'Bushmen' at London's Exeter Hall, which was accompanied by a group of 'pigmies' who sat as evidence of his words (Qureshi, 2011: 1). An advocate of polygenesis, Knox was a pivotal figure in the new biological and racial determinism of the mid-nineteenth century, and was highly influential in the development of racial science (Stephan, 1982: 41).

With exhibited peoples used for 'scientific' research and public education, and routinely displayed behind fences as zoological curiosities of human evolution, it is hardly surprising that the exhibition of peoples—popularising racial theory often made through displayed people—has largely been understood as marking progressive shift from scientific to widespread public racism in the West. The works of Rydell (1993) and Parezo and Fowler (2007) examine the exhibitions held in the U.S., revealing how a diverse range of nineteenth-century ideas about human evolution were promoted. Drawing links between themes of evolution and exhibition arenas, Rydell's *All The World's A Fair* (1987) and *World of Fairs* (1993) shows that American World Fairs displayed scientific visions of race, and in doing so legitimatised slavery and racial exploitation with the public. Parezo and Fowler's *Anthropology Goes to The Fair* (2007), meanwhile, connects the anthropological knowledge being fostered at World Fairs to the promotion of empire, and shows that American exhibitions became sites in which anthropologists promoted their own quest for professional status.

This body of scholarship connects to the wider role of evolution in popular culture in the nineteenth century. Lightman (2014) and Smith (2009) both explore how Darwin's theories transformed into popular knowledge through popularisation by a range of scientists and non-specialists writing about and illustrating evolution for a general audience. Other scholars argue that evolution in popular culture was also a site of distortion and contestation. Tiffany Watt-Smith (2014) explores the reactions of scientists to their subjects, including flinching, wincing and cringing, which she argues exposes the falsehood of the principle of objectivity in nineteenth-century science. Whilst reactionary, these recoils and grimaces can also be performative acts of

observing and responding, and link the worlds of theatre and science. Jane Goodall's *Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin* (2002) provides a particularly valuable investigation into the entanglement of evolution and performance, in which she argues that popular curiosity about man's 'animal nature' operated within the same narratives as scientific study. This was, as Goodall argues, "the formative period for evolutionary ideas, when questions about human origins and ancestry, about the status of humans as a species among others and about the diversification of life forms were matters of popular speculation as well as specialist research" (2002: 1). Interested in the forms of museum display that functioned inside and outside of a natural order dictated by colonial anthropologists, Goodall argues that popular entertainments, including freak shows, circus and cabaret, satirised views of evolution, and argues that representational forms could become sites of parody. While she agrees that exhibitions were inherently performative, she also focuses on the showcase of peoples who represented the "degree of zero civilisation," and argues that they enabled those who viewed to "contemplate the whole vista of human progress of which they were the culminating point" (2002: 98). Although Goodall makes a brief nod to the range of identities, including 'Hindoos,' who featured in Barnum's displays in Chicago and Paris (2001: 98-99), she focuses on the exhibition of 'savages' and the polarised binaries of the nineteenth-century evolutionary hierarchy.

Qureshi has made the point that exhibitions became the "most accessible sites in which the public encountered theories of evolution" (2014: 261). In a number of publications Qureshi (2011a; 2011b; 2014) argues that appearing as 'proof' of British ethnological theories, human showcases played a part in not only sharing but actively producing anthropological knowledge. She (2011a: 202) stresses that the popularity of people showcases grew out of an interest in ethnology and human evolution, and from a desire for reassurance that Europe alone had reached the most developed branch of civilization. In *Peoples on Parade* she contends that "the associations between displayed peoples, imperialism, and ethnic difference are neither inherent nor self evident; rather, they must be both created and maintained" (2011: 2). Like Goodall (2002), Qureshi negates the privileging of Darwin's work in

contemporary scholarship, and calls for a more nuanced approach to the distinctions between evolutionary theorists including Darwin, Spenser and Taylor in order to explore “some of the more neglected connections between evolution and entertainment within nineteenth-century Britain and the United States” (2014: 264). She (2011: 170) does not disregard the hierarchies of evolution, noting that shows capitalised on ethnic differences between peoples of the same colour and thus recognises that colour was not to central to the identification of ethnic difference (Qureshi, 2011: 171-173). For example, Qureshi explains that Zulus were deemed praiseworthy and, brought into hierarchical distinctions among African peoples, were often conceived by viewers as superior to the ‘Bushman’ or ‘Hottentot.’ She (2014) also pays attention to the exhibition arrangements in Chicago, Louisiana, Paris and London, which demonstrated the supposed linear development of human races, and called on hundreds of performers (not only solitary instances of the monkey-man) to do so. However, Qureshi tends to focus her in-depth analysis on the exhibition of peoples whose features resided in the threshold between man and beast. Though recognising that Africans were referred to as ethnically distinct peoples “such as the San, Zulu, or Ndebele, rather than black or African” (2011: 275-276), she tends to highlight examples that demonstrated the ‘missing-link’. Thus she is interested in the “[e]nlightenment discussion on the nature of humanity and the distinction between the savage and the civilized” in nineteenth-century stories of man’s evolution (2014: 266).

A lacuna in the work outlined above is that by focusing on ‘missing links,’ scholars have tended to envisage and perpetuate a black/white binary of race, or a European racism aimed at African peoples. While crucially highlighting the ways in which Victorian theories of evolution were popularised and produced, contemporary scholarship has often neglected other ethnicities used in Victorian models of evolution. A significant oversight of this binary is the tendency to truncate racism at the cost of overlooking other ethnic groups featuring in nineteenth-century theories of race, evolution and performance. Of course, part of Victorian race science was to define the extreme—to identify the most and the least civilised, to find evidence of the ape or monkey-man which would publicly prove that human and beast had a common origin.

However, another part of race science was to look at the intervals between that binary, of which India was crucial. As Bates says while “India is still often seen to be immune to many of the prejudices and fashions that held sway in other colonial territories in the same period”, it was especially important to racial theory in the history of European colonialism (1995: 4).

It has often eluded current discussions of the public presentation of evolution in Victorian culture that ethnological ideas of human hierarchy functioned not only through peoples thought to occupy the lowest end of human evolution, but also through cultures recognised by the British as ancient civilisations, including India, China and Japan. By examining the anthropological underpinning of Indian displays in nineteenth-century London we may partially address this oversight. It is significant that the ethnological exhibits helped the British public to recognise India as a civilised but also a degenerative ‘race.’ Displayed models substantiated so-called Indian primitivism (which will be discussed further in Chapter Four) within the mid nineteenth-century ‘scientific’ discourse on human evolution, as it engaged with notions of high/low caste and Aryan/non-Aryan. Ethnological displays hence put forward relatively composite ideas and notions about white superiority, which reflect Britain’s complex encounter with India as well as a link being made between evolution and the body. They thus helped forge a foundation of racial thinking in popular thought, by which external features of the body denoted the evolution of particular races, and through which India was pigeonholed into two racial categories. In ethnological terms evolutionary primitivism was identifiable in ‘tribal’ dark-skinned groups who fell outside the caste system, whilst higher castes became recognisable through light skin and ‘finer’ features, which Victorians saw as a more advanced form of evolution. Ethnologists and ethnographers working in the nineteenth century, including Dalton, Riskey and Latham, helped to make the notion a scientific truth. They also helped to situate India’s tribal population and its ancient and advanced civilisation within a broader shift from Orientalist theory into race science. With the emergence of new ‘scientific’ anthropology, older typologies were superseded by a prevailing mode of thought that “portrayed India as a composite social landscape in which only certain peoples had evolved historically in ways which

left them ‘shackled’” (Bayly, 2001: 127-128). As we will see, exhibitions also played a role in this classification.

Qureshi (2011b: 145) is correct that ethnological displays contributed to the popularisation and making of anthropological knowledge. However, here I am not only interested in how this knowledge was being performed in order to re-address contemporary understandings of Victorian models of evolution in Victorian culture, I also argue that through *performance* the audience themselves co-created theories of evolution. Consequently, by considering the role that the educational—yet increasingly entertaining—exhibition of India played as sites of evolutionary theory, I tackle a number of issues. First, I fill a scholarly oversight that has tended to focus on Africa in discussions of race theory and has neglected India in histories of evolutionary theory and popular culture. Although it would be interesting to investigate the consumption of other so-called races in exhibition (including Indigenous Australians, Chinese, Japanese and the Irish), Indian racial identity was particularly important to the way in which white supremacy on ethnological and racial grounds was ambivalently conceived under the broader concerns of imperialism within popular culture. The anthropological exhibition of India is also important because it points to a Victorian perception of evolution that resided in relatively complex hierarchies rather than simple binaries, and situated non-whites *somewhere* below whites (and not necessarily as the white’s antithesis). This is not to dispute the argument that ranking peoples was a mode through which whites re-imagined their claim to the top, or that it was a way of displaying “a certain claim to civilisation on the basis of distinction” (Burton, 1996: 137). As Bhabha argues, colonial power functions in the production of knowledge of ‘subject peoples’ and in the stereotypical binary of coloniser and colonised, where “the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest” (1994: 100-101). It is important to note that while the exhibition of India points to a relatively complex evolutionary vista, it still operated within the ideology of white racial supremacy and helped to envision publicly white Europeans as the most evolved ‘variety’ of the human species. However, through looking more closely at India I will



show that this was achieved in complex ways, helping us to understand more fully the insidious modes in which white supremacy was publicly endorsed as natural science. As the exhibition of India insists, India was not so easily slotted into a primitive evolutionary category, rather ways of thinking continued to operate in a more typical eighteenth century European discourse that recognised a kinship with India. To nineteenth-century theorists, India offered examples of both the so-called Aryan and non-Aryan races, defined by a wide set of criteria (skin colour was not the only mode of identifying human variety—see Qureshi, 2011: 257), and both of which shared a relationship with the discourses of evolution and imperialism.

Secondly, I argue that anthropological theories were embodied and produced through exhibited bodies and their audiences. By contending that race, and its physical and cultural identity, was created in a mass public and increasingly performative way, I challenge Bates' argument that it is only in the "relatively small intellectual elite in America and Europe, and in the colonial administrations of Africa, the Middle East and Asia at this time, that we may find the origins of the modern conception of race" (1995: 5). The idea of race was also conceived and publicly endorsed through exhibitions which welcomed extraordinarily large audiences. As Qureshi notes, exhibitions "highlight the sheer range of ways that evolutionary theory could be encountered" (2014: 262). It follows that the ethnological theories accompanying exhibition displays were given life through comparative viewing. Spectators looked to and created the evolutionary and racial status of exhibited models with the scientific encouragement of the ethnologists who curated them, and against their own difference. The European viewer represented the pinnacle of evolution, from which exhibited identities could be classified. London's populace, as Qureshi explains was "accustomed to quick and effective classification of diverse subjects" (2011: 46). However, what becomes crucial is that evolutionary and racial discourse was inhabited, collaborated and consequently co-created by the home market.

In this chapter, then, I turn to the anthropological narratives that accompanied the exhibition of India in London, and I pay attention to the relationship

between anthropological knowledge and performance in order to account for another important way in which India was being conceived and exhibited in the Victorian metropolis. Although engaging with different anthropologies, both the exhibition of modelled Indians in the earlier part of the century and living Indians in the latter helped the British public to 'know', racialise and subjugate India. It is in these forms of display that India ultimately becomes redefined as racially inferior. What is also crucial to this process is the corporeal and dialogical production of alleged evolutionary difference between Europeans and Asians *within* and *by* the popular British imagination. Furthermore, evolutionary difference was not only publicly verified as scientific fact through exhibitions, but it was also then made relevant to the justification of the British Raj, helping to explain the reasons and 'necessity' for colonisation. Ethnological displays and exhibited entertainers were placed into conditions that performed, endorsed and even produced an educational/anthropological framework of human difference within the public creation of scientific and racial truths.

#### A BRIEF HISTORY OF ETHNOLOGY, PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY, RACIAL THEORY & ETHNOGRAPHY

Scholars such as Kuklick, (1991, 2008), Sera-Shriar (2013), Stepan (1982), Stocking (1982, 1985) and Robb (1995) have outlined the British history of ethnology, anthropology and the concept of race in science; for more detailed chronologies I refer my reader to their works. However, in order to situate the exhibition of India within the scientific field of anthropology of its period, and within the history of colonialism more generally, it is necessary briefly to sketch the history of ethnology, anthropology and racial theory (which later became important in civilising mission ideology). I focus here on British thought, and do not look at how these ideas played out in Indian thinking—which, as Robb (1995) has shown, had its own history of race theory that became entangled in European analysis. My aims are not to re-think British histories of anthropology, but to insert the role of exhibition performance, and specifically the display of India, into that history in order to show how the Indian population

was inconsistently conceived as a lower evolutionary form in British scientific and popular understanding, partly through exhibition display.

Although the wide-held assumption that early nineteenth-century anthropologists were ‘armchair’ researchers has begun to be accepted as a sanction of twentieth-century practitioners, anthropology in the first half of the nineteenth century was striving to find professionalisation. Ethnologists and anthropologists sought authority in lecture halls, museums and in medical and natural history programmes in universities, yet authority was not so easily obtained. Moreover, though the first university post in anthropology was awarded to Sir Edward Taylor in 1884 (Kuklick, 1991: 6), anthropology at this time was as a field had yet to be established (Sera-Shriar, 2013: 9). It was not until the twentieth century that anthropology was institutionalised, before when most anthropologists struggled to secure funds and conducted research in their spare time (Sera-Shriar, 2013: 5/9). Victorian anthropology was carried out in the main outside of academia (Kuklick, 1991: 5). Nonetheless, it was researchers of the early twentieth century, in particular Malinowski, who widely discredited earlier anthropological efforts, arguing that only those who were university trained would be able to properly interpret field-work observations of peoples (Sera-Shriar, 2013: 5-6). These criticisms vastly overlook the issue that anthropology in the first half of the nineteenth century was in fact a discipline that was constantly evolving.

Furthermore, contrary to the reproaches of anthropologists of the 1960s, who heavily slate nineteenth-century researchers’ relationship to the colonial enterprise—in particular their influence on the policies of colonial governments, their political bias and the damage this caused to the communities studied (Sera-Shriar, 2013: 7)—practitioners broadly endeavoured to improve their work. Certainly, the concerns of anthropologists were intertwined with the concerns of the imperial enterprise and in many ways anthropology and colonialism were mutually constitutive. As colonial agents who worked abroad or simply as beneficiaries of imperial infrastructure in Britain’s colonies, anthropologists “advanced their findings in support of various policies within Britain” (Kuklick, 1991: 5). However, as Sera-Shriar

(2013) stresses, although often preoccupied with systems of collecting and analysis (rather than with the level of direct experience they had with the peoples they studied), anthropologists and ethnologists continually reflected on the methods of their research practices and looked to improve them. Furthermore, as Kuklick comments, anthropologists “were as likely to condemn as condone colonialism” (1991: 5).

Moreover, contrary to a longstanding belief in scholarship that early theorists avoided hands-on field research abroad, many ethnologists and anthropologists did travel in order to gain first-hand experience. As Sera-Shriar (2013: 8-9/12-13) explains, researchers, including Thomas Huxley (125-95), Richard Kind (1811-76), Charles Darwin (1809-82), Robert Knox (1791-1862) and Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-197), were not passive observers of ethnographic material, but were active in the process of collecting information, were acutely aware of the issues surrounding the utilisation of second-hand reports and many did conduct their own ethnographic research abroad. Indeed, observational practices of nineteenth-century anthropologists were “a chief preoccupation of researchers” (Sera-Shriar, 2013: 5), an interest that was then extended, as I will later show, to the British public through the forum of exhibitions.

It is also important to acknowledge that “[t]he history of British anthropological practice is one of gradual change and transformation, research approaches and methods of analysis came under constant refinement” (Sera-Shriar, 2013: 3/10). In light of this, “positioning Victorian anthropology as an armchair pursuit, without critically engaging with the meaning of this category, is particularly problematic because it has led to historical accounts that have further divided the history of the discipline into divergent methodological epochs” (Sera-Shriar, 2013: 12). The perceived divide in anthropological methodologies has habitually been located in the founding of the Ethnological Society of London (ESL) and the Anthropological Society of London (ASL). Scholarship on the subject has broadly classified the differences between these two societies as oppositional and binary, and as a result has vastly downplayed the nuances and coalitions between them. Sera-Shriar (2013)

both raises this issue and refutes this line of argument, stressing that the ELS and ASL were not disparate entities. As he comments, “[m]ost historiographic accounts have positioned the debate as a competition over practice, between anthropologists led by Hunt on the one hand and ethnologists led by Huxley on the other”(2013: 18). By looking more closely at the works and methods of Hunt and Huxley, he explains instead that there was much the ELS and ASL had in common.

Nevertheless, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the era of the Great Exhibition, a time of greatly conflicting thought about human races had developed. Polygenesis—the theory that human races are of different evolutionary origin and were therefore different species—and monogenesis—the theory that all humanity has one common origin—did cause some disagreements in anthropological thought. While the Ethnology Society of London (the ESL) was situated in monogenism, other anthropologists—including Robert Knox and James Hunt—branched off from ethnology to form the Anthropological Society of London (ASL). They developed the idea of polygenesis, a concept imagining “that each race became human separately within the evolutionary process” (Bernasconi, 2000: xi). This led to a disagreement among students of human variation “who were increasingly concerned by race..... [and] found it harder to devise a chronology of human history (and the earth itself) consistent with biblical narrative” (Kucklick, 2008b: 54). John Crawfurd’s works for example, including ‘On The Physical and Mental Characters of the Negro’ (1863), rejected the belief in the unity of the human species and advocated the notion that different races evolved from different origins. Knox’s *The Races of Men* also argued for different human species, declaring “Men are of various Races; call them Species, if you will; call them permanent varieties” (Knox, 1850: 9). For Knox and Hunt, European topographies offered examples of the most evolved state of the human race, the degree of difference from those features measured how regressive non-whites were by comparison. This race science articulated an “association of different levels of intelligence with different races defined by physical form...At opposite extremes lay the light-skinned civilised European and the dark-skinned savage” (Trautmann, 1997: 181-182). It was rooted within and justified

the slave trade, and “black skin was taken as a ‘natural’ outward sign of inward mental and moral inferiority” (Stepan, 1982: xii).

Nevertheless, there were many commonalities across these societies. One being that they did share ideas of human hierarchy, and whether following social evolutionism or race science, both placed white Europeans at the pinnacle of civilisation and focused on the physical differences between humans. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775) had already identified five varieties of mankind: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American and Malay, and “allotted first place to the Caucasian” and last to the Ethiopian and Mongolian (2000: 28). After describing the physical attributes of each, including skin and hair colour, the shape of the nose and skull and quality of lips, and in the name of the ‘objectivity’ of science, Blumenbach declared the Caucasian to be “the most beautiful race of men” (2000: 31), and therefore, by his terms, the most advanced. Prichard, father of monogenesis and faithful to Blumenbach, argued for a collective human origin, yet believed that origin divided into races. Far from preaching equality, the idea behind monogenesis was that man had evolved to civilization from a low to a high condition of morality and knowledge, and that human groups were on different ‘unlinear’ sequences of progression. “By the middle of the nineteenth century, everyone was agreed, it seemed, that in essential ways the white race was superior to non-white races” (Stepan, 1982: 4).

Polygenesis and monogenesis led to collaborations, and what flourished was a volatile mixture of the two strands of thought. When the ESL succeeded the ASL in the formation of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (AI) in 1871, the AI shadowed a polygenist-Darwinian approach that different peoples differentiated from one another biologically as they became separated geographically, the idea being that human races had evolved at different rates in different places. This idea rejected eighteenth century thought that supposed differentiation of races could be explained by environmental factors. Instead anthropologists widely believed that human differences were due to physical biological evolution as well as differences in the stage of development of society. At the pinnacle stood the white European male,

below which all others ranked in a racial hierarchy; at the lowest end was the ape. Adjectives of 'savage,' 'barbarous' and 'civilised' were applied to races, which was easily colour-coded as black, brown/yellow and white (Stocking 1988: 7–8), and Darwinian evolution supported “a raciocultural hierarchy in terms of which civilised men the highest products of social evolution, were large-brained white men” (Stocking, 1982: 122). Collating monogenism and polygenism, the AI included ethnology and physical anthropology under its umbrella (Kucklick, 2008b: 56). Thus the trajectories of monogenism had profoundly shifted towards what Stepan has described as “a nineteenth century biological pessimism, and a belief in the unchangeability of racial ‘natures’.... What had been a relatively egalitarian and humanistic outlook at the beginning of the century, transformed in the middle of the century into the biological ‘science’ of inequality of mankind in mental, moral and physical differences, which allegedly caused or prevented civilised behaviour (Stepan, 1982: 1-4).

## THE ARYAN AND NON-ARYAN INDIAN

Within this discourse India presented British ethnology with a difficulty, since its population evidently included dark-skinned people who, although not industrialised, were civilised. Trautmann argues that India “constituted the central problem for Victorian anthropology, whose project it was to achieve classifications of human variety consistent with the master idea of the opposition of the dark-skinned the fair skinned civilized European” (1997: 3). This led to the conception of India’s own racial binary of the light-skinned civilised ‘Hindoo’, who were believed to be of Aryan origin, and dark-skinned savage ‘aboriginal’ tribes, who were accepted as ‘native’ and non-Aryan. The idea, which also echoed indigenous categorisations, was that Aryans had migrated into the sub-continent at the dawn of civilisation, and the Aryan race had been spread and enveloped indigenous communities. While the ‘Aryan invasion’ theory derived from comparative linguistics and the discovery of the Indo-European language family (as Trautmann (1997) and Dirks (2001) discuss), the theory became important both in race science that had to explain

'high' cultures that were not white and also within the ideologies of imperialism. Bayly explains that Aryan ideology "became a cornerstone of ethnological thought about India, and provided later theorists with a parallel between 'Hindu' Aryans, and later Roman, Mughal and British conquerors" (Bayly, 1995: 173). The Aryan idea proposed that Hindu and British were long-lost kin being reunited, and were thus the family bonding of India to British rule (Trautmann, 1997: 15-16). However, unlike philology, which asserted that speakers of Indo-European languages in India and Europe were of the same culture and race (Dirks, 2001: 142), the Aryan theory accepted a brotherhood, but made the relationship hierarchical.

Trautmann (1997) explores the attack made by race science on an earlier belief that Brahmins were the original founders of civilisation. Orientalists, including Friedrich Max Müller, scholar of Sanskrit, as well as Sir William Jones and his contemporaries, had advocated a blood lineage between Britons and Indians through the proxy of language. They viewed the speakers and writers of Sanskrit as primordially Aryan (Bayly, 1995: 172). They even usurped the word *Ārya* from Sanskrit, to mean speakers of ancient languages, which for them 'evidenced' an Aryan race. Yet, under the study of ethnology race became answerable to biology rather than to language (ibid: 183). Consequently, the notion of biological race differentiated the European Aryan from the Asian Aryan (Thapar, 1996: 5). Physical anthropologists found error in the assumption that the relationship of language indicated a racial relationship. Prehistoric archaeological finds undermined the philologist school of thought, and, disproving the theory that the Aryan race had migrated from Asia, conceived the idea that the 'original' Aryan race was located in the white European. "The racialization of the Aryan idea" Trautmann writes "made the Aryan race an exclusive group very much smaller than the Indo-European speaking population as a whole" (1997: 187). In this framework the Indian Aryan was reduced to a migrated and degenerated Aryan race. He was still a lost 'brother,' who usefully substantiated a British-Indian relationship, but he was also culturally and religiously deviated and degraded, and therefore needed civilising by the British 'master' race.



This anthropological outlook rested on the division of the world's peoples into higher and lower forms of civilisation (Kuklick, 1991: 26). Although colonial fieldworkers took very different positions and were "as likely to condemn as to condone colonialism" (Kuklick 1991: 5), colonial rule came to be widely celebrated as a peacekeeping and civilising mission "despite reports from the colonies replete with descriptions of the unfortunate consequences of colonialism for subject peoples" (Kucklick, 1991: 6). The Aryan myth became increasingly political, and often united political administrations and anthropological efforts. It became important to British ethnographers, who during the late nineteenth century offered guidance on the colonial Empire. Administrator-anthropologists, such as H.H. Risley, tried to catalogue and characterise the physical and cultural diversity of the Indian population. Building on Dalton's *Ethnology Of Bengal* (1872), which had conceived a distinction between Aryan and non-Aryan races in India, Risley conducted extensive ethnographic research on the tribes and castes of Bengal. By using the techniques of anthropometry, he became the leading authority on caste classification. By way of physical attributes, largely referencing physiognomies of the nose, Risley constituted a new wave of anthropological racism. In "The Study of Ethnology in India" he proliferated earlier assumptions that Indian civilization comprised of two races; the dark-skinned 'savage' aborigines and the light-skinned Hindus of Aryan stock (1891: 249/251). Risley also rejected monotheistic theory, arguing that it was 'incompatible' with theological and mythological development (ibid: 236). Asserting that different castes were in fact of different races, Risley summed up two distinct Indian 'types': one "to a degree closely approaching to the negro, and the other... much the same measure as the population of Southern Europe" (1891: 252). He made this distinction based largely on skin colour and platyrhine/leptorhine nasal characteristics.

Risley's *Tribes and Castes* volumes, which inspired future ethnographic work and other similar volumes, presented anthropometric data and helped to create, categorise and fix the Indian population into racial types (Bates, 1995: 21). This anthropological-administrator documentation connected to a wider colonial process which re-imagined and re-produced caste identities and ways

of controlling the Indian population (see Dirks, 2001). Although growing in complexity over the course of the nineteenth century, anthropological efforts in India, which studied and classified India's tribes and castes, grossly overlooked the myriad of social identities. As Dirks argues, British documentation reduced the vastly complex units of identification:

Temple communities, territorial groups, lineage segments, family units, royal retinues, warrior subcastes, "little" kingdoms, occupational reference groups, agricultural or trading associations, devotionally conceived networks and sectarian communities, even priestly cabals, were just some of the units of identification, all of them at various times far more significant than any uniform metonymy of endogamous "caste" groupings.

(Dirks, 2011: 13)

In the second half of the nineteenth century the British study of tribe and caste was driven by a belief that India could be ruled, and future unrest prevented, using scientific knowledge. Bayly has observed "[t]he problems being 'solved' by ethnological enquiries were not simply 'imperial' problems" (1995: 17), however they readily lent themselves to ideas of superiority and of civilising Indian races.

Ethnographic work facilitated the 'invention' of caste, a subject that Dirks (2001) and others have discussed. Ethnographies were largely initiated in the latter half of the nineteenth century; the idea being that India could be ruled and controlled with the aid of anthropological knowledge. Anthropologists including Shortt, Dalton, Crooke, Risely, Hunter and Sherring produced ethnographic work on Indian tribes and castes conceiving and adding detail to Aryan/Non-Aryan divides. Their research applied race theory to caste, and contributed to the constitution of a separation between white and black races, and often propagated the notion that India's internal hostilities and prejudices—including that of caste—could and was already being 'civilised' through British rule. A general assumption was that castes were really 'races' "and the distinction between high and low caste was really a distinction between peoples of supposedly superior and inferior racial endowment" (Bayly, 1995: 169). What is crucial is that these ideas became important in civilising mission ideology. For example, in his book *Hindu Tribes and Castes*

Matthew Atmore Sherring, a missionary, saw British rule as freeing India from inequality, caste prejudice and religious tyranny. “What was impossible under former administrations” described Sherring in 1872, “is possible under English law” (1872: 248). Shortt, meanwhile, conducted an account of the tribes who inhabited the Neilgherries. His report claimed that the tribes were “filthy” and that their customs were “revolting” (1869: 238/ 240). Yet, he also argued that civilization was dismantling ‘savage’ religious beliefs of hill tribes. This kind of thought littered British approaches to studying and controlling India, and operated as justification of colonisation.

## INDIA IN EXHIBITION

The relevance of outlining this complex history of anthropology is that exhibitions picked out and even played a role in producing these key and time-specific strands of anthropological theories and fieldworks, making them palatable for lay audiences through exhibited models and performative bodies. Thus the exhibitions of Indian people in London were theatrical sites of public participation in period-specific *trends* of anthropological thought. The intersecting shift from ‘educational’ displays put up between 1850 and 1886 into ‘entertainment’ from the 1880s onwards shadowed and helped develop anthropological concepts in physical ethnology, race science and ethnography. Exhibitions of the mid-nineteenth-century, often exhibiting life-sized tribal models, educated the public on ethnology as “the physical history of man” (Guide to the Crystal Palace and Park, 1856: 118), and looked primarily toward physical anthropology, peculiarities of skin colour, bone structure, and stature in order to rank the world’s races. From the 1880s onwards however, this became about ‘civilising’ a ‘lagging’ and ‘divided’ race, as moral differences assumed greater importance than physical ones in both anthropological thinking and in exhibition display. Performing and producing anthropological models of evolution, both styles of display positioned Indians on a low (though not the lowest) evolutionary locality. Both modes of representation helped to conceive the notion of white cultural/evolutionary supremacy that was made increasingly relevant and important to the

discourses of imperialism. Furthermore, the various strands of anthropology—physical and moral—were embodied and performed through exhibition display, where they were not only produced *for* the British public but were also produced *by* them.

Anthropologies as a matter of public participation was not unique to the exhibition ground during this period. In Britain, in an underdeveloped university system, anthropological efforts were conducted outside academia, and relied on public agreement that knowledge of other cultures, particularly non-industrial societies, was of value (Kucklick, 1991: 6-7). During the nineteenth century anthropologists, who included active fieldworkers and ‘armchair’ researchers, wrote clearly for general readers, and by addressing receptive lay audiences, they exerted a powerful hold on the public’s imagination (Kucklick, 1991: 8). In this landscape, various anthropological narratives not only reached a non-professional audience, but were also powerfully embodied and performatively-generated through the forum of exhibitions. This helped certify popular knowledge of white evolutionary and racial superiority in the public sphere during the heyday of the British Empire.

What I am unravelling here is not about individual spectatorship or the racism of individual consumers, but a prevailing discourse and popular mode of thought, in part produced by the exhibitions. An examination of the exhibition of India in London facilitates a better understanding of British interpretations of India during Britain’s Empire-building, as well as of the conflating histories of anthropology and performance. In turn the exhibition of India, as a public/performative site of anthropological theory, was another way in which Indian identity was being created and imagined, and offers particularly interesting insight into how anthropologies, ideologies of imperialism, and popular culture evolved and collided in the lead up to and during the reign of the Raj. My initial focus lies in the exhibition of human evolution, of which India was a key feature. As we will see, ethnological exhibits that took place in the decades that fell in the wake of the mid-nineteenth century, which were typically interested in ‘education,’ embodied theories of the evolution of so-called indigenous ‘primitive’ tribes and civilised Hindus. Life-sized models of

Indian tribes helped Britons know themselves as the ultimate superior race and civilisation whilst making sense of India's supposed heterogeneous position on the scale of evolution, which included the savage tribe and the 'nearly' civilised 'Aryan' 'Hindoo.'

The second area I cover in this chapter is the reduction of India's diverse communities into a few racial/religious 'types' and 'castes.' This 'diversity' was set out in exhibitions that were typically more spectacular and included a range of living Indian entertainments. Although these entertainments were no longer theory-driven, they were praised for being 'thoroughly' representative of India's heterogeneity. Further, rather than being entirely divorced from anthropology, they did often operate within developing anthropological-administrator efforts, which were trying to catalogue and categorise the Indian population in order to know India well enough to rule it. In this way British anthropological approaches to colonial rule were taken up in exhibition entertainments, which came to stand amongst other things as a justification of the Raj.

#### ETHNOLOGY IN EXHIBITION: TRIBAL MODELS EXHIBITED

Between the 1850s and 1880s, exhibitions were public and scientific sites of enquiry into the evolution of mankind, through which the idea of white supremacy was tangibly exemplified and performatively endorsed. Interested in the public's education of ethnology, the Crystal Palace exhibitions at Sydenham included ethnological displays of life-sized human models. The models bridged a gap between contemporary scientific thought based on physical anthropology, and performative museum display. Qureshi describes that "Sydenham offered an unrivalled object lesson in contemporary ethnology by virtue of presenting human models, exhibited in naturalistic environments" (2011b: 156). The court was the creation of Robert Gordon Latham, professor of English turned medical and ethnological expert, and his exhibits show that a range of races were drawn upon in order to make racial distinctions in the supposed stages of human evolution. Exhibiting life-sized models, Latham literally fleshed out a hierarchical version of human evolution and presented it

as solid corporeal fact during the contentious years in the ethnology/anthropology of Prichard, Knox and Hunt.

Latham's Natural History Courts were devoted to the geographical groupings of men, animals, and plants, and committed to the public's education of ethnology. Devised as the museum of man's history, the plaster-of-Paris and clay models showcased the science behind the different 'varieties' of the human species, during a time when ethnology was only just beginning to merge with physical anthropology. Educating the public on the varieties of mankind in Asia and Africa, Latham's displays were available for public consumption until 1866 when the models were destroyed by a fire (Qureshi, 2011b: 164). The models themselves, as Qureshi (2011b: 156) reveals, were often casts of individuals exhibited earlier in the decade.

In 1854 Latham wrote a guidebook to accompany the Natural History Court, which is likely to have been one of the most widely distributed ethnological works of the 1850s (Qureshi, 2011b: 149). In it he described the characteristics and distinctions between the groups on display. His references to contemporary theory and his "decision to stress human unity unequivocally indicate both the intended educational aspect of the court and the perceived utility of the guidebook in introducing ethnology to the lay public" (Qureshi, 2011b: 154). Encouraging readers to participate in ethnological identification, the guide explained that evolutionary developments could be surveyed through bodily features by way of physical anthropology. The idea being that European features—white skin, curved noses, and slender lips—were evidence of the more advanced stage of human development. The darker the skin, the larger the lips, the flatter and bigger the nose, meanwhile, the less evolved that particular subject was perceived to be. Latham thus helped to construct the notion of white evolutionary and racial supremacy based on bodily features within the British psyche.

Like other ethnologists, Latham rejected earlier thought prevalent in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that difference in skin colour could be explained by climate, abiding instead by the new line of thought that there were biological and intrinsic differences in human races. His performative and

physiological use of race in exhibitions popularised an anthropological assumption of the period that the cultural and civilised characteristic of races were directly related to their physical bodies. He encouraged the British public to accept the assumption that the more civilised mankind became, the whiter the race; the darker the skin, the more savage the race. This is not to suggest that Latham's interpretation of skin differentiation was a new concept in ethnology, rather that his work was being publicly performed and authorised in new ways, thereby reaching new mass-audiences who were given embodied, and therefore more easily understood knowledge. As Qureshi writes: "Latham's work is a particularly instructive example for the mid-nineteenth-century remaking of 'race'" (2011b: 146). It is also characteristic of the fusion between the ESL and ASL. Although Latham argued that the skin of the Negro "differs from that of the white man in degree only" (1854: 42-3), he emphasised racial differences and divided humans into three basic separate species: the European, Mongolian and African (Latham, 1850: 7). As Qureshi contends: Latham "cannot be fully accommodated within frameworks that propose that the mid-1800s, and particularly Knox's work, ushered in a new era of scientific racism and the successful overthrow of older approaches in favour of anatomical, physiological, or biological notions of human variation" (2011b: 163).

What I am principally interested in here is the ethnological treatment and presentation of India within the sequences of diachronic human development, which was important to the remaking of race, and shows how race-science was being produced / performed dialogically and with relative complexity. I urge that a closer look at Latham's delineation of Indians is important for understanding how India was being represented in London specifically, and in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the modes through which theories of evolution being produced more broadly. Although it was not only in Latham's displays in which different races inhabited hierarchical stages between the white/black binary on exhibition sites—for example, a simplified synopsis of human evolution was conceived at the 1893 Chicago exhibition's Midway, which "promoted Social Darwinian visions of human development on an international stage" (Qureshi, 2014: 272)—it was in Latham's displays

where a more specific and varied parade of *India's* evolution was envisioned. This is hardly surprising since Latham's ethnological exhibits coincided not only with a lively anthropological atmosphere, but also with the transfer of power from Company rule to the Raj, and during a time when the British were looking for ways to identify with and subjugate the Indian population. Latham in particular is important because his use of India contributed to the notion, in a public and performative approach to theory, that lighter skin was a marker for a superior race in both Britain and India alike, as he also explained why the fairer skinned Indian was still inferior.

Claiming to represent the entire spectrum of human development, Latham's 1856 Natural History Court was divided into two sections; 'The New World' and 'The Old World.' The first group featured in the New World was the wild savage. Two Mexicans, bow and arrow in hand, were placed next to a jaguar, which had killed a deer and was about to pounce "when another native advances boldly with a spear to receive the attack" (Guide to the Crystal Palace and Park, 1856: 119). Next came the "fiercest of American savages": the Botocudos. After that North American Red Indians, who Latham described as harsh, muscular, and cruel (ibid: 119). Following on to Central America were Indians of Mexico, which led on to an Amazonian group, and then Arctic illustrations of "Samoides... a child of the Lapland race, [and] a Greenlander" (ibid: 121). Touring on to the 'Old World' led firstly to Zulu inhabitants of South Africa, who, according to their "well proportioned" stature and "prominent" noses, "are far above the rest of the South African races" (ibid: 122). Next, Eastern African 'Danakils,' who "differ widely from the Negro" were displayed near to a group of slaves. Eastern Africa led on to a Tiger hunt from India, next to which could be found group of 'Hindoos.'

In reference to the 'Hindoos', Latham explained that two distinct kinds of physiognomy and caste could be distinguished—"one coarse-featured—the low caste—and the other with fine features, and lighter skinned—the high caste" (ibid: 126). "The Hindoos belong to the Indo-European nations, and are spread over British India" (ibid: 126). The high caste 'Hindoo' was described as "exceedingly handsome...[and] very skilful" and unlike the uncultured brute,



the 'civilised' Hindoo made the beautiful shawls and exquisite materials that enchanted the Western world (ibid). Yet, conforming to a history of British thought that regarded India as an uncivilised and stagnated civilisation (including Henry Maine, Lord Hastings, Charles Grant and James Mill, for example), Latham's 'Hindoo' was also "physically weak, and incapable of hard physical labour" (ibid, 126). The 'Hindoos' were followed by a group from Tibet, botany from China, Siberia, Japan and Nepal, figures from Borneo, and savage "half-starved, lanky and ill-proportioned" Australians (ibid: 128).

Indian identities were important in the physical identification of so-called stages of human evolution, and Latham's guidebook connected a higher level of intelligence to individuals whose features more closely resembled those of the Europeans'. In doing so he also began to make public physiological distinctions between low and high caste. Describing Indian types in the 1854 Natural History Department handbook, Latham claimed there were two types of Indian physical form: "one the colour is dark, or even black, the skin coarse, the face flattened, the lips thick; in the other the colour is brunette, the nose aquiline, the eyebrows arched, regular, and delicate, the lips of moderate thickness, the face oval, the features intelligent" (1854: 8). European-like qualities remained linked to higher caste and a higher form of evolution. "[T]he higher the *caste*" claimed Latham, "the finer the features, the clearer the complexion" (1854: 8). In the process tribes (thought identifiable through dark skin and flat large noses), as the antithesis of high castes, were conceived as a different race who inhabited India before the West had made contact. Other higher castes of lighter complexions were believed to be of 'Indo-European' descent.

When classifying India, Latham made evolutionary and racial distinctions through physical anthropology, rather than philology. His theories are indicative of the issue that India was clearly a problem in British thinking since it was unmistakably an ancient and advanced civilisation, and could not just be slotted as a primitive or lower race. As Latham reminded audiences of the Crystal Palace: "India and China, we must remember, are countries that have been long civilised" (1854: 8). Yet this did not mean these countries were *fully*

civilised, and Latham also found ways to ensure that the British public knew that India's civilisation followed its "own peculiar fashion." Departing from an Orientalist trend that honoured Aryan Indians as the most advanced and original Aryan race, Latham reminded readers that India was a country "from which civilization has been diffused over districts more or less barbarous" (ibid).

Latham's use of India is also significant in that he disregarded older ideas that the Aryan race could be classified through philology and he preceded later ethnographic works, including those conducted by H.H. Risley, which apprehended India's alleged Aryan/non-Aryan divide through physiology. In this spectrum of human development, Latham's work helped to re-cast the theories of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Orientalists, who encountered India clearly as a 'high' civilisation with more advanced literary traditions than Europe. Latham's work recognised the supposed Aryan conquest myth within a race science perspective. Together with John Crawford and John Muir, Latham turned against Müller's connection between race and language, and took the Aryan Indian into race science in a way Müller neither expected nor condoned. In response, Müller marked Latham as a particularly 'unfriendly' ethnologist (cited Trautmann, 1997: 172-3). Latham is thus representative, in a wider sense, of anthropological thought that began to emerge around 1850 that no longer believed there was a correlation between race and language, helping to conceive Aryan Indians as a civilised but degenerated race. This was the thinking he put forward in an authoritative and tangible form to a British public. Qureshi (2011b: 163) argues that Latham not only brought together the worlds of the intellectual men of science and the lay public, he layered theory on embodiment and museum performance, through which theory acquired a new and easily-comprehensible physicality. This enabled the public to participate tangibly in the re-making of race generally, and India more specifically, and proposed that India was both inherently and paradoxically a 'primitive' and 'civilised' culture.

Latham's displays are important not only for positing India on two locations on the scale of human hierarchy, but also because they became increasingly

performative. Linking ethnology more firmly to zoology, Latham's 1856 Natural History Court at the Crystal Palace considered "the different varieties of the races of men in a physical point of view, instituting comparisons between them, and carefully pointing out the differences or affinities which characteristics the physical structure of the various branches of the great human family" (Guide to the Crystal Palace and Park, 1856: 117). Showcasing models according to comparable evolutionary sequences and alongside animals from the subject's natural habitat, this later display dabbled in a greater range of theatrics that amplified and exaggerated the supposed hierarchies of human evolution, and enabled the public physically to access a range of human evolution. Those who inhabited the lowest stages of evolution were exhibited nearer to the entrance, dispersed as a counterpoint to so-called more developed forms, including the audience themselves who populated the entire scene at will. The arrangement of the models suggested a seamless series of racial evolution according to "the differences of skin, hair, bone, and stature that exist between the various races of men" (ibid: 118). Latham's 1856 display offered an embodied and theatrical journey through the stages of man's evolution, through which white spectators, free to move, peruse and discriminate, could palpably 'know' their status. Evolutionary differentiation was far more complex than white/black, as Indian exhibits continue to exemplify. Nevertheless, low and high castes, which were read through the 'physical structure' of displayed models, could be physically identified alongside other primitive and civilised races, the spectator included.

Significantly, Latham's ethnological exhibits were followed by other exhibitions in both London and India, which, although engaging in a more complex categorisation of India's tribes and castes, continued throughout the years to assign Indian tribes into a different variety of mankind, separate from those of 'Indo-European' blood and caste groups. In doing so, exhibitions publicly and performatively constructed an Indian binary of race within the black/white binary, which consisted of dark-skinned less evolved tribes and lighter-skinned more evolved castes.

The differences between tribes and castes were displayed as a natural and innate order in numerous exhibitions, all of which performed and cemented anthropological race theory, and helped public audiences 'know' Indian racial inferiority in both its Aryan and non-Aryan groups. The 1883 Calcutta International, for example, showcased life-sized models of the groups as demonstrations of the different types of race, and was specifically interested in caste groups and divisions in the Bhotiya, the Gujjars, the Tharus, and the Korwas tribes. In 1866 Dr. J. Fayrer organised a similar exhibition, which sought to represent fully the wilder tribes of India, and called on local Governments to collect data on the various races found in their jurisdictions. According to Dalton, who was in charge of much of the ethnographic work, the idea was to "to bring together in one exhibition typical examples from the races of the Old World, to be made the subject of scientific study when so collected" (1872: 10). Dalton even used the series of photographs of tribes that had been taken for the London Exhibition of 1862. London's 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition also exhibited models of "the wilder tribes which are found throughout various countries of India in the hills and forests" (Colonial and Indian Exhibition, Official Catalogue, 1886: 84). These were conceived as the "descendants of the races who inhabited the country before Aryan immigration" (ibid). Commissioned by George Watt, the series of ethnological models included models of natives from the Andaman and Nicbar islands, the 'Karens' of Burma, the "Singphos, Mishmis, Nagas, and other hill tribes of Assam", and other races from Bengal, Bombay and Madras (ibid). They were representative, according to Cundall's *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition* published in 1886, of the indigenous races of India (1886: 21). Although the 1886 exhibition identified a far larger range of tribal groups than the Crystal Palace displays, it continued to operate within the Aryan myth and helped to conceive tribal groups as evolutionary inferior.

The models of Andamanese Islanders featured at the 1886 exhibition displayed a particular barbarism that was indicative of the ethnological production of the non-Aryan. Located off the Bay of Bengal the Andaman Islands were one of the British Empire's most remote and most ruthless dependencies, whose populations were famous for their vicious intolerance of

foreigners. Banishing Indian rebels into the ultimate state of savagery, Britain used the Andaman Islands as a penal colony for holding captured mutineers after the events of 1857, when Indian prisons reached breaking point. Judged as the *most* primitive and *most* degraded of barbarous races, and appropriated within the popularisation of human evolution, nineteenth-century anthropological journals and popular imaginations had widely consumed the Andamanese “as scientific ‘evidence’, central to sociocultural-evolutionary debates of the period” (Wintle 2009:1). Their tribal attire, spears, adornment of human skulls, and nakedness appeared as ‘evidence’ of lower evolutionary status, and helped further a two-fold racial classification, within which Indians could be understood to share racial heritage with the British, but also could be understood as less evolved savages who shared ancestry with African races.

The ethnological displays at the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition became a crucial venue for anthropological study. Throughout the months of June and July 1886, a series of conferences and lectures were run by members of the Anthropological Institute at the Conference Hall of the exhibition. Qureshi (2011: 256) writes that this was due in large part to the wishes of authorities of the exhibition. The speakers at the conferences and lectures were gentlemen connected to the ethnological exhibits, and they gave accounts of the most ‘typical’ specimens. “Most pertinently, foreign performers at the Colonial and Indian exhibition provided experimental subjects” (Qureshi, 2011: 257). Living specimens even accompanied many of the lectures. Mr. Webb, for example, showcased three men of the ‘Bantu race’, as well as a ‘Bushman’ as living examples of their race (Galton, 1887: 176). On another occasion, the ‘Bushman’s’ strength was measured to prove that the man was “barely of the average strength of an Englishman” (Galton, 1887: 177). At other times, conference audiences were given opportunities to view collections available at the exhibition, which were used as evidence of the speakers’ theories (Galton, 1887: 176). Thus the 1886 exhibition was an important site of anthropological research and discussion. Yet theory developed through performances intended for mass popular audiences. Exhibitions therefore not only created opportunities for the anthropological research community as Qureshi (2011: 258) argues, they also reveal a relationship between specialist theory and

mass-entertainment. Clearly popular culture was important developer of science. Anthropologists were dissatisfied by the “narrowly limited time” with ethnological displays (Galton, 1887: 175), which points to their value to the field. Added to this, the limited anthropological access to ethnological exhibits continued to frustrate the anthropological community. In June 1900, an exasperated Dr. W. H. R. Rivers (discussed further by Qureshi, 2011: 261-267) commented that nearly every year in London “members of the savage or barbarous races are exhibited” yet “little or nothing is done” to utilise the material, and he urged the Anthropological Institute to “take steps” to remedy the oversight (*Anthropological Review and Miscellanea*, 1900: 6-7). Rivers insisted that anthropologists should be permitted access to exhibits when they were closed to the public, adding that “it is especially desirable that the facilities should be given soon after the arrival of the natives in England before they have been ruined for the purposes of scientific study by the British public” (ibid: 6). Although ‘spoiling’ the ethnological ‘material,’ it also remains significant that the public themselves became creators of science.

More specifically, exhibitions displayed Indian ‘variations’ in a monolithic, but also in an embodied, participatory and performative approach to race. Exhibitions informed audiences that while the Himalayan tribal groups belonged to an altogether “different race”, the ‘Hindoo’ was both handsome and skilful (Guide to the Crystal Palace and Park, 1856: 126). The embodiment of this idea held longevity. An Official publication written by a school headmaster E. J Marshall encouraged visitors of the 1885 exhibition to “[s]pecially compare the different races in the Ethnological groups, as to size, character, dress, and notice how superior the representatives of the Aryan stock are to the purely native tribes” (1886: 10). Marshall’s notes were initially intended for a lecture given to the students of Brighton Grammar School prior to their visit to the exhibition. However, his lecture notes were then reprinted for other talks, for distribution to the workingmen’s club, and were even for sale with other Official Publications at the exhibition bookstall. Similar to Latham’s guidebooks, Marshall encouraged his audience to look at the physical differences between the ethnological groups and ‘notice’ the superiority of the Aryan stock. He also urged that readers should not equalise Indian Aryan and

European Aryan 'stocks'. On the contrary, far from being fully 'civilised,' Marshall advised that the Indian Aryan race held back from progress by a caste system thought to have stagnated and divided their race. Marshall explained that "[w]ith few exceptions, the Indian Art Ware in these Courts is similar to the Indian Art Ware of two thousand years ago. Contrast this almost stationary condition with the progress indicated by the exhibits in the Australian and Canadian Courts, and ask **"Why?" "Why?"** The history of the Aryan races in India is involved in much obscurity" (1886: 11). Marshall concluded that the code of Manu had "petrified" Hindu society and the rigidity of caste made progress unachievable. As well as degrading the Indian Aryan, Marshall shows how ethnology and racial hierarchy was made readable through both the physical bodies of the models on display and the audience themselves, whether they be professionals or school children. What remains vital here is that the white British spectator could visually compare their bodily distinction to the exhibited model/body, as they were being instructed on what anthropological, biological and cultural difference that distinction supposedly involved. This 'easy-access' of anthropological theory through physicality enabled a participatory/corporeal British ranking of race.

In this making of race, exhibitions re-articulated black/white binaries. Although exhibition collections, like British classifications of caste, were growing in complexity, they also perpetuated the Aryan / non-Aryan categories and neglected other classifications of identity. This issue is indicative of the rudimentary nature of the British's classifications of caste, which was grossly reducing the diversity of the Indian population, its vast social/religious affiliations, caste identifications, languages, and ethnic groups. Yet it also shows that certain groups who were also important to British ethnologists were overlooked by exhibition display in order for a more simplistic understanding of India's racial identity. Dravidians of South India, who as Dirks reveals (2001: 140-46) were of interest to missionaries and ethnologists at this time, were a significant non-appearance at exhibitions, a likely reason being that they could not fit into either a caste or tribe category—the Dravidians were darker skinned than most north Indians, yet their language preceded Sanskrit and there were also Brahmins among them. Thus, in contrast to the British approach to Indian

race, the Dravidians were neither Indo-Aryans nor non-Aryan tribal originals. Another way in which the exhibition of caste/tribe was a reduced description of the British's already grossly simplified view of caste was its failure to acknowledge 'outcaste' or dalit groups. Instead, the exhibitions presented the more simplistic story that the Indian population comprised of degraded Aryans and original and barbaric tribal peoples.

The education of the public about Aryan/non-Aryan races in this sense became particularly potent in that it articulated and collated two paradoxical strands of thought. The first was racial science, which theorised that Indians were a separate and inferior race, and the second was the civilising of the Hindus. The European race was seen not only to share ancestry with higher castes, but also brought emancipation from savagery for both its lower and higher groups. The notion that those of lower races were being 'civilised' through the influence of 'superior' races was also put forward through ethnological displays. The tribal models exhibited at the Colonial and Indian exhibition, for example, included representatives of the 'Gonds,' "amongst whom the practice of human sacrifice prevailed until put down by the Government of India" (Official Catalogue Colonial and Indian exhibition, 1886: 84). The Gonds were viewed as a particularly hostile, violent and feared tribal group, as Bates (1995: 15) explains in early British-tribal contact. Yet, as Marshall's notes show, exhibitions proposed that the Aryan 'Hindoos' were degenerated and also required civilising.

In a wider sense, the idea of civilising reflected a relationship between imperial power and race science which often, as Trautmann observes "combined in an unstable and volatile mixture, forming the attitude that said to the people of India, "[a]dmire us; emulate us; become like us," then added, "but you can never become one of us"" (1997: 188). Significantly, the exhibition of India presented an ethnological orthodoxy that was later widely accepted by theorists. Scholars such as Hunter, George Campbell and Walter Elliot "portrayed India as a composite social landscape in which only certain peoples, those of superior 'Aryan' blood, had evolved historically in ways which left them 'shackled' by a hierarchical, Brahmanically-defined ideology of



‘caste’” (Bayly, 1995: 170). The events that fell between 1851 and 1886 had already suggested the degeneration of the Indian Aryan race. In doing so they helped to popularise theories that preceded the works of Risley as they reiterated an incommensurable distinction between the colonisers and the colonised, which in turn helped to rally recognition of India’s civilisation while also showing why that civilisation remained inferior.

Displaying calcified though civilised ‘Hindoos’ supposedly of Aryan descent alongside savage tribes supposed to be of non-Aryan descent, exhibitions clung to a historical and increasingly political tradition that looked for ways to both identify with and subjugate India. They thus helped to banish those thought to be of non-Aryan blood to a realm of Otherness, whilst they conceived Hindus as being of the same racial origin as the British. In this story, civilisation remained the prerogative of those of ‘original’ Aryan descent, and coincided with a wider belief that white-skinned races alone had ascended to the pinnacle of man’s evolution (Stocking, 1982: 120). Following this notion, and although the Aryan narrative conceived a racial relationship between the colonised and the colonisers, the difference between European Aryans and Asian Aryans also perpetuated a denial of ‘full’ Aryan status of Indians. In the exhibition arena this denial was achieved not only physiologically (for while the Aryan Indian’s skin was ‘superior’ it also wasn’t white), but also through the notion that Indian Aryans had degenerated down a ‘wrong’ religious and social path. Visualised as of higher caste and Aryan descent, exhibited ‘Hindoos’ were regarded as a superior race in comparison to tribal groups, but also a degenerated identity that, while usefully sharing a racial decent with their rulers and therefore legitimising the Raj as racial ancestors, required moral salvation. This notion became particularly useful in the rhetoric of civilising, and the ‘true’ Aryan’s job during the reign of the Raj was to uplift and civilise India—both its lower and higher races. These ethnological ideas of race easily appealed to ideas of ‘rescuing,’ ‘teaching’ and ‘building’ India, and acted as a rationalisation of British rule. This is partly representative of classic social evolutionism, in which every society is supposed to pass through the same stages of development. Yet, it also helped to define Indians as irreducibly Other, as barbaric, degenerated and non-Christian.

## ENTERTAINMENT & ETHNOGRAPHIC DISCOVERY

The ethnological models that were a particularly popular exhibition display in the decades that followed after the mid nineteenth century were soon superseded by more enjoyable living cultural delights. From a promotional and commercial viewpoint, the inclusion of 'real' 'Mohammedans', 'Hindoos', 'Burmese', 'Parsees,' as well as craftsmen, jugglers, and nautch girls, who were from Delhi, Agra, Madras, Bombay and Burma in exhibitions suggested authenticity and variety, and propagated a misleading idea that what was being showcased was *all* of India. A review of 'India in London' in *The Morning Post*, for example, reported, "there has been gathered a motley assemblage of Parsees, Mohammedans, and Hindoos, who succeed in giving a fairly complete idea of Indian life in its holiday and industrial aspects" (23 December 1885: 5). Frank Cundall's *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition* explained that the exhibited craftsmen at the 1886 exhibition had come from all parts of India and were representative of many types of race (1886: 29). Cundall described eight of these craftsmen in more detail, including a 'Musalman' silk weaver from Benares, a 'Musalman' dyer who was a 'Native' from Agra, and a goldsmith who was a Hindu from Agra (1886: 29-30). For exhibition managers, the viability and therefore profitability of Indian performances lay in helping the British public to become more intimately acquainted with the peoples from its dominions.

While feeding a new era of public entertainment, the range also suggests a new relationship between anthropological knowledge and exhibitions. Whereas the exhibitions between 1854 and 1886 sought to identify racial difference through physical anthropology, later exhibitions were interested ideas of racial difference based not so much on the physical, but the moral and mental. Exhibitions reflected a shift in an anthropological focus on physical racial difference toward an interest in broader social difference. Father of cultural anthropology, Tylor (1871) was interested in 'survivals', art, belief and law. Tylor provided anthropology with a definition of culture. Anthropological

views of evolution towards the end of the century used cultural characteristics in order to assess ideas of human development, through which non-industrial societies, including India, were believed to inhabit earlier stages of evolution. (For more information on the different strands of anthropological theory exhibitions followed/engaged with see Qureshi (2014)).

The inclusion of 'all' of India was one way that exhibitions departed from ethnological theory and launched into spectacles that were more pertinent to colonised/coloniser differences. As Qureshi summarises:

By the late nineteenth century the shows had become increasingly dissociated from stimulating interest in human development and increasingly associated with spectacle, visual extravagance, and public frivolity. Promoters no longer relied so heavily on claims that their shows were suitable for widespread public engagement with contemporary theories of ethnic difference; in contrast, displayed peoples appear to have been made increasingly and primarily relevant to revealing the unequal relationships between Britain and its colonized subjects.

(2011: 270)

The exhibition of Indian entertainments functioned within this transformation. Although they departed from active engagement/education of evolutionary theory, by including India's variety and marketing it as all inclusive, exhibitions did interconnect with contemporary anthropological investigations. This enabled the public to assume the roles of anthropological explorers in a 'discovery' of India's heterogeneous population.

While exhibitions of people were no longer used as testing grounds for physical anthropology, the exhibition categorisation of Indian entertainers intersected with a late nineteenth-century political-anthropological ideology, developed by writers such as Risley, which sought to document and understand caste. As Pels shows "from about 1830 onward, the practical development of.... colonial intelligence more and more relied on the ethnographic typification of contemporary statistics and its scientific inscription as ethnology" (1999: 85). Indeed, after the events of 1857, British administrators knew that they had to know India better, and the "conquest of India was a conquest of knowledge" (Cohn, 1996: 16). After the 'Mutiny',

colonial rulers including Richard Carnac Temple, believed that firmer control in India and avoidance of any future unrest could be achieved if there was a better understanding of the people of India, especially those who dwelled in rural areas. “Colonial anthropological studies were often derived not only by a desire to contribute to what was considered scientific progress but also by the imperative to monitor and control a diverse land” (Dudley Jenkins, 2004: 1147). Melita Waligora (2004: 141-165) states that caste in fact became a central theme in colonial documentation and gave a material justification to the ‘civilising mission.’ As the century wore on, caste became a central interest in the British monitoring and classification of India, and as many historians argue (most notably, Dirks, 2001), colonialism both constituted and organised caste under its domination.

Ideas of ‘variety’ that materialised through exhibitions tapped into Britain’s growing desire to know and categorise Indian diversity, and part of that interest resided in caste. For the 1885 exhibition, reviews assured readers that followers “of every different caste and religious belief” were included, and “all the various castes” could be seen “perusing their avocations”, and advised “those who feel curious about our Indian dependencies would do well to pay it a visit” (*The Times* 24 December, 1885: 14). This interest also often manifested into descriptions of the caste’s distinguishing and identifiable features: “they were all very grand in brand new costumes of their representative castes” declared *The Era* in a review of the Albert Palace Indians, “The bushy-whiskered Mohamedan, the turbaned Hindoo, believing in his million gods, the slim Parsee, with the tall, characteristic Gujerat hat, which his race adopted... The appearance of the long curving line of Oriental costume, was very picturesque” (31 October 1885). *The Standard* made similar descriptions of the Indian performers at the 1895 exhibition, though linked religion and art, informing readers that “the Buddhist will exhibit his plastic art, the Hindu his mythological, and the Jain his colossal groups of figures and the Mohammedan his delicate floral designs” (1894: 6). These descriptions helped bring alive the idea of Indian caste differentiation to Britain as it engaged in the links anthropologists were making between evolution and culture. At the same time, caste was clearly a confusing and ununiformed

categorisation. Reviews and promotional material used 'race' and 'caste' as interchangeable terms, and often referred to caste as an occupational (craft, juggling, nautch), religious (Parsee, Hindu, Muslim) and/or geographical (whether performers be from Delhi, Agra or Bombay, et cetera) affiliation.

While trying to document and describe performers, exhibitions dabbled in numerous definitions of caste, including not only those of Hunter and Risley who believed caste was definable in racial biological terms (see Dirks, 2001: 79), but also William Crooke, author of *Castes and Tribes* surveys, who along with Denzil Ibbetson and E. A. H. Blunt, viewed caste as an occupational category. These incongruities feed into Dirks' (2001) argument that caste is a product of a historical encounter during colonialism, and while not an invention of the British, caste was a mode through which Britain systematised India's diverse communities and social identities. As Dirks reminds us, caste is a complex social system that has no universal meaning, yet has been historically accepted as "somehow fundamental to Indian civilization" (2001: 5). Although exhibitions accepted caste as an inherent system that could be classified, they also conflated two very different accounts of caste, both of which as Bayly (2001: 127) explains were in force during the second half of the nineteenth century. By engaging with religious, occupational and territorial classifications, exhibitions point toward Bayly's assertion that there "was no homogenising colonial 'consensus' on the subject of caste" (2001:141). Nevertheless, exhibitions did follow trends of thought. They clearly moved away from Latham's promotion of stadial visions of human development and toward caste-classification. This did not mean that they became disassociated from the practice of anthropology, rather that the relationship between anthropology and exhibitions remains apparent (or as Qureshi (2011: 267-268) argues haphazard), as it also became more firmly attached to the ideologies and practices of imperialism.

## EXHIBITING ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA

Indicative of a more concrete relationship between anthropological knowledge and display, exhibited bodies were often underpinned by educational examples, including samples of ethnographic fieldwork. Therefore, although no longer exploited as a research site by anthropologists and ethnologists and no longer a testing ground for physical anthropology, exhibitions did continue to present scientific enquiry to the public. Significantly, the exhibition of ethnographic data was a context through which living entertainers could be read; the public's 'discovery' of ethnographic records bound the exhibited body to potent imperial discourses, such as *civilising* and *rescuing* India, and in this way became more closely attached to the anthropological-political project for control. Exhibited data often included contributions from the Government of India, which consisted of ethnographic studies of Indian tribes. For the 1862 International Exhibition, the Government of India provided photographs of natives from each local government, including natives from the Etah District, tribes peculiar to the Fyzabad District, and a special collection by Benjamin Simpson, a British photographer who served in the Medical Service in Bengal. These were accompanied by descriptions of:

the realities in which the tribe is found. Its chief occupation. Religion, or chief objects and mode of worship. General description and character. Principle diet, animal or vegetable. Longevity. Height of figures in the photo, colour of their dress.

(National Archives, Delhi. Progs,. Nos.43-45, December 1861)

Collapsing and circulating a political quest for tribe and caste classification that was used for knowledge and control, exhibited photographs of Indian tribal groups formed part of a wave of ethnographic surveys initiated by the administration of the British Raj. These surveys concentrated on specifying and describing certain caste and tribe groups. Exhibited material formed part of *The People of India* ethnographic publications, a title that has been used for at least three different series. Volume One was gathered following India's 'pacification' following the events of 1857, part of the idea being that the commission would gather information about the different races to be found in

India, and would gain greater knowledge of rebellious groups. Lord Canning, who was Governor General of India between 1868 and 1875, initiated the project, whilst the likes of John Forbes Watson and John William Kaye carried out fieldwork. In an attempt capture and document tribal and caste groups visually, the first collection contained 468 annotated photographs of the natives of India. Accompanying remarks included descriptions of the 'typical' dress, customs, characteristics, attributes and ways of native life. The data from the surveys then arranged castes into tables, for easy consultation by administrators (Dudley Jenkins, 2004: 1150). Displaying some of this ethnographic data, exhibitions directly shared in the ideologies behind the government-led works published on India's tribes and castes.

Exhibition displays also often condoned imperial rule. Government contributions to British exhibitions were about promoting and justifying the Raj as a civilising force. The Government of India, made up of British Governor Generals, viceroys, secretaries of state and civil servants, contributed to numerous exhibitions, showcasing its influences in India in order to warrant its existence in what can only be thought of as self-propaganda. For the 1908 Franco-British exhibition, for example, the Government of India supplied a series of maps and photographs from the Geological Survey, which had been collected to demonstrate the civilising effects of colonisation (Report on the Indian Section, Franco-British Exhibition 1908: 15). The photographs were displayed at White City and included schools, courts, railways, post offices and universities. These displays firmly resided in the civilising narrative and India's pacification.

Distributing archaeological and anthropological surveys to a British public presented the Raj as civilising force upon a backward and savage people. 'Development' displays proliferated civilising mission ideology, which, in a broader sense, was "the official doctrine in the heyday of imperialism" (Mann, 2004:4). Mann adds that the civilising mission was about leading a primitive people into modernity, it implied "that colonial subjects were too backward to govern themselves and that they had to be 'uplifted' and that above all the enlightening agenda fostered the "self-legitimation of colonial rule" (2004: 2).

Civilising ideology superseded physical anthropology to become the new marker of civilisation differentiation between Britain and India. Within this shift, the so-called improvement of India was a powerful tool for legitimising the Raj to the people at home. Significantly, 'improvement' had to do with infrastructure and education, but was not about social reform. This enabled a discourse of civilising India, without interfering with religious practice, as a way of negating the growing criticism of colonialism.

It is of key importance that 'improvements' were displayed in the same spaces as the entertaining Indian body. The inclusion of modelled/photographed schools and hospitals built by the British in India underscored the exhibition of Indian entertainers, and provided a framework through which the civilised/uncivilised divide between the rulers and the ruled could be read. The exhibition of British civilising efforts helped to sketch general ideas of patriotism, racial supremacy and a *right* and a *need* to rule in the British consciousness. By showcasing 'proof' of Britain's civilising influence in India, exhibitions attempted to vindicate why the Indian people on display were under the authority of the Raj. The 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition included the exhibition of Indian craftsmen, ethnological models of "the wilder tribes which are found throughout the various countries of India", as well as maps, post office paperwork, particulars relating to the inspection of Indian schools, and models of railway ways and other public buildings, "upon which the lives of millions currently depend" (*Official Catalogue*, 1886: 84/85). As these elements combined in persuasive force, the exhibition was widely congratulated for representing "the developments that have taken place under our rule" (*Birmingham Daily Post*. 24<sup>th</sup> May 1886). The *Morning Post* declared that it was in the Administrative Court at the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition where:

we can see something of the results and of the importances of English rule in India, and it must be confessed a certain feeling of pride rises as we perceive the gentler process whereby our civilisation is gradually penetrating even into those parts of India where the darkness of prejudice is thickest. On the walls hang education tables, whilst there



are plenty of clever models of universities, schools, telegraph stations, post-offices, hospitals, and poor-houses.

(10 May 1886)

The Franco-British exhibition at White City similarly included a Bazaar “full with life, with many brown artisans chatting, laughing and quarrelling, but intent all the while upon their handiwork” (*Report on the Indian Section, Franco-British Exhibition*, 1908: 47). In the village, dancers, jugglers, musicians and nautch girls entertained visitors, while elsewhere in the exhibition photographs of buildings built by the British in India, showcased the benefits and civilising influence of British rule in India. ‘Improvement’ displays were taken as icons of India’s potential for development by way of British rule. Examples of the ‘progress’ made in India by British hands were exhibited at many European international exhibitions during the later nineteenth century, including the 1871, 1886, 1895-6 and 1908 exhibitions. *The Times* reported that the collection “of educational works and appliances” at the International exhibition “is very large and complete, and ... that which is most full of promise for the future of India” (8 Jul 1871: 10). Similarly, according to *The Standard* the idea of the 1895 Empire of India exhibition was;

to give the public an opportunity of contrasting the India of the past with that of the present, and noting the improvements which contact with Western civilisation has wrought in this wonderful people.

(13 December 1894: 6)

Reviews commonly confirmed that exhibitions educated the British public about “the wonderful results of British control in India.” They often noted Britain’s duty to ‘relax’ “some of the antique Hindoo religious observances, which not only stand in the way of advancement, but also tend to conflict with other religious parties of India” (*The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* 25 May 1895: 321). As exhibitions entertained audiences with a variety of Indian performers—including nautch, crafts, snake charmers, wrestlers, acrobats and contortionists—and instructed them the introduction on infrastructure, the idea that permeated exhibitions was about the ‘advantages’ of British rule to India. In a wider sense, modernising India in itself was a contradiction of imperialism that played forcefully for British political and

economic authority. As Dirks writes “[t]he colonizer held out modernity as a promise but at the same time made it the limiting condition of coloniality: the promise would never be kept” (Dirks, 2001: 10). While proposing to lead and improve, Britain also maintained its exclusive claim to modernity in order to guarantee its continued economic power.

Themes of civilising were also regularly taken up in missionary exhibitions, which, seeking to promote the global project and success of Christianity, more forcefully inserted the matter of religion into Britain’s supposed moral ‘duty’ to colonise. From 1882 onwards missionary societies capitalised on the successes of exhibitions for self-promotion of their work abroad, and opened exhibitions in Bristol, Birmingham, Newcastle and Liverpool. The most significant were held in London, including *The Orient in London*, as well as the 1890, 1909 and 1922 exhibitions held at Royal Agricultural Hall in Islington. Exploiting the public’s thirst for entertainment, missionary events promoted themselves as a humanitarian and philanthropic force, and, appealing to much larger audiences than they could otherwise reach, offer a striking example of how imperial expansion became justified on religious grounds for home audiences. Like other mainstream exhibitions, missionary events revealed the so-called ‘primitive’ state of the Empire’s colonies and showcased the improvements of Western contact. They propagated as Coombes (1997: 163) describes a misleading sense of class unity under the notion that even the poorest in England did not suffer the same misfortunes of those living elsewhere in the world. Organised by the London Missionary Society the 1908, *Orient in London* was a religious pageant and exhibition which accompanied the Great Exhibition at the Agricultural-Hall in 1908. The pageant itself showcased the “conquest of darkness by light in different parts of the world” with scenes set in India, Central Africa and South Sea Islands. *The Orient in London* was described as “a modern miracle play” (*The Times* 25 May 1908: 17), depicting the civilised missionary rescue of the ‘savages’ of the Orient and Africa.

Whilst missionary events often abided by Evangelical writing on India that viewed caste as religious tyranny from which only Christianity could bring

relief, they also showcased the ‘improvements’ made by the British in India. By avoiding the subject of social reform in favour of displaying British infrastructure, including schools, hospitals and railways, missionary exhibitions, like other events, suggested the degenerated state of India without commenting on specific social practices or religious customs. This correlated to a broader British detachment from local Indian issues, including *sati* and nautch. Wary that reform efforts led to local discontent, the British were increasingly careful about avoiding offence to Indians (see Tschurennev, 2004), and so looked to other ways to identify and mark India’s lag in the field of civilisation. One way in which this was achieved was through marking the development of India’s infrastructure. Along the way, these events also sidestepped both the missionary failure to convert Brahmins, which “rendered the missionary enterprise an absolute failure” (Dirks, 2001: 134) and the British Raj’s intolerance of missionary activity in India (see Fischer-Tiné, 2011 and Major, 2011b).

Meanwhile, the unease of imperial rule manifested itself throughout the exhibition space in other more contentious ways, and the themes presented at exhibitions were not always accepted. For example, Krishna Gobinda Gupta gave a talk that at the 1911 Crystal Palace exhibition in which he queried the trend that classified Indians as savage races. Rousing awareness of the political tensions of rule, he argued “that to deny [Indians] the ordinary rights of citizenship is not the way to lessen difficulties of ruling the Empire” (*The Times* 5 Aug 1911: 3). This suggests that ideas of evolutionary inferiority never went uncontested, by British anthropologists or even in the exhibition arena. Gupta’s objections also signify dynamic shifts in the imperial relations that have been discussed in Chapter Two. By the beginning of the twentieth century, ideas of equality and cooperation were circulated. In turn British rule came to be viewed as an evolution of Indian nationality, and for British administrators, medics and other professional men living and working in India, Britain’s duty was to “live up to the moral responsibility of empire by uplifting their fellow members of ‘the Aryan nation’ and restoring these distant racial cousins to their proper greatness” (Bayly, 1995: 188). The concept expressed a key contradiction in the civilising narrative, that once ‘civilised’ colonised

peoples could justly demand self-governance, and as Mann points out “the basis of colonial rule would vanish, likewise destroying the foundation of self-governance” (2004: 24). Of course, India’s equality could never be achieved under British rule, yet civilising ideologies allowed Britain to maintain its legitimacy in India. Uncertainties, as Mann continues “enabled the British to react flexibly to changing colonial parameters and to ‘improve’ the means and mechanisms of self- legitimation” (Mann, 2004: 24).

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The polemical, often Christian account of civilising, as Bayly (1995: 179) similarly observes, occupied only one strand of ethnographic understanding. Other lines of thought, which fed ideas of civilising but were also separate, focused on race science, and believed that the ‘higher’ races were more equipped for political liberty (Bayly, 1995: 179). Whilst reaching audiences of extraordinary sizes, the exhibitions performatively achieved an embodiment, contextualisation and popularisation of trending anthropological ideas and practices. They helped to generate an order of race and of civilisation in the British psyche, a social-scientific worldview, in which the spectator ranked top, and other cultures—including India—were racialised into lower forms. In the exhibition context, these issues were a matter of anthropological scrutiny as well as public interest and education. Converting ideas of ‘race’ into palatable, physical form, exhibitions showcased ‘scientific’ theory that held weight well into the twentieth century. Although abandoned by anthropological thought, they helped to leave an imprint in the popular imagination that has proven much harder to shake. Exhibitions dissolved diverse debates and theories into digestible categories of racist thought and enabled a British public to become ‘experts’ themselves in matter of race, and then of knowing and civilising. The power of the anthropological theories lay in their corporeal embodiment and their placement in theatrical spaces. The performance of theory relied on the spectators’ tangible comparison between themselves and the exhibited body. This is important in that anthropological ideas became far more than a ‘truth’ of intellectuals, but also an embodied knowledge of non-professional viewers.

Anthropologies could be read through model or living bodies of India, and this is of vital significance, since exhibits actively and tangibly, though performatively and creatively, brought science to life. Latham's displays at the Crystal Palace could be read with the aid of guidebooks, which added additional explanation of the different groups on display. The models could "sufficiently tell their own tale", since as "a general rule the varieties that are especially illustrated are foreign to Europe; it being supposed that the character of most European populations is sufficiently understood" (Latham 1854: 5-6). Meanwhile, exhibitions enabled visitors to inhabit the ethnographic discovery of India, as they marked the colonisers as civilisers of a degenerated people, and trace the changing anthropological approaches to ideas of race, caste and even colonial rule. However, there were ways in which exhibitions also honoured India's ancient civilisation, and discovered not only degeneration in antiquity, but also quality and expertise. As the next chapter explores, the exhibition of Indian craftsmen anticipated India's primitive and therefore earlier stage of development as it indicated the degenerative condition of modernity and stood as endorsement, but also a critique of colonialism. It also reveals a postcolonial image of India as a majestic, authentic and romanticised idea that is rooted in the colonial past.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **INDIAN CRAFT: AMBIVALENT CONSUMPTION OF THE 'PRIMITIVE'**

AGRA - SEPTEMBER 2016

The Western imagination often draws India as a place of tradition and exoticism. India welcomes tourists in their millions each year, all looking for some kind of 'authentic' experience. India remains particularly appealing to British travellers and intrepid backpackers, including me. The Taj Mahal is perhaps India's most significant, or at least most famous, historical site, celebrated as a 'new wonder of the world.' It is known as one of the most admired masterpieces of architecture on Earth. It is an especially extraordinary sight, more breath-taking than I could have ever anticipated, for the true beauty of the mausoleum reveals itself to the naked eye not as a white marble majesty, but as a splendour gleaming transparently in many colours. Aside from its visual magnificence however, my experience of the Taj was also as a site upon which questions of art, craft skill, economy and even spectatorship and performance linger.

The marble inlay work that was used in the construction of the Taj Mahal is still practiced in Agra today. A once prosperous trade unique to the area, marble products ornamented with semi-precious stones now cater almost exclusively for tourists, whose purchasing of 'a bit of the Taj' is the only hope for the survival of this ancient art. A persuasive tactic involved in the sale of marble goods is through demonstrations of its production, which involves one of the most performative sells that I have ever experienced. Arriving at a dusty shop front outside the grounds of the Taj, I was beckoned inside to observe a lone craftsman who was sitting on the floor shaping a small piece of jade on a hand-operated machine called a hone. The shaped stones would be set into chiselled marble, creating a product of the highest quality and beauty. The shop owner who had welcomed me in told me about the heritage of the skill I was observing, proud that like the other marble craftsmen of

Agra, his ancestors had formed part of the twenty-thousand skilled workforce who had built the Taj in the 1600s. Inlay work remains a hereditary skill with the knowledge passed from father to son, and relies on ancient techniques and hand tools. After informing me that the value of marble skill lies in its secrecy and simplicity, for it needs only traditional tools and a mastery of skill, the owner encouraged me downstairs to the shop. I arrived to a room beautifully finished—a hybrid space of modernity and tradition—teeming with exquisite marble products: tables, sculptures, lamps, trays and plates, made luminous under strategic spotlights. As I was shown particularly special pieces, the lighting was dimmed in perfect timing by one of the attendants, who must have been poised ready, and illuminations on the particular piece intensified. After spending some time assuring the salesman that I couldn't afford to buy any of the items—which were in the hundreds, sometimes thousands of pounds—I was shown another room, containing smaller pieces including boxes, vases and coasters. These came with a significantly smaller price tag, and persuaded by the theatrical journey through the shop space, and in order to support a disappearing trade, I purchased a few pieces.

The narratives that my experience of craft demonstration in Agra drew upon are not wholly dissimilar from those that formed in the nineteenth-century context, and there are numerous past/present continuities that I will explore in this chapter. Questions about the survival, heritage, protection, and even the performance of traditional craft have a long history, in which the Victorian metropolis exhibition is involved. Incidentally, I am not trying to suggest here that my experience in Agra was in some way a reconstruction or reproduction of nineteenth-century voyeurism. I was neither seeking this kind of experience, nor do I believe that it is possible. Place, time period and context matters, as does *who* is speaking for craft, and the incidence of my gaze remains entirely different from that of the Victorian exhibition flâneurs'. However, my encounter with craft demonstration did bring into focus some continuing issues—economic and cultural—over the importance and continuance as well as the tourist *experience* of traditional craft in an increasingly modernising world.

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LONDON, 1885:

4.1

The Indian Village at the Albert Palace, Battersea.  
In *The Graphic*, 21 November 1885

During the winter months of 1885, London's Albert Palace displayed a number of Indian entertainers, including snake charmers, nautch girls and craftsmen, who were all showcased inside a 'genuine' Indian village. Despite the failure of Liberty's venture (as we saw in the introduction, it was disastrously unsuccessful), reviews widely expressed particular admiration for the Indian craftsmen, pronouncing them to be the most fascinating part of the exhibition and a 'true' insight into 'real' India. As Mathur (2007: 58) explains, the figure of the craftsman in exhibition embodied a timelessness understood



as the essence of India. A review in *The Era* reported that even though the acrobat danced with swords and clubs, broke marble upon his head and picked a man up using only his teeth, and whilst the juggler performed the 'rabbit trick' in which he transformed a pair of slippers into half a dozen white rabbits, "the most interesting part of the exhibition at the Albert Palace is undoubtedly the artificers who work the village itself" (21 November 1885). Artisans included a wood turner, an embroider, a brass gold moulder, and a musical instrument maker, who feature in Fig 4.1, an illustration included in *The Graphic*, in which craftsmen can be seen manufacturing their products under the observation of exhibition audiences. Sketch number 6, for example, is an illustration of the three musical instrument makers, who sit on the floor as they work whilst Victorian patrons peer into their workshop looking down curiously at their productions as they appear to ask craftsmen questions.

Liberty's display marked the beginning of India's living exhibition in London, a pioneering way of exhibiting people and a particular interest in displaying 'Native Artisans.' Demonstrating a range of industry from across the Indian subcontinent, typically including ivory carving, gold and silk embroidery, weaving, silk spinning, and inlaid marble work, craftsmen were routinely commended as especially popular displays. The Indian craftsmen of the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition were, like Liberty's craftsmen, widely acknowledged as the most congested exhibit, frequently acclaimed as "the finest part of the whole Exhibition" (*The Graphic* 8 May 1886). "It is advisable to pay a visit of inspection to the open Indian workshops at the very earliest hour" warned the *Penny Illustrated and Illustrated Times* "as dense masses of spectators soon form in front of the twenty shops lining three sides of the courtyard" (24 July 1886: 52). Reviews unanimously reported that the favourite exhibits with the crowds—which amounted to 128,077 in the first week alone and 5.5 million in total—were those held in the Indian Courts:

As yet the visitors have hardly settled down to favourite objects. Nevertheless, certain exhibits have already acquired favour, and were crowded from opening time to final closing. The fame of the Indian Jungle causes numbers to stop and try and see this colossal pictorial scene. The Imperial Indian Court, with its ethnological groups, its

remarkable bamboo bridge, and its numberless samples of produce, presented all day through well-filled aspect, The Central Indian Gallery, with its riches and golden treasures, was, as a rule, most generally walked through.... But nothing exceeds the crowds drawn by the native workmen at the Indian Palace.

*(The Standard 6 May 1886: 3)*

Proving to be popular spectacle pieces, Indian craftsmen were exhibited in numerous exhibitions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including events held at the Crystal Palace, Olympia and Earl's Court—venues that attracted audiences in the millions—with the largest recruitment being for Imre Kiralfy's 1895 Empire of India exhibition for which a total of eighty-five artisans were employed. Significantly, craft display revealed what was marketed as 'genuine' and 'primitive' India. Yet it was also an especially ambivalent cultural form. While Chapter Three explored how a 'primitive' was part of the discourse on human evolution, this chapter charts how the exhibited Indian craftsman was a point around which other versions of the primitive were formed and complicated. Indeed, exhibition publications including guidebooks, catalogues and press reviews, indicate the invention of the 'native' and also show that a deep contradiction lay in the performing Indian body. This captured a modernity/tradition dichotomy in the imperial imaginary—binaries on which power was founded and maintained—at the same time as it disseminated larger debates concerning the handmade and craft survival that in part stemmed from a social discontent that accompanied modernity. Following the premise outlined in Chapter One, this chapter also shows that the identities of exhibited craftsmen were created in part by space, and by those who viewed them at exhibitions, and particularly out of their own experience of being modern. Exploring the role of the Indian craftsmen not only reveals another way in which India was represented in London's exhibitions, it also indicates the value of cultural production amongst other discourses, including debates about design, craft, expertise, beauty, protection, mass production and imperialism. What ensues is an unravelling of multiple discourses that stem from producing, presenting and consuming the so-called primitive Indian craftsmen in Victorian London. I will stress the

central place of the modern in creating the colonial Other and the colonial Other in creating the modern.

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I will show in the pages that follow that British producers and consumers loaded paradoxical meaning onto exhibited Indian craft—including exquisiteness, dexterity, and nostalgia for the pre-industrial. However, let me note for the moment that for Victorian audiences the Indian artisan presented foreign, exotic, and altogether *primitive* customs of working and living. Though it did not include ‘living’ India, the 1851 Great Exhibition was important in that it seized and perpetuated the notion of India’s primitive industrial identity as an opposition to Britain’s own industrial self. The Crystal Palace’s Indian Court exhibited a collection of life-sized models of India’s tribes and castes alongside ‘native’ implements used in the production of sugar and silk. So described the Guidebook:

To us, who have arrived at a pitch of excellence in agricultural implements and preparations, who have brought the details of machinery, and even the power of the steam engine to bear upon the surface of mother Earth, the large collection of agricultural implements, rough carriages for timber, ploughs of the most amusingly primitive, and apparently ineffective make, are at once diverting and instructive.

(A guide to the Great Exhibition, 1851: 116)

Exhibited models played a significant role in the narrative of the oppositional primitive. The Great Exhibition included a collection of scantily clad models that presented a composition “that in the Western lexicon of gestured signified indolence and nonchalance and was in no British case associated with work” (Barringer, 2005: 246). Exhibited models produced and showcased a primitive that was anthropologically associated with tribal groups, and formed part of the discourse about human/cultural evolution. Following a new era of anthropological thought that looked to culture in order to identify evolution, the Indian artisan provided the British public—the majority of whom had never been, nor would ever go to India—with living

'proof' of a premodern/modern divide between East and West. Barringer explains that "[m]id-Victorian orthodoxy held that peoples of India were racially and culturally inferior to the British" (2005: 262). The exhibition of Indian artisans gave this orthodoxy tangible existence for the public at home. "If anyone wants to see a primitive manner of working, let him go and watch the ivory-carver" stated the *Daily News* in reference to an Artisan at the Albert Palace, adding:

Yesterday that artist was using his lathe—a machine which he placed upon the ground and turned by means of a hand-bow. This proceeding not being sufficiently antiquated, he seated himself on the floor while at work, and used one of his bare feet as a rest for the turning tool. Another shop was already open by a woodcarver, whose profound patience and painstaking assiduity were such as one does not see in Europe. (23 December 1885)

Indeed, by showcasing the craftsman, exhibitions popularised and gave physical existence to versions of the primitive Other that had long featured in the writings of leading Western intellectuals. As Pickering explains;

scholars like Maine, McLennan and Morgan offered a view of the Primitive that was the conceptual opposite of the civilised subject.... The underlying assumption was that modern society had evolved from its antithesis, that non-white 'primitives' in the contemporary world were 'childlike, intuitive, and spontaneous', and that because of this they required control and guidance from Europe. (2001: 52/53)

Indian craft continued to offer a counterpoint to British innovation in technology and provided Western audiences with a powerful and embodied measure of their own industrious modernity, and thus shows 'primitivism' to be a derivative of a discourse of progress pinned in part on industrialisation, technology and science. This mutually forming contrast proved a key theme in exhibitions. Imre Kiralfy, director of the 1895, 1896 and 1908 exhibitions, maintained that the Indian craftsman's

methods are primitive, their tools are primitive, but with quiet, patient earnestness they work at tasks that would be simply maddening to the European artizan accustomed to the whirl and whirr of machinery, and our busy roar and rush.... the eastern mechanic plods on, doing by hand

in a month what the Englishman with the aid of steam or electricity would accomplish in an hour.

(Kiralffy 1895: 39)

The West's encounter with people displays as examples of the inferior primitive who embodied a counterpoint to the superiority of the modern is an issue widely discussed in literature (Corbey, 1991; Pickering, 2001; MacKenzie, 1984; Maxwell, 1999; Munro, 2010; Rydell, 1984; Sánchez-Gómez, 2013). Showcased peoples have often been understood to be unconditional renditions of the primitive and inferior Other for their Victorian audiences. In fact, the redefinition of paradoxical tropes is a story well known, including modernity/tradition, coloniser/colonised, hegemony/subjugation and progress/primitivism through exhibited people. Those binaries are quite familiar in broader postcolonial analysis and also in the works of Raymond Corbey, John MacKenzie, Anne Maxwell, and Lisa Munro, amongst others, who typically engage with the subject of exhibited peoples from the disciplines of anthropology, history, art history, and cultural studies. Maxwell argues that the idea of ethnological exhibits was not just to present Britain with the spectacle of racial difference, but also to make its audience feel mentally, physically and morally superior. She claims that through exhibition colonised peoples "were banished figuratively to a permanent space of savagery" (1999: 2). Corbey agrees that exhibited peoples highlighted an insidious distinction between 'wildness and civility' and 'nature and culture' wherein primitivism was staged in minute detail. "In the British exhibitions" MacKenzie tells us "the native villages always performed one function, to show off the quaint, the savage, the exotic, to offer living proof of the onward march of imperial civilisation" (1984: 114). This body of work argues that the message of people exhibits was of barbarism, savagery, and primitivism.

Accepting this scholarship, it would easily follow that exhibited Indian craft offered corporeal knowledge of India around which a Western self-identity could be composed and endorsed, making once again these straightforward identity distinctions. This line of thought suggests that the exhibited Indian craftsman provided evidence of Europe's own supremacy, but was also,

following a Saidian approach, a fantasy built on Western desires that came to life through public display. One could easily draw the conclusion that paraded craftsmen were simply highly successful spectacle pieces of a 'backward' culture thought lost to the modern world. Certainly, this was a prevailing interpretation and in many ways the exhibition of Indian peoples corporeally defined imagined cultural differences between Britain and India and in doing so justified colonial conquest to the British public.

However, exhibition literature does show that colonial binaries, which feature heavily in work on the exhibition of people and in postcolonial analysis, were not only propagated but were also transgressed through the Victorian consumption of Indian craft. Indeed, primitivism as an opposition to progress may have been the prevailing discourse, yet it was not the only value at play in the exhibited Indian body. I do not seek to dispute the issue that craft popularity at least partly resided in its revelation of 'authentic' and so-called 'primitive' India which was an entertaining and educational fantasy. Neither do I want to downplay that a particularly sinister effect of the primitive narrative lay in its justification of colonial rule. As instructive and tangible representatives of the premodern and external to progress, craftspeople justified the British Raj as both acceptable and necessary, 'revealing' the backward state in which the Indian population lived, whilst identifying Britain's development and its duties to lead and improve. I will show that, set within the heart of the Empire, craft exhibit was a site upon which numerous values were inscribed, including imperial discourse, but also luxury, dexterity, protectionism and nostalgia. These meanings arose out of the viewers' own sense of modernity as the Indian artisan became a re-invented and inferior but often also a desirable opposition. I should also stress that these acknowledgements are vital, else we are at risk of perpetuating a version of the primitive that may never have been *fully* conceived in the first place, or at least was not such a straightforward identity creation as first appears.

My arguments here draw and advance from scholarship that identifies the connections between Indian craft and Indian nationalism. The most significant contribution to questions of Indian art and design in the Victorian context is

Mathur's chapter 'The Indian Village in Victorian Space' (2007: 27-52). Mathur acknowledges the significance of the fact that Indian craftsmen appeared in the metropolis at the same time as craft was being reclaimed by Indian nationalism in the *swadeshi* campaigns. She argues that the symbol of the artisan became a body "of convergent aesthetic, commercial, and anthropological ideas about artisanship... and one that acquired new form in the rhetoric of Indian nationalism" (Mathur 2007: 50). Mathur argues that the nationalist view of craft, developed by key individuals such as Dutt, Coomaraswamy, Havell, and Gandhi, shattered the illusion between colonial reproduction and traditional manufacture in the production of a new aesthetic, economy and ideology, to which the Indian craftsman was central (2007: 43-49). It is not without consequence, as Breckenridge has similarly observed, that craftsmen were being exhibited "when homemade and handmade alternatives to European industrial products first became identified with nationalism" (1995: 232). Questioning what happens when marginalised objects are made visible in the social sphere, Venkatesan (2009: 79) more broadly agrees that the Indian elite, politicians and organisations re-constructed the *idea* of traditional craft.

These scholars point out the craftsman, in particular the handloom weaver, transformed into a perfect theme in India's political and economic awakening. He is a potent symbol of village life, pre-industrialisation, of Western corruption of Indian arts and a figure of Western exploitation. Indian art in the colonial context has also been identified as a question of preservation, hybridity and demand. Spear argues that "[a]dministrators dedicated to the preservation of craft traditions nevertheless commissioned hybrid artefacts" (2008: 911). More significantly still, Spear continues, "the development of an Indian urban middle class created demand for local goods that imitated Western forms, creating demand for hybrid products beyond the control of traditionalists, whether British or Indian" (2008: 911). Mathur similarly explains that hybrid imitations of Indian handicrafts express "a crucial historical and ideological configuration in the intertwined trajectories of modernity and national identity in India" (2007: 29).

While scholars have considered the resistive ideologies that became attached to Indian craft in the Indian context through the prism of exhibited craftsmen, I look to situate the display of Indian artisans more firmly in the nineteenth-century metropolis where they were exhibited. By focusing on London's complex encounter with Indian craftsmen, I suggest that signs of identity were problematic, dialogical, and resistant *even within the British experience*—an experience which, contrary to claims that exhibited peoples were taken as successful examples of the primitive other, had as much to do with commerce, class, luxury and craft survival as it did about primitivism and subjugation. London here is of key interest, and although there were other great industrial cities of Victorian Britain—Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds—that held their own exhibitions, London was the centre of economic, social, political and ideological trade, and remained the heart of the Empire and the world's largest and most modern city during the years under investigation. It also happened to be a tourist city, the hub of exhibition culture, and the most frequent location of exhibited Indian craftsmen. Therefore, while Mathur's concern is with the Indian agency of craft and the 'authenticity' of village craft being exhibited, I am more interested in the irregularity tangled up in the metropolis's experience of 'India'. I argue that although a fantasy and misrepresentation, through relocation and exhibition India was not *only* conceived as exotic, traditional and primitive in the British psyche. Instead, interpretations resided in numerous incongruent narratives that, drawing meaning from the metropolis, were neither coherent nor united. By paying attention to these paradoxes, I show that the values accompanying Indian craft drew meaning from Victorian modernity and, on occasion, propagated some of the ideologies of Indian nationalism to British audiences. While I am also interested in how the craftsman's identity was appropriated symbolically, I seek to engage more firmly with Britain's complex encounter with the simulacra of Indian craft over a range of events. In doing so I argue that the 'Native Artisan' displays which featured in London's exhibitions were a product of modernity that imposed conflicting values onto Indian craft, and I view craft identity as being produced and problematised by the wider socio-political climate that contained it. As museological studies contend, placement and spatial context create meaning for exhibited things.



In making these arguments I show that the identities of exhibited Indian craftsmen were a product of the exhibition and the city beyond. My enquiry here does not rely on who the craftsmen were, or their own particular experiences in the exhibition, but instead is interested in the general meanings invested in them. Chapter One argued that exhibitions produced fantasy and imagined places. This chapter follows up on this, arguing that the British—in particular the London-subject position and its experience of being modern—shaped ambivalent identities for the performing Indian craftsmen. Although I reconsider the significance of the individual in later chapters, for now I agree with Venkatesan that “[p]resented as victim or as symbol, valued for his products, the craft producer is spoken for, rather than speaking” (2009: 83), and that “[a]ssociation within the social space of traditional Indian craft gives makers agency, but it also burdens them. Makers are positioned in ways that abstract them from their larger social contexts” (Venkatesan 2009: 79). This is not to deny that the craft traditions on view had some correspondence to authenticity or the past; instead I view craft displays as being interpreted as enactments of identity that served the requirements of their geographical present. While London’s exhibition of Indian artisans quelled anxieties over India’s position in the Empire, casting India as both backward and valuable, artisan demonstration was also intertwined with the Victorian’s own cultural anxieties and experiences with modern living, and launched questions over the impact of industrialisation at home and abroad, as well as on art, labour and the environment. My initial focus lies in how London’s modernity conceived an Indian artisan who was premodern by comparison. I then consider the many other values that the city and its inhabitants ascribed to exhibited traditional craft. This reveals *how* craft identity was produced, and how in turn that identity disrupted the confidence in modernity. As I will explain, exhibited craft reflects and stimulates a wider disillusionment with modernity in Victorian London—an area that I briefly sketch below since it has been extensively discussed in both primary and secondary literatures.

## EXPRESSIONS OF UNEASE

Any basic search for scholarly works on Victorian London shows that it has widely featured in discussions revolving around art, photography, printing, mass-reproduction of news and image, architecture, theatre, music, policing and public order, slum life, poetry and non-fiction. It is those who lived in and wrote about Victorian London, however, who really captured the sense of unease that accompanied the city's modernity. The feeling of being modern went hand-in-hand with a loss of tradition, and often a fear of what progress might eventually lead to. Many leading thinkers of the Victorian era voiced apprehension for the future and a longing for the past. In his lectures on *A Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1884), John Ruskin agonised over the acquired malice and 'unnatural' character of London's weather. Anxiety over where the technological age might take society, meanwhile, was captured in a range of pioneering post-apocalyptic literature, from Richard Jefferies' *After London* (1885) to William Morris' *News from Nowhere* (1890), both which romanticised tradition and nature while casting a dystopian future for modernity. Coleridge was appalled by urban life, linking it to spiritual decline and to sin, whilst Charles Booth investigated London's poverty, and Marx reminisced about historic societies in which craft flourished, quality was maintained, and communities unselfishly prospered. These are just a few examples of a much larger distrust of industrialisation, which evidently was not only marvelled at but also scorned.

Much of the anxiety stemmed from the experiences of being modern, and from living with the changes wrought by the industrial revolution. Nineteenth-century Europeans felt themselves on the brink of a huge transition into modernity, experienced as both Britain's progress and as a radical break from traditions (Pickering, 2001: 52). London in particular had rapidly transformed into an industrial city, being the largest and greatest city of the world. Its growth was astounding, and as White (2011) has shown, London in the Victorian era was a time of dizzying change. The nineteenth century, as De Sapio names it "was London's century," and the hundred years between 1815 and 1914 "were London's period at the top of the urban hierarchy" (2014: 1).

Yet, this was a modernity that was fraught with its own perils. London was a beacon of modernity and “a portent of industrial discontent” (De Sapia, 2014: 1). Secondary works have widely identified the anguish that accompanied modern Victorian living. As Nead describes, particularly during the middle decades of the nineteenth century “London became part of a highly concentrated discourse on the modern.... This was a period of expectation and compromise” (2000: 5). The desire to modernise, Nead continues, was an uneven process of urbanisation: “it took the form of the improved street within a district of slums. It was summarised in the image of dereliction, as a sign of the past and of preparation for the future” (2000: 5). As White (2011) similarly states, the aweing wonders of London were stupendous, but they also shocked the world, and modernity was a condition of tension and irregularity. Quoting William Blake’s declaration “I behold London, a Human awful wonder of God”, White outlines Victorian London as a city in turmoil. Old London in particular was full of “decay, squalor, poverty, disease and disorder. It cluttered, threatened, stank, demoralised, infected, offended the eye” (White, 2011: 1/10). As Walker (2007: 1) also explains, the interaction between modernity and crisis was at its most intoxicating in Victorian London.

Industrialisation produced vast changes, which were not limited to a mid-eighteenth to early-nineteenth century revolution, but were an acute and morbid form of modernity for the Victorians who lived with those changes. Modernity, as Dewan explains, “was perceived by many to be at the root of the social and cultural degradation of British society” (2004: 125). All who lived in London, in the West End and East End alike, suffered heavy pollution, increasing mechanisation, noise, traffic, and smell, and all were aware of the growing impoverished population whether or not a part of it. This was the modernising London that had already begun to reel and dismay in the effects of its own transformation. Although the salvation of disorder and the basis on which British superiority was marked, the Victorians diagnosed problems where “[t]he vision of technology as comfortably implanted in the social and cultural milieu was not at all firmly established” (Wosk, 1992: 2).

These experiences of modernity were felt and expressed, as studies of Victorian London have shown, in a range of cultural practice. The crisis of modernity in literature is a widely discussed subject. Armstrong, for example, describes the unease that beset Victorian poetry, and argues that nineteenth-century poets epitomised the catastrophe that “emerged directly from economic and cultural change” (1993: 3). Punter (1996) similarly says that changes in the nineteenth century instigated crisis, which became entangled in forms of nonfiction. The dramas and dangers of new technologies, as Wosk (2006) and Barringer (2005) argue, were also captured in a range of nineteenth-century visual art. Wosk (2006) explains that industrialisation, the invention of the train, electricity, mass production and factories were widely mistrusted. Overloaded with advancing technologies, population growth, and poverty not only rapidly changed the way people lived but were features of modern life that were attributed to increasing fatalities, rising stress, loss of community and environmental damage. The industrial revolution was responsible for progress but also potentially dangerous technologies, longer working hours, an increasing exploitation of child labour, and new perils of working with and travelling by machines. As numerous scholars explain, the anxiety of these changes was being widely expressed a range of Victorian culture and media.

Drawing partly from the field of Victorian Studies, I view the exhibition of Indian craftsmen as producing similar reflections of modernisation. Victorian histories and specific living conditions and experiences in a rapidly changing world shaped how the Indian experience was absorbed. The artisans were made meaningful through changes wrought by industrialisation, and most significantly through the perception of their freedom from it. The crisis of modernity loaded Indian craft with incongruous meaning, so that Indian industry became backward and stagnated even as its arts were commended as a source of wealth and quality that English manufacture could not equal. Indian craft was the antithesis and therefore the inferior of modernity, yet it was also admired, envied and commercialised. It was consumed within an impulse to protect/preserve traditional skills from industrialisation that was broadly viewed as the cause of artistic and social crisis in London. Therefore

the artisan embodied contradiction and unease, and as Britain presented itself in the exhibitions as the epitome of modernity and progress, it also remained artistically and socially inferior to India. What I hope to unravel here is that the exhibition of Indian arts appeared to expose India's social integrity and community life that was thought spoilt in Britain's own industrial cities. The result being that the identities of those who looked as well as those who were looked upon were shaped by the exhibition experience of craft demonstration. In this I abide by—but also depart from—the field of Victorian Studies, showing that craft display created yet also altered the identities of both the British and the Indian, and in doing so forged and disrupted the trajectories of modernity, of economy, and of power.

## CONSTRUCTING PRIMITIVISM

Before I can explain the heterogeneous values attached by the British to Indian craft, let me begin with *how* and *why* notions of Indian primitivism were conceived. My aims are not to dispute that premodernity was a central, if not the leading, interpretation of craft exhibits. I do stress, however, that the primitivism of the exhibited Indian artisan hung at least in part on the interplay with and the physical proximity to the metropolis, and was a direct product of modernity and expansion, which relied on contrast between the West's own sense of progress and its ideas of backward societies. As Pickering writes: “[t]he process of becoming modern and building empires profoundly altered the ways in which people in Europe thought about cultural difference” (2001: 51). In this process, as active participants of the exhibition scene, London's audiences helped to envisage India as traditional, which became central to Britain's hegemonic view of itself. The result was that, rather than expressing the innate quality advertised, the status of craft was powerfully produced against London itself and by those who viewed.

By 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, over half of the British population lived in towns and cities, and the broad force of industrialisation had transformed productions and drastically altered the way of life. For the West,

industry no longer relied solely on skilled labour, but on new technologies, machines and mass production. Set within this climate, the meeting with the exhibited colonised Other was against city life, against transformations in transport, lighting, and machinery, which rendered the craft body primitive and premodern by comparison. It was the physical arrival from the city into the exhibition that played a leading role in cementing and shaping the traditional premodernity found within. In particular, travel to the exhibition produced a tangible juxtaposition between the busy advanced metropolis and the primitive and exotic India on display. Developing transport links and subsidies for poorer-classes made exhibitions available to increasingly larger audiences and enabled easy access for those travelling into London from out of town. The Empire of India exhibition, for example, was situated between two prominent train lines used by four railway companies, whilst the Central Line was specifically extended for the 1908 Franco-British exhibition. The significance being that train lines not only made these viable locations for mass entertainment centres, they also increased the proximity of modern London and the premodern traditions on display within. Even visitors who flocked from villages arrived to exhibitions through London first, often on the train. Inside the perimeter of the exhibition the exhibited craftsmen were redefined further through their juxtaposition to other exhibits. The 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition proudly showcased state-of-the-art machinery, technological inventions and electrical lighting, while later exhibitions incorporated theatrics and fairground rides that not only entertained but also showcased British innovation. For example, the 1895 Empire of India exhibition included a Ferris Wheel standing 300 feet high, a 'Himalayas Gravity Railway', and a colossal theatre building that staged dramatic effects on an unprecedented scale. Demonstrating technical expertise through entertainment, the 1895 exhibition combined "all the elements of an Indian fair with the latest mechanism which Western skill has perfected" (*The Standard* 13 December 1894: 6).

These oppositions, however, were also encouraged through exhibition publications, which also persuasively played their part in structuring how displays were presented and interpreted. Publications routinely narrated India

as an ancient and static culture. In doing so they helped popularise a wider belief in India's primitive stagnation and failure to modernise (whilst pointing toward a 'lost' knowledge, which I will come back to). For example, the Official Catalogue to the Empire of India exhibition explained that the wheel used by the craftsmen "is peculiar to India, and is probably the survival of a primitive implement which went out of use in the western world in pre-historic times. .... but India's balance or "tee-to-tum" wheel belongs to a remote age beyond our knowledge" (1895: 358). As we have seen in Chapter Three, the idea of India being an evolutionarily deprived and uncivilised culture was the basis upon which British rule was legitimised as a civilising force in both scholarly and public thought. As Barringer notes "India's present was already being recognised as a living simulacrum of Europe's past" (2005: 259). The exhibition of traditional craft helped to forge identities as fixed in the British imagination, whilst enabling a steady flow of fresh audiences to reimagine ownership over the political body.

This is not to suggest that these were new concepts. The idea of India's antiquity being expressed through the live form of the Indian craftsmen re-awakened the experiences of early travellers' tales and the works of prominent writers, including Charles Grant, William Ward and later James Mill. These writers consecrated the belief that having changed very little in thousands of years, Indian manufacture was indicative of a stagnated culture. Breaking away from the eighteenth century 'discovery' of India as a high civilisation, these theorists mark a shift in thinking that was also being proliferated at exhibitions. Whilst the earlier Orientalists discovered the ancient language of Sanskrit, and believed that those who spoke it represented the 'original' Aryan race, later theorists supposed that the Hindus' general disposition was of deceit and perfidy, and they became the measure of an uncultivated society. Theorists, in particular Mill, became highly influential in politics and education—Mill's *The History Of British India* was even used as a reference book. In many ways exhibitions perpetuated a discourse of Indian backwardness, breathing life into India's so-called premodernity in the public eye as it re-defined a British impulse that had long viewed India as a lazy, inferior and decayed civilisation. Showcasing an

Indian artisan who was described as non-productive, exhibitions exposed an idle and incompetent industrial identity. As we have seen, the exhibited Indian craftsman's production methods were consumed as awkward, plodding, and painstakingly slow. In this respect it is indisputable that exhibited Indian craft work insisted on Britain's own sense of modernity, or that the ultimate ideological measure of progress was the traditional and seemingly stable referent of the primitive.

Recognition must also be given to the issue that the production of these oppositions was not only a matter of modernity, but also of economy, competition, capitalist markets, resistance and misrepresentation. As Cook (2014: 12) stresses, Indian manufacturing in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, reliant on a large labour force, dominated the world markets in fabrics; and threatened by this leading industry, Britain mechanised in order to compete. "At the same time it created a false history of production that marginalized the Asian artisans as inefficient and non-productive in comparison with efficiency and output of industrial production" (Cook 2014: 12). As Thomas (1991: 1) explains, the belief in India's failure to adapt was founded on an Orientalist assumption, based on an acceptance of Indian resistance to innovation. Proving the power of the discourse, ideas of India's rejection of the machine were also taken up in Indian nationalist movements. Although forging their own interpretations of craft, resistance movements shaped their ideology around a typically British view of artisanal communities. As Douglas and Haynes argue, while the craftsmen had readily adopted different methods for different markets,

most nationalist leaders, including Gandhi, appear to have been almost oblivious to the ways in which the actual economy of artisan production was changing around them. Weavers, dyers, printers, and gold-thread producers in early twentieth-century India used different raw materials in manufacturing textiles than their pre-colonial counterparts.

(2012: 2)

Roy (1999: 1) similarly writes that "traditional industry modernized and played a creative role in Indian industrialization" (1999: 1). In making these assertions Roy and Douglas and Haynes negate the long held assumption



that as British industrialised, its colonies de-industrialised. While their insights are important in that they pay attention to the specific economies of artisans, I have been attentive (and will consider further) to how the assumptions they refer to formed in the first place. Explaining this *how* further, it becomes clear that the belief in India's manufacturing and cultural stagnation, inspired partly through exhibitions, relied on what the primitive showed 'us' and stemmed from Britain's own sense of progress and power. As Pickering also stresses, the West's representation of the primitive Other was not about 'them' at all (2001: 55-6). Operating in a socio-political fantasy and economic advantage, London's exhibitions re-produced and authorised a version of Indian identity that was based on the traditional, the premodern, the unproductive, and the primitive. These values arose out of what Anderson (2006) has described as 'imagined communities' and a 'national imagination.' Anderson argues that nation is "an imagined political community" (1983: 6). Although his analyses of nation and nationalism form around the question of what makes people live and die for nations, he importantly stresses that communities are distinguished by the style in which they are imagined. Certainly, India was being imagined as premodern.

## THE ADMIRATION OF INDIAN ART

The primitive was not the only value at play in the exhibited body. Set inside Indian spaces that were not only simplistic, but also exquisite, 'native' artisans offered far more than a simplistic confrontation with an archaic Other; they offered an incoherent encounter with the opulent and mysterious East that possessed ancient skills and unexploited treasures. Significantly, while the Indian artisan brought to life a definition of the unchanged primitive for London's audiences, their craft products paradoxically redefined the perimeters of India's abundant luxury; luxury that was not only being visually consumed, but was also up for sale.

4.2 Print of the India Court, by Joseph Nash, 1851. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The commercial demand for Indian products, often produced by the exhibited craftsmen themselves, abided by a European impulse that viewed India not only as barbaric but also an exotic and 'high' culture inhabited by lavish palaces, wealthy princes and debauched nabobs. Indian arts were routinely conceived as magnificent on exhibition sites. India after all was not only historically considered a premodern culture, but also a civilisation that stretched far beyond Britain's own antiquity. Fig 4.2, a painting of the India Court at the Great Exhibition, illustrates the grandeur of the Indian display at the Crystal Palace. On loan from Saffron Walden Museum in Essex, the stuffed elephant was draped in luxurious materials and an ornate gold *Houdah* (carriage) was positioned on the animal's back. The Guide to the Great Exhibition informed readers that the Indian collection "fully realizes all our notions of the exquisite luxury of Oriental despotism.... To describe the objects of Indian affluence which occupy this space would far exceed our plan or limits" (1851: 113/115). Whilst equating luxury with despotism, the Guide went on to list many of the Indian valuables on display. Indeed, glamorising

rather than reproving Oriental wealth, Indian commodities showcased a particular splendour in the same spaces that showcased the 'primitive'. The Indian decorative tent seen in the background of the painting, for example, teemed with luxurious materials of silk and a variety of cloths embroidered in gold thread, slippers set thick with precious stones, elaborate rugs, sumptuous carpets, exquisitely carved dark wood furniture, muslins in red, gold and silver, the intricate dress of a dancing girl, silver filigree-work and pottery. There was a collection of jewels including the "Durria-i-Noor" or "Sea of Light" diamond worth £300,000, as well as pearls, rubies and emeralds (Guide to the Great Exhibition: 1851: 114-115). In fact India's opulence was a regular pleasure of exhibition sites, shaping, exoticising and cementing India as an obtainable treasure in the public eye. The exhibitions that followed in the wake of the Great Exhibition continued to parade not only a primitive but also a valuable and dazzling India to be lusted after, romanticised and claimed. Referring to the Indian objects on display at the Colonial and Indian exhibition, *The Morning Post* commented "it would be impossible even to indicate the thousandth part of the number of beautiful objects shown. The Queen of Sheba herself could not have carried to Solomon richer offerings than the marvellously decorated and costly jewels, vases, and embroideries here so lavishly displayed" (10 May 1886: 8). Whilst making claim to Britain's historical connection with India, the Guide Book and Catalogue to the Festival of Empire captured and propagated narratives of admiration:

the second scene in the third part of pageant will show, in some measure, how great were the excitement and wonder felt by our ancestors when the first ships of the East India Company, as far back as 1603, returned from India to our shores... bringing with them the treasures of the East... Much admiration had always been expressed for the skill, dexterity and good tastes of Indian workers... the beautiful fabrics, the delicately carved caskets of wood or ivory, the jeweled arms and richly ornamented vases, had always been highly appreciated.

(1911: ix-x)

The Official Catalogue Empire of India Exhibition, meanwhile, was especially persistent in its admiration for artistic beauty thought rare in England. To take a few examples, the "exquisite design and harmonious colourings" of the Indian carpets were described as "incontestable" (1895: 237). Quoting art

expert George Birdwood the metalwork in brass and copper was described as work of a quality that “is very rare in England... studded all over with little raised flowers, which shine like frosted sliver, out of a groundwork of blackened foliated scrolls, which are traced so delicately as to look like the finest Chantilly lace ” (1895: 213). Even Paris, the catalogue claimed, “cannot paint gold with the ruby and coral reds, emerald green, and turquoise and sapphire blues of the enamel of Jaipur, Lahore, Benares, and Lucknow” (1895: 215).

The exhibition of Indian craft enabled large public audiences to feast on—and therefore play a role in defining—India’s pre-industrial yet abundant and superior artistic identity. Staging India’s splendours in the heart of the Victorian metropolis played a central role in differentiating between the handmade and the mass produced (an important matter that I will return to in more detail), as it also promoted commercial demand for India’s finery. Indian displays offered up India’s wealth, while revealing beauty believed lost to modernity, and this was a market full of consumerist possibility. Indeed, the exhibition of India’s luxurious exoticism was a site upon which India’s economic and social worth was sketched, harking to the free-trade rhetoric that proved to be the success of Company Rule. Yet it was through exhibitions where Indian art and craft largely came to the knowledge of the general Victorian public, who consumed a primitive but also a luxurious India that tapped into—and advanced—a wider claim to India’s wealth and a budding Victorian thirst for authentic Eastern goods. The idea behind many exhibitions was, after all, to stimulate trade.

The craft body was central to the promotion of Indian products, and not only drew crowds but also ‘authenticated’ expensive Indian commodities. Exhibitions continuously capitalised on India’s commercial viability, and used the craftsmen to motivate trade of Oriental retail. The 1885 Liberty & Co. display for example, imported Indian performers in order to foster sales of their Eastern goods. Appealing to its wealthy clientele, the idea of Liberty’s artisans was to offer ‘proof’ of the traditional handiwork and ‘authenticity’ of their Indian products, to draw crowds and to boost profits. Authenticity ensued

in spite of the issue Mathur (2007: 35) has raised that many of those products were idiosyncratic hybrid blends. Indeed, even though much of Liberty's Oriental goods were English-made, reproductions were valued, sold and accepted as authentic.

Claiming a part of India's 'authenticity', exoticism and wealth, exhibition spectators were also often able to purchase the Indian goods that had been produced on exhibition sites by exhibited craftsmen. Procured items acted as a souvenir of the craft performance, and they extended the spectator's world reach and enabled their active participation in possession of the exotic East. While Liberty's exhibition ended as a commercial failure, the store and other exhibitions thereafter increased the popularity and value of Indian goods in British markets. The Portland Hall exhibition, which became a popular social venue of London's elite, and the far larger 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition, which welcomed over five and a half million victors, as well as events of 1861, those of the 1870s, Kiralfy's 1895 exhibition and events at White City all responded to and fed the public's desire for Indian commodities. As George Birdwood noticed "[t]he International Exhibitions of 1851 and 1862, caused great demand, which is every year increasing, for Indian carpets; those of 1868, and the aborted annual series held in 1871, 1872, and 1873 at South Kensington, widely diffused taste for Indian jewelry [sic] in England" (1879: 306). At the Colonial and Indian exhibition, the Indian jewellery and pottery were all sold within the first few days of the exhibition's opening (Mukharji, 1887: 93). Similarly, the Official Catalogue to the 1895 Empire of India exhibition informed that 'Koftgari' gold decoration, which was of the highest luxury was "bought for the most part by Europeans as curios" (1895: 214). The consumption of Indian goods in the exhibition arena fuelled the economic and social value of Indian commodities, and was an accomplice to the origins and pursuit of modern capitalism.

Promoting India's pre-industrial beauty to vast audiences, exhibitions played a central role in forging a commodity appeal of Indian luxury, whilst more broadly participating in the acquisition of India's wealth. They tapped into and increased British demand for India's pre-industrial goods, helping to

commercialise traditional Indian merchandises for the consumer market, and in particular enticed upper-class fashion. As Indian craft objects were circulated in London, British consumers played a leading role in transforming Indian products into desirable luxuries, which loaded those goods with new kinds of economic and social value. As Appadurai (1996: 5) more broadly suggests, it is the trajectory of things-in-motion that reveal their significances. Exhibition consumers' demands also helped to create a distinction between cheap mass-reproductions and expensive authentic goods. Generating and satisfying demand in a capitalist-consumer culture nineteenth-century, British designers frequently used Indian imagery as a source of inspiration. Eastern patterns were regularly incorporated into ladies' fashions, into hairpieces, fabrics and shawls, as Indian goods became associated with 'high art' and satisfied a social desire for class distinction. The Indian style became notably popular amongst the upper-classes, whose acquisition of 'authentic' rather than factory reproduced Indian products indicated class, wealth, worldliness, taste, and exclusivity. Authentic Indian shawls for example, as Choudhury (2015: 199) has explained, were an incredibly expensive and luxurious domain of the elite in mid-nineteenth-century Britain and, conceived as a superior product, were a manifestation of class demarcation. Cheap reproductions, meanwhile, became a way through which "the less privileged were seen as competing for social power" (Choudhury, 2015: 207). It was thus not only those who had industrialised, but those who sought to define their own social status placing new value on the handmade. As Appadurai (1896: 4) explains, it is people who put value on objects, and the demand for objects bequeaths the object with value. "[T]hings have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions, and motivations endow with them... their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories" (ibid: 5). Indian commodities became associated with splendour that was given new rhetoric against modern London.

At the same time, while India's opulence was envied and appropriated in exhibition, it was also feared, and tapped into a decadence thought dangerous. For example, the Guide to the Great exhibition described a crimson dress as "most superbly embroidered, and near it a shawls in silver

and gold” at the same time as it noted the “monstrosity of the pattern” (1851: 116). The guide scorned Indian luxury as oppositional and extravagant, commenting: “[s]uperb shawls, dresses, scarfs, and other articles of Oriental extravagance, make us rejoice in the comparatively economical style of costume adopted in our own country” (1851: 115-6). Those who consumed India’s effervescence therefore not only usurped its magnificence, but participated in a dangerous indulgence and a greedy want for material commodity that was believed to be the downfall of past empires. As Nead (2005) explains, London was constantly drawn to images and shadows of the past. London was a place...

that symbolised material wonder and tumultuous destruction; a city whose splendour was its downfall. Babylon and imperial Rome were indices of London’s greatness and also warning of the dangers of hubris. These great trading centres and capitals of empires were brought down by luxury.... Victorian Babylon could thus look to its ancient predecessors and find... traces of its inevitable destruction.  
(Nead, 2005: 3)

In this wider cultural unease, exhibited Indian luxury also posed a warning and a threat, suggesting splendour turned sour. Indian products were historically associated with an extravagance held partly accountable for the destruction of the once-prosperous Indian empire. Furthermore, Royal demand for luxury was seen not only to have been Indian ruin, but also to have had a contaminating effect on the British. One only had to look back to the *nabob* to see the corrupting influence of excess Indian indulgence. Indian opulence stood, amongst other things, as an admonition to Britain of its own possible downfall, and was thus conceived not only within the discourses of taste and an acquisition of Indian wealth, but within ideas of debauchery and the decay of power.

Nevertheless, the commercialisation of Indian commodities relied on the evaluation that Indian craft presented a beauty thought superior to European art. Interestingly, this presented a particularly strong rebuff of modernity. As Tzoref-Ashkenazi argues more broadly: “[r]omanticism represents both a distinctly modern cultural phenomenon and one of the strongest responses to

the challenges of modernity” (2013: 281). In exhibition, the exhibited living craftsman, and not just his art, was essential in this narrative. On display Indian art was judged superior as the Indian body was judged crude. The result being that as the craftsman evidenced premodernity, he also maintained a quality and morality thought spoilt by the industrialisation so prevalent in city life, art and work. Often associated with a splendour thought unchallenged by Western manufacture, the romanticising of India’s lavish luxury in this sense critiqued modernity as it created a powerful contradiction between the craftsman the craft product. Representative of an adoration being expressed through a range of exhibition publications, the 1895 catalogue appealed that “[t]he Indian workman, from the humblest potter to the most highly skilled artificer in gold, or the most experienced enameller, claims our respect as being an artist in the true sense of the word” at the same time as it described the four glass-workers from Kapawanj as “producing remarkable results with primitive apparatus” (1895: 212/357). The admiration for Indian art was thus the product of a paradox between producer and artefact, a contradiction that was linked to India’s perceived dependency as a premodern culture and to India’s exotic and commercial appeal. Exhibited craftsmen therefore were key. They marketed Indian goods, and created and catered demand for India so that it became increasingly important to Britain, and associated India with extravagance, fashion and wealth, as the craft body remained primitive and therefore subjugated. Indian bodies were showcased inside scenes that were basic and premodern. Indian commodities meanwhile—including materials, shawls, slippers and jewellery—created a vibrant view of India to be wondered at, admired, conquered and acquired. As the 1851 Guide to the Great Exhibition declared, the Indian exhibits were evidence of “the powers of India to enrich, and of Englishmen to take advantage those riches” (1851: 115).

Mathur argues that “such an assessment allowed Victorians to admire Indian cultural objects, and to make distinctions between their aesthetic and utilitarian functions, without challenging the prevailing ideological framework of European dominance and industrial progress” (2007: 10). She suggests that the riches manufactured by ‘primitive’ and ‘ignorant’ Indians offered



India's wealth as obtainable and explained why India had not industrialised. However, Mathur also overlooks a crucial disobedience: although often showcasing hybrid products, Indian craft rendered visible the beauty of handicraft. This articulated a distinction between the handmade and mass-produced goods that did challenge the celebration of industrialisation since Indian art became a sign of good taste and superior skill. Quoted on the first page of the introduction to the Official Guide to the Colonial and Indian exhibition, the Earl of Kimberly, the Secretary of State for India, remarked "I have often been struck by the calamity of the introduction of our taste into Eastern arts and manufactures, for their taste is far better than ours" (1886: 9). In the backdrop of admiring and procuring Indian goods, which stemmed at least partially from the poor quality of mass production, consumers ascribed other kinds of significances to Indian craft that supported and turned against the British imperium, as both a primitivism and beauty of Indian handicraft were simultaneously embodied in exhibition. This paradox was being consumed and produced by the general public through exhibitions, and particularly out of their feeling of being modern, and was rupturing the binaries of modernity/tradition in the public eye.

Of course, the tensions between respect and criticism of traditional Indian skill already had a long history in travel literature, which often described both the primitivism of people and the majesty of India's art and architecture. By the end of the eighteenth century travellers perpetuated a mythic, primitive and dangerous version of India. They also regularly sought out the sublime elements in Indian art, and were attracted to India's opulent visual qualities (Mitter, 1977: 120-21). "[W]hile the iconography of Indian art was uncomprehendingly received as the repository of esoteric wisdom... early travellers did not hesitate to reflect on the architectural grandeur of Hindu temples and the delicate craftsmanship" (ibid: 31). Literature historically devised a condemnation of the Indian body as it associated Indian art with mystery and wealth. In a wider and more elitist setting, as Mann argues, Indian art became central in on-going discussions concerning the aesthetic improvement of British manufacture, and, propagating the ideologies connected to the Arts and Crafts movement "it seemed that Indian

artefacts—if not the Indian artisan himself—might be superior to their English counterparts” (2011: 66). Barringer similarly explains that the resulting admiration for Indian art was “deeply corrosive of widely held mid-Victorian assumptions concerning national and racial superiority, progress, and mechanisation...the Indian manufactures were more beautiful, and better made” (Barringer, 2005: 260).

What I want to underscore here is that the admiration and condemnation of Indian art was not only embodied, and therefore emphasised, in exhibition, but also that it was being produced and consumed by popular culture and a lay British public and as a response to industrialisation. Furthermore, Indian art acquired new values in those spaces and also against the city of London, its drudgery, pollution and factory production. Romanticised in exhibition as an opposition to modernity, Indian art was pre-industrial, vibrant, a source of respectable expertise, wealth and perfection. The effects and experiences of industrialisation felt, by all classes—albeit in different ways—scribed new significance to Indian craft. The attractiveness of Indian goods gained traction against the bleakness of city life, the loss of trade skills, and the demise of artistic beauty. The exhibition of Indian art was therefore central in bestowing universal value to the handmade. As Barringer notes, the labour manifested in Indian manufactures “was of the highest skill and sensitivity,” and “represented a different order of knowledge from that of the British industrial designer” (2005: 260/263). Choudhury has similarly argued in the case of Paisley reproductions, mass produced copies of expensive Indian products not only posed a threat to the exclusivity of the upper classes acquisition, they were also “central to debates about design reforms, and how imitation shawls were frequently critiqued as badly manufactured products” (2015: 189). Exhibitions not only enabled a British public of all classes to access and visually consume, and therefore play a role in creating these critiques, it allowed them to partake in themes that honoured traditional skill and condemned mass production, as they consumed a hybrid mixture of mass produced imitation as well as authentic objects.

## PRESERVATION OF THE HANDMADE

As discussed, the appreciation for traditional handiwork in the public eye came to the forefront through the forum of exhibitions, and through the counterpoint of being modern. Yet, while tapping into India's so-called primitivism and its luxury, which enhanced India's commercial appeal in capitalist-consumer markets, Indian craft also opposed the celebration of capitalism, materialism and mass production. Particularly in the last decade of the nineteenth century, as the English began to regard themselves as a more respectful force, exhibitions participated in an imaginary impulse to protect Indian craft traditions from industrialisation. Ideas of protection were embedded within not only a historical encounter, but also in a new regime of power. As the *Daily News* remarked in an article written about the Empire of India exhibition, "[t]he kind of talk which used to be heard at one time about the impossibility of governing India except by sword is not heard any longer in any society of rational Englishmen" (27 May 1895). As Chapter Two explored, after the events of 1857 Crown authority claimed it would respect India, and this prerequisite in order to rule gathered momentum throughout the remainder of the century.

Remodelling craft into a victim of industrialisation, through which progress was maintained as the prerogative and peril of the West, exhibition producers and consumers played a role in generating a sense of colonial threat to Indian manufacture. Whilst the machine became a sign of power for the West, it was a phenomenon that many thought India should avoid. In turn the craftsman in London, like his counterpart in India, came to embody the corrupting effects of colonial policies. The demise of the Indian artisan at the hands of industrialisation was therefore not only being felt by art critics, and later by a Marxist tradition in scholarship, but by the public and cultural sphere, which played a role in casting modernity—and British rule by extension—as an unwanted and destructive peril to Indian craft. Showcasing traditions under threat was a shrewd promotional strategy designed to entice the public, it also helped to create a false economy in which the Indian producer transforms into a victim. Although, as Douglas and Haynes,

Thomas, Cohn, and Roy have shown, many artisans were already using new materials, had embraced new production techniques, and were fashioning new communities and economies, exhibitions represented craft producers as helpless victims, and cast them into a historical condition overturned by colonialism, the industrial revolution and world-trade competition.

This stimulated ideas of conservation. Embodying the ideologies connected to the Arts and Crafts movement, the Indian art manufactured on exhibition sites routinely testified to the authenticity, intricacy and beauty of handmade goods, which converted into a desire to protect and preserve that skill. A genuine fear that Indian art was all but disappearing under British rule accompanied the craftsman's exposure in London. Although romanticising non-industrial work produced a version of India that was both valuable (commercially, economically and politically) and inferior (therefore 'safe'), artisans also exhibited expertise that were prized as ancient skills thought lost to modern London. Academic, scientific, and public audiences routinely conceived exhibited Indian artisans as nascent figures who were external to the processes of industrialisation, and also as subjects who required protection. Consumers widely admired the beauty and perfection of the handmade, and, often perceiving the demise of the handmade, viewed the condition of modernity as a menace to traditional skill. The Guidebook and Catalogue to the Festival of Empire, for example, declared that the endeavour of the Indian section was:

to afford a fair idea of the technical ability and good taste of the Indian art workers of the past, though it is to be feared that under commercial exigencies, and in consequence of wider facilities of communication, these excellences are on the downward grade.

(ix-x)

Thus the exhibited craftsmen aroused wider concerns about the impact of colonisation and industrialisation upon India within the public sphere, concerns best encapsulated by the Earl of Kimberly's note in the introduction to the Official Guide to the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition, in which he remarked:

There is, perhaps, nothing more desirable for India, than that its products and industries should be well known in this country, although we have much more to learn than to teach them. Their beautiful manufacturers which they have produced for so many ages have proved that there is knowledge of many branches of art, which it would be a thousand pities should be diminished under our rule.

(The Official Guide to the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886: 9)

The call to preserve Indian traditions was also discussed at scholarly level at the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition, where a series of anthropological conferences and lectures were held on site throughout the months of June and July. As Chapter Three discussed, the talks were designed for men interested in ethnology and provided an opportunity to learn more about the 'native subjects' of the British Empire as well as the resources of the colonies. The conferences included lectures about the collections from the Cape of Good Hope, West Africa, the West Indies, the Caribbean and Cyprus (Qureshi, 2011: 257). The talks also sought to raise awareness that the Europeanising of other countries, including India, was damaging indigenous ways of life. Used as a 'reliable' reference, the performing craftsmen of the 1886 exhibition became a link to an ancient knowledge, and representing an 'uncorrupted' Indian identity were used as evidence of the speakers' theories. "Ancient industries and arts are rapidly perishing before the advancing flood of alien civilisation" announced Francis Galton at the opening of a series of conferences at lectures, "[w]e must therefore be prompt to study whatever is still extant of early ethnological value, and should all the more cordially welcome the opportunities afforded by this instructive Exhibition" (1886: 175). Certainly a key impulse of this scientific consumption was that it conceived the unchanging and static purity of the artisan as inferior in contrast to the clever, curious and far sighted European, whose role it was to study and then either educate or preserve the innocent race. Along the way, ideas of preservation shook the celebration of progress, and helped produce narratives of colonial endangerment to tradition skill. This all centred on the craft body appearing in exhibition.

These themes were carried through to the education of public audiences, who had often flocked to see the exhibited craftsmen. The published notes of E. J

Marshall recognised the exhibits at the Indian Art Ware Courts as “[t]he results of long-inherited skill and patient handicraft, and not of machinery” (1886: 11). As Chapter Three has seen, Marshall’s notes were initially intended for a lecture given to the students of Brighton Grammar School prior to their visit to the exhibition. The idea was to teach pupils about Britain’s **“great “World Mission,” and their own responsibilities as British subjects”** (1886: 5). His lecture notes also went on to be reprinted for other talks, for disruption to the workingmen’s club, and for sale with other Official Publications at the exhibition bookstall. Reaching far larger audiences than he initially intended, Marshall’s talk educated a sprawling readership not only about Britain’s mission and superiority in the Empire (points he emphasised in bold), but also proliferated the crisis between hand labour and industrial production, and between “alien civilization” and the disappearance of indigenous craftsmanship. Marshall belittled the producer as he congratulated Indian products, including metal work, woven fabrics, embroidery, carpets, and jewellery, as superior forms of art. His notes described, for example, how the Indian weaver incorporates the “proper” colours into a fabric either from his own knowledge or a pattern. He explained that if that workman “is told simply, “Now I want you to make something in this style, in your own way, but the best thing you ever did, and you may take your own time about it, and I will pay you whatever you ask,” he will succeed. Art in Europe is spoiled by haggling and hurry” (1886: 13). He also noted that “English chemical dyes are fast spoiling the Indian dyers’ work” and that “[t]he once celebrated Dacca muslins are now almost a thing of the past” and “European demand for Indian carpets has led to their deterioration” (1886: 13-14). This view of Indian manufactures evidently developed from a sense of superiority, but also from a feeling of mechanical busyness and a modern disregard for artistic integrity. Consequently, Indian handicrafts were often interpreted as being under threat but also unspoilt by modernisation.

An increasing ambition of the exhibition of India over this period became about showcasing arts that had not suffered from European influence, which in turn articulated an identity unaffected by the progress that was defiling British work and arts. The idea was that exhibitions would act as a repository

for the preservation of Indian art, and help protect its survival. The Society of the Encouragement and Preservation of Indian Art (S.E.P.I.A.) for example was involved in the Empire of India exhibition. Although it largely contributed works of European artists to the Fine Art section, the Official Catalogue claimed that the Society was set up in order to “foster the indigenous Decorative Arts of India, and preserve their distinctive characteristics wherever possible” (1895: 209). The Society sought to encourage Indian artisans to continue their hereditary handicrafts and hoped to promote European taste for Indian art. In making contributions to exhibitions, S.E.P.I.A. felt it was making significant achievements in these objectives. Set against a prevalent dissatisfaction with the loss of artistic skill, the Official Catalogue insisted that the Society’s contributions to the exhibition were helping stimulate Indian arts on the brink of extinction. To take a few examples: the catalogue claimed that the exhibition showcased Chanda that in the Central Provinces “seems to have entirely perished” (1895: 213); it also displayed “antiquated” Indian knives, swords and daggers that “although undoubtedly more artistic and beautiful” had been “superseded by European inventions” (1895: 217); and it unveiled carved iron “considered only very little inferior to the skilled workmen of Greece or Rome” that at one time was “practiced to a very large extent” yet “the industry at the present day is only partially followed” (1895: 223). S.E.P.I.A. was even called upon to judge exhibits and award prizes to the artisans’ competition at the exhibition, indicating a more direct relationship between the society and exhibition display.

It follows from this that although colonial urges to protect certainly reasserted some of the conceptual frameworks dictated by colonial domination (Western ideas about its responsibilities to educate, convert, protect, or civilise the weaker Other), protectionism also reflected the wider climate of disillusionment with industrialisation and resided in a wider criticism of the demise of Indian art. Prominent designers from the Arts and Crafts movement, including Ruskin and Morris, similarly called for the perseverance and protection of craftspeople from industrialisation. Many nineteenth-century critics and ethnologists alike believed that India’s artisans should continue to

work in traditional ways. They reflected a widespread disdain for Britain's industrial productions, whilst conjuring their own fantasies which ignored economic realities. Many wanted craftspeople to avoid European influences, arguing that their methods were preserving India's ancient history, community and art, which they maintained were being destroyed by modern technologies and trade competition. Cited by art philosopher Coomaraswamy, Morris protested;

the Indian or Japanese craftsman may no longer ply his craft leisurely, working a few hours each day, in producing a maze of strange beauty on a piece of cloth; a steam engine is set a-going at Manchester, and that victory over nature and a thousand stubborn difficulties is used for the base work of producing a sort of plaster of China clay and shoddy, and the Asiatic worker, if he is not starved to death outright, as plentifully happens, is driven himself into a factory to lower the wages of his Manchester brother worker, and nothing of his character is left him except, most like, an accumulation of fear and hatred of that to him unaccountable evil, his English master.

(cited Coomaraswamy, 1909: 71)

Representing on-going concerns over craft survival during a time of growing resistance to British rule, art critics helped to popularise a wider set of claims about the importance of handmade crafts as continuing elements in Indian culture. They also reflected negatively on the dissipating of skilled work into factory reproduction. In doing so art critics spoke for—and created new identities for—craft producers and their products. In particular, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Sir George Birdwood helped change the trajectories of craft in the British imagination, partly through the exhibition arena. They sketched ideas of traditional craft out of experiences of modernisation and in doing so dissipated narratives that contained anti-industrial and anti-imperial connotation, spreading values that are also rooted in the rhetoric of Indian nationalism.

In his book *The Indian Craftsman* published in 1909, Indian Art Philosopher Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, a man who played a leading role in the rise of the *swadeshi* movement, discussed the role of the craftsman in India's pre-industrial society. Viewing the craftsman as a pure product of India's identity



and community, Coomaraswamy believed the craftsman to be India's purest and most valuable asset, and argued that the hereditary position of the craftsman was the key to the functioning of society. Coomaraswamy viewed the craftsman as the organic element of Indian national existence and the centre of feudal community living. The soul and skill was taken out of production, which steered the way, Coomaraswamy believed, not only to the degradation of art, but also, in a wider sense, to oppression and want, and to a desire to accumulate wealth. As Mathur (2007: 46) explains, for Coomaraswamy:

the craftsman was central to the problem of the creative and intellectual status of the country; his degraded condition reflected not only Britain's political power and material prosperity, but also the inability of India to attain its moral vision and spiritual destiny.... In this way the actual physical body of the craftsman – ruined, disfigured, and enslaved by colonialism – became a powerful metaphor.

Believing that traditional craft skill in India was degrading under Britain's modernising influence, Coomaraswamy was concerned by commercial methods of production, over-taxation, and revenue-exploitation, and looked for ways to preserve and document traditional skill. In 1910 Coomaraswamy founded the India Society in London in order to promote Indian art in the West. His personal collection of art was donated to the Boston Museum of Fine Art in 1917, "at a time when he was disappointed by the failure of Indians to show any real appreciation of his work" (Humphreys, Christmas, et al, 1977: 3). Writing numerous publications on Indian Art and even a few sections of exhibition guides and catalogues, Coomaraswamy informed the British public about the damaging effects of British rule on Indian art. For example, Coomaraswamy wrote a portion of the Indian Section Guide Book and Catalogue to the 1911 Festival of Empire, in which he announced that in Mogul and Rajput paintings had all but disappeared "largely as the result of the change of taste produced by "English Education" so called" (1911: 105). He also informed readers of the Guide that "whereas the ambition of the nineteenth-century reformers had been to make India like England" that an effort was now made to reform Indian culture (1911: 106). His contributions to exhibition material helped to re-cast the craftsman as a victimised but

valued figure and enabled that symbol to hold a global presence. At the same time he conformed to a changing tactic of colonial rule, which increasingly sought to quieten Indian discontent (see Chapter Two). Along the way he commended rather condemned the exhibitions that staged the artisanal body. He praised exhibitions for doing good work in the preservation and publicity of Indian products, and believed that further exhibition of Indian craft should be undertaken before it was too late, because it acted as a repository and record of traditional skill. His desire to document was so rooted that he even compiled his own photographic collections of craftsmen, labourers, dancers, musicians and entertainers, which he believed were a means of preserving a culture and broadcasting information about those people and their lifestyles.

Sir George Birdwood was another particularly influential art critic who broadcast criticisms of colonialism through the forum of exhibitions. Specialising in the study of Indian art, Birdwood “became the key figure in the British reception and interpretation of Indian craft and material culture” (Barringer, 2005: 269). Like Coomaraswamy, Birdwood dreaded the introduction of industrialisation to India, arguing it was the root of ‘evil’ for village communities and was destroying ancient skills and art. Birdwood argued that trade competition was already extinguishing craft perfection and society in India, and viewed Indian craft as pure, un-polluting and a repository of antiquity. Quoted by Coomaraswamy, Birdwood wrote:

for all the marvellous tissue and embroidery they have wrought, they have polluted no rivers, deformed no pleasing prospects, nor poisoned any air; whose skill and individuality the training of countless generations has developed to the highest perfection, these hereditary handicraftsmen are being everywhere gathered from their democratic village communities in hundreds and thousands into colossal mills of Bombay, to drudge in gangs for tempting wages, at manufacturing piece goods, in competition with Manchester, in the production of which they are no more intellectually and morally concerned than the grinder of a barrel organ in the tunes turned out from it.

(cited Coomaraswamy 1909: 69-70)

Birdwood also published numerous articles in journals and popular newspapers on issues concerning Indian art, in which he expansively warned

“against the influences which are enfeebling and corrupting [Indian] artistic character” (Birdwood, 1879: 306). He held duty at the India Office from 1871 until 1902, after which he continued to be consulted on matters relating to India. He was also extensively involved in numerous exhibitions as a curator and as an advisor, including the 1886, 1895 and 1914 events, as well as events held in Chicago and Paris. He was even called upon to award prizes for the Artisan competition at the Empire of India exhibition, and acted as advisor for Kiralfy’s spectacle *India* and the 1914 spectacle *The Romance of India* intended for Earl’s Court. It was through the prism of exhibitions that Birdwood reached a particularly large audience, and also where his dislike of mass-production, and his appreciation for the handmade were most influential. Birdwood’s book *The Industrial Arts of India* was first published in the Indian section of the catalogue to the 1878 Paris Exposition, was later recommended as a textbook during the conferences at the Colonial and Indian exhibition, and was also extensively quoted in the 1895 Empire of India exhibition. This provided a historical background for Indian exhibits “and stimulated a new appreciation of such crafts among scholars, artists, and general visitors” (Hoffenberg, 2011: 83). In those publications, Birdwood made continual reference to the crudity of machine products, a taste for which would, he believed, be the demise of the handmade. European reproductions, he claimed, were ruining the beauty of traditional goods. To take a few examples, Birdwood wrote that “gemmed jewelry [sic] of Delhi has lost its native vigour under European influences” (1878: 252). He explained that “[t]he gold jewelry [sic] of Trichinopoly...has long been corrupted to suit European taste” (1879: 262-3), and that “the carpets of *Masulipatam* were formerly among the finest produced in India, but of late years have also been corrupted by the European, chiefly English, demand for them” (1879: 381). He abhorred European influences both for their aesthetic and economic impact, and by making contributions to exhibition material, dissipated his displeasure of British industry and its influences on India with a lay public. In particular, he expressed deep concern about inauthentic mass-produced reproductions that were flooding the market and dispelling artisans from employment. He dreaded the loss of India’s traditions, and, worrying about the decline of Indian handloom industry, called for a return to hand-woven

clothes. Birdwood's view was that India's ancient heritage was already on the decline, its only links survived through craft. He saw perfection in Indian art and like advocates of Indian nationalism linked its survival to hereditary traditions preserved in the social structures of village life.

Producing a version of India that was full of misrepresentation, the contributions made by art critics to exhibitions helped produce a negative view of industrialisation, and, indicating the damaging impact of modernity abroad, unhinged the celebration of modernity. Although the call to preserve India's traditional arts and crafts became, in part, another way for Britain to make convincing distinctions between Indian and British identity, exhibition publications, which were designed to be read alongside craft exhibits, also re-defined definitions of modernity and stood as a critique of imperialism. As Bhabha argues more broadly, the engagements of cultural difference can be both consensual and conflictual. Moreover, "they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity... and challenge normative expectations of development and progress" (Bhabha, 1994: 3). Interestingly, these challenges were a reaction, and often a perceived idea about craft rather than a reality, to colonialism and the impact of British policy on India. Therefore, although subversive, these ideas were also derivative; certainly, they were British-inspired and stemmed from a feeling of loss.

## NOSTALGIA FOR CRAFT

The heterogeneous views of India being showcased in the exhibition space—including premodernity, beauty, and victimisation—dwelt in a romantic nostalgia for the pre-industrial. Audiences not only attached ideas of primitivism, beauty and protection to pre-industrial craft, but also experienced that premodernity with feelings of nostalgia. Similar to a literary impulse that articulated melancholy for medieval and earlier societies "on the grounds that they provide a better standard of life" (Stafford, 1989: 33), exhibited craftsmen showcased a quality of living and working that was romanticised and envied by those who had undergone industrialisation. Importantly, the exhibited

craftsman presented these values in corporeal ways. Viewed in the flesh they 'evidenced' the community bond of village life, thought lost to the modern metropolis. As *The Morning Post* (25 December 1885: 2) reported:

The affection of Hindoos for the various members of the family group is a praiseworthy and distinctive feature of national character, evidenced not in sentiment only, but in the practical manifestations of enduring charity. The normal social relations of a Hindoo family command our admiration, and in many respects afford an example we should do well to follow.

Reviewers who gazed upon displayed craftsmen thus often did so with whimsical sentiment, and therefore played a role in idealising the version of the primitive. Although craft identity resided in the British imagination of India, it was also an experience of the Other refracted through the Self that contained conflict. As MacCannell argues more broadly, nostalgia for 'naturalness' is the "conquering spirit of modernity—the grounds of its unsatisfying consciousness" (1999: 3).

The perception of simpler, purer lifestyle was also at the core of the 'Noble Savage' concept, which came into fruition during the exhibition of Zulu Kaffirs, whose 'purer' moral natures and 'enlightened' dispositions were admired by Victorian audiences. As Stafford explains, the argument behind romanticising the savage "is that commercial society is too complicated and sophisticated; as a result, the relationship of the human being to the environment has become divided, fragmented, unsatisfying" (1989: 41). The Noble Savage was appealing because he/she offered something more authentic and more 'real' than modern life. This was a fashionable reaction of the time (as Charles Dickens' article in *Household Words* scathed). Yet these attributes were also centred in a feeling that the savage was an antidote to modernity and very much in the idea of a deteriorating modern present, a concept that was also being discussed by sociologists. Weber, Töennies and Durkheim, despite their differences, "all found contemporary society culturally or politically deficient" (Chase and Shaw, 1989: 6). European rationality and the evolution of technology gave rise, they believed, to the derogation of tradition, identity and community bonds.

A similar nostalgia for the pre-industrial India sprung from the exhibition of Indian 'primitives,' and out of the craftsman's perceived autonomy from modernity. Like the appeal of the Noble Savage, the desire for the Other as Singleton explains;

is centred very much on a lack (or loss) in the Self, namely, a longing for a premodern world that the idea of the Orient provides. In the anxious conditions of the modern age the desire often evokes a longing (a wish fulfilment) for all the supposedly lost comfort, security, and familiarity of a remembered (or imagined) past.

(2010: 354)

As MacCannell (1999) also argues, for those who think of themselves as modern, reality and authenticity are found elsewhere, in history or other cultural contexts and particularly in the idea of simpler and unpolluted lifestyles. Since mechanisation was often held responsible for fatal accidents, explosions, the unemployment of the skilled labour-force and for the degradation of community living, the 'native' village in exhibition and its 'primitive' inhabitants contained significant nostalgic appeal. For as the worlds of British modernity and Indian tradition physically collided, city spectators were given an experience that opposed their chaotic urban lives. It is this experience, and especially this juxtaposition, that gave rise to the call for preservation.

Unlike the 'Nobel Savage', the Indian craftsman was not savage. They were desirable not only because they rejected modernity, but because they exhibited skills of a higher artistic plain and social value. Indeed, showcased inside the world's largest and fastest growing metropolis, Indian craft offered a utopian image similar to one that critics of modernity, including Ruskin and Jefferies, had conjured. The exhibited craft body offered a subject free from the destruction of the mechanical revolution, who worked by hand and took pleasure and time over his work in the production of something beautiful. Exhibitions admired and romanticised the Indian craftsman, creating stereotypical views (as Chapter One has also shown).

Figure 4.3, an illustration of the cotton-cleaner at the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition signifies the romanticising and utopian tranquillity attributed to traditional skill. The imaginative geography of the scene is not a reproduction of what audiences encountered at the exhibition, but does reveal to us the historical way of seeing the craftsman. An imagined representation of the cotton cleaner's 'natural' environment, the background is an empty, neutral and natural space. The image is void of machines; the edges are blurred extenuating a dream-like quality, whilst the craftsman is seated upon the dirt floor and looks relaxed and at peace. He and his environment are simple, uncomplicated, contented. The image suggests that even as crowds bustled and were often overwhelming in size, the artisan, secure in his pre-industrial space, appeared relaxed, and at peace.

Fig. 4.3 The Cotton Cleaner, Punjab.  
A turbaned man, squatting on the ground cleaning cotton.  
Exhibited at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition.  
Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

Nevertheless, not only was the scene an illusory reference to ‘original context’, the scene was also made meaningful by contrast to the unseen city. Although views of London were actively blocked out, the meaning and romanticism of craft came into being against the opposing place—the immediacy of the industrial city—which, as Wosk, Barringer and MacCannell have shown, was far from perfect. Barringer argues that although Victorian exhibitions showcased new manufactures proudly, the conditions of labour in Britain were harsh “and the advent of machine production offered little cause for celebration” (2005: 1). Despite the bombastic rhetoric of industrial progress evident in London’s exhibitions “no one was unaware of the poverty and social dislocation that beset the industrial cities of Britain” (Barringer, 2005: 8). The exhibition of craft offered a refuge from the dystopian industrial existence, while underscoring a cultural dissatisfaction that was the unavoidable by-product of modernisation. While exhibitions celebrated a version of industrialisation that resided in a *known unreality* (being a negative aspect of the viewers’ lives), they celebrated a version of premodernity that resided in an *unknown reality* (since most of those who viewed never had nor would ever go to India). Showcasing a romanticised version of Indian craft as ‘truthful’ representation, and without an alternative frame of reference, exhibitions presented a version of craft in which poverty, labour wages and colonial policy were largely rendered invisible. The exhibition of Indian craft thus emerged as an imagined and appealing site different to the one on which it made reference, shaped by new context as it was being abstracted and displaced.

Exhibited craftsmen appealed to modern anxieties and losses in a society which communally experienced the rapid transformations wrought by modernity. Nevertheless, as already suggested, the upper classes were more likely to admire the Indian craftsmen. Bengali exhibition manager T.N Mukharji noticed this, commenting “[g]entlemen and ladies of higher education and culture... honoured us as the representatives of the most ancient nation now existing on the face of the earth” (1889: 101). This had to do not only with a fashion for the ‘savage’ but also with a fashion for expensive Indian goods, which as discussed indicated taste and world reach.



At the other end of the class divide, meanwhile, it was the working class visitors, who were often admitted to exhibition on reduced tickets and even free travel, who felt the desire and threat of the primitive most keenly. Mukharji observed in his memoir that the lower classes in particular were keen to buy into the notion of Indian savagery, observing that 'common people' and especially 'country folk' were especially ignorant. Their impulse label Indians negatively as 'primitive', as Mukharji suggested, was characteristic of a class attitude. This attitude dwelt in a desire for superiority amongst a group whose hierarchical situation occupied a closer position to foreigners, but also in a longing for the seeming security of Indian craft skill. It was this group who bore the brunt of modernity's more unpleasant consequences, such as unemployment, low pay and the discontinuity of trade expertise. As a result "the loss of earning and employment probably led to a sense of 'incompleteness' and shame and to a loss of dignity" (McClelland, 1991: 79). Unlike those in India, craft trades in Britain were not a hereditary right, and even if a boy's father had a successful trade career that did not guarantee his. Moreover, trade skills in London were under threat by the rising introduction of machines in the work place. By contrast, the skills of Indian craftsmen who performed in exhibitions, who now reached this working class audience, appeared to be free from the industrialisation that was discrediting trade skills. Apprehending this crisis while romanticising the life of the Indian craftsman as an opposition to the English worker, Birdwood commented that Indian artisan:

knows nothing of the desperate struggle for existence which oppresses the life and crushes the very soul out of the English working man. He has his assured place, inherited from father to son for a hundred generations... while nature provides him with everything to his hand, but the little food and less clothing he needs, and the simple tools of his trade. The English working man must provide for house rent, coals, furniture, warm clothing, animal food, and spirits, and for the education of his children, before he can give a mind free from family anxieties to his work. (1879: 309)

The unchanging 'native' craftsman in exhibition existed as a reminder of Britain's own transformations, restating the developments of industrialisation

and in doing so, conjured a longing for a society which was similar to Britain's own past, but which was lost.

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Enduring as the most popular and most frequent exhibition form of living India in the Victorian metropolis, Indian craftsmen coalesced with a complex and often contradictory milieu of ideologies, reproducing yet redefining ideas of primitivism out of modernity at the same time as they drew upon ideas associated with the arts and crafts movement. These paradoxes ascribed conflicting value to the producer's handiwork, from which he was estranged, and worse could not claim, whilst he was outwardly being patronised, honoured, respected, protected, and desired. Many of the values that became attached to traditional Indian craftsmanship still problematise the idea of being modern and the quest for cultural integrity today. As Venkatesan argues, craft continues "to be frequently mobilized within the nation-building project" (2009: 80). By Indian middle classes at home and abroad and by foreign tourists alike, craft is still viewed as something organic, of quality, integrity and beauty. It is linked to perfection, peace and joy not only in work but also in life, and as a concept "perused over the centuries, relentlessly, to use a harsh term, and stressed as most crucial in shaping our life style" (Chattopadhyay, 1999: 79). Yet 'tradition' also endures as a fantasy of the past, as an antidote to modernity or diaspora, and reasserts a loss of art quality, which is founded in a romantic longing for the *idea* of craft. As Venkatesan similarly maintains "[i]n India, an idealized and romanticized craft context was discursively produced and explicitly contrasted with the ruptures, distress, and inequalities seen as resulting from industrialization, colonisation, and modernization" (2009: 83). Contemporary enterprises that look to preserve and document authentic craft, a practice prevalent in academic scholarship, museum curating and government initiatives in India, is a mode of thinking that inevitably holds some root in colonial discourse. Furthermore, the idea of authenticity is also problematic, as Ortner writes more broadly "insofar as it seems to presume a naive belief in cultural purity,

in untouched cultures whose histories are uncontaminated by those of their neighbors or of the west” (1995: 176). At the same time, these conclusions fail to acknowledge the importance and historical and cultural significance of Indian arts and crafts. Although craft takes different meaning at different times, and its trajectory altered under forms of colonialism and resistance, it still encompasses skills and knowledge that are centuries old, that outdate colonialism and are integral to the fabric of pre and post-colonial India.

This chapter has been intentionally inconclusive. Although the exhibition consumption of ‘primitive’ India was perhaps the prevailing, and certainly the most injurious imprint within the British consciousness, traditional craft demonstration resided in no one interpretation; as soon as one is uncovered, another is revealed behind it in an unbounded though unequal variation of sequence of meaning, knowledge, power and resistance. All this transformed the Indian body into an object loaded with ideological and social significance. Most interestingly, while artisan performance can easily be read as insidious instruments, playing for the dominant socio-cultural order, it also threatened the very hegemonic imperative it has been widely understood to uphold. Drawing small but significant cracks in the imperial façade, craft stood as a critique of colonial expansions and modern mode of productions. There is, meanwhile, another facet of India’s identity, propagated to the public through exhibitions, which complicates matters further, and suggests both the production and perturbing of identities. Receptions of exhibited nautch girls (Indian dancers) were, similar to the craftsmen, diverse, and nautch presented an entertainment that was ambivalently interpreted by the habitants of the metropolis. The nautch girl also provided another image of Indian identity in the exhibition experience, and enriched a so-called more authentic experience. What is significant about nautch girls, however, as the next chapter will show, is that receptions verified a depiction of nautch being sketched in the realms of entertainments and politics as they also exposed the falsehood Britain’s definitions of Indian identity.

## CHAPTER FIVE THE NAUGHTY NAUTCH

In the popular British imagination, the nautch girl often operated as a figure of Indian savagery and sexual decadence. On stage the nautch girl was presented as the incarnation of Indian exoticism and oppositional immorality—narratives that also happened to be critical elements in the justification of Colonial rule. As numerous scholars explain, nautch (and *sati*) were the Hindu practices where “the British invoked to mark their moral superiority to their Indian subjects” (Meduri and Spear, 2004: 437). As Chatterjee reminds us, by “assuming a position of sympathy with the unfree and oppressed womanhood of India, the colonial mind was able to transform this figure of the Indian woman into a sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire cultural tradition of a country” (1989: 622). Chapter Two suggested that the invention of ‘unfree’ Indian womanhood was also a product being drawn by British popular culture. The chapter explained that British theatre, including exhibition stages, used Indian women either as a site of religious tyranny and victimisation in the form of *sati* (widow burning), or as a point of wickedness and impropriety in the form of nautch. Both *India* (1895) and *The Romance of India* (1913), for example, represented Indian women as sufferers of religious persecution or as conjurers of evil. In both productions, Indian female characters were dragged to their deaths by corrupt Brahmin priests, or performed nautch dances during scenes of Indian malice. British depictions of Indian women in politics and culture alike, including those found on exhibition sites, perpetually exploited notions of savagery. In entertainment, the representation of nautch was exploited in order to thrill and horrify the public as a character of exoticism and moral backwardness.

In the context of nineteenth-century British culture the nautch girl was not in fact exclusively contained as an impersonated character, rather from the 1880s onward London’s exhibitions routinely included not only the dramatic but also the ‘real’ nautch girl in their programmes. In doing so they offered British audiences an adventurous opportunity of seeing ‘authentic’ nautch for

the first time. As *The Pall Mall Gazette* informed readers, “London is to have a new sensation. In a few days the real nautch girl, of whom so much has been heard, will make her first bow to a Gaiety audience” (10 December 1885). Nautch girls, hired in India and shipped to Britain, were thereafter recruited for numerous exhibitions including the 1885 Liberty & Co. and 1885-6 Portland Hall exhibitions, the 1895-6 Empire of India (and Ceylon) exhibitions, a number of Crystal Palace exhibitions and Earl’s Court Exhibitions, including the Franco-British exhibition at White City. Often viewed in the same exhibition spaces as Indian craftsmen, jugglers and theatrical spectacles, the inclusion of nautch girls finalised what was marketed as a ‘complete’ representation of India and its peoples. By including nautch girls, exhibitions revealed the Indian woman to the British public, who in turn formed part of a larger picture of India being showcased. This was another Indian entertainment around which ideas of Indian oppositional identity were drawn, and also one that was full of commercial viability. The exhibited nautch girl was a feature of British culture who entertained British audiences as another component of human exoticism and Otherness, and exhibitions, like theatre and literature, used the Indian dancer as compelling and objectified commodity in order to attract audiences and boost profits. What becomes interesting, as I will investigate in this chapter, is that by including nautch, exhibitions also presented a figure who laid bare the illusory representation of nautch being dictated in others medias. By exploring the contention between the character and the so-called ‘real’ exhibited nautch girl, it becomes clear that the exhibition of nautch at once reaffirmed, at the same time as it called into question the distinctions of difference being produced both by and for entertainment and the politics of colonial rule. NB: by ‘real’ nautch, I refer to a nautch girl who was understood by audiences as ‘authentic’ rather than a staged character or representation. In this sense, while Chapter One questioned what is at stake in the exhibition of so-called authentic places and authentic identities, this chapter questions what happens when the ‘authentic’ being created is revealed as for being what it was: imaginary.

Before the arrival of nautch girls at the 1885 Albert Palace exhibition, rumours excited the public that “a new sensation...of whom so much has been heard” (op.cit.) would arrive to London to bewitch audiences with their “soft dark eyes, and their flowing raven hair” (*The York Herald* 2 January 1886: 7). They were anticipated as “creatures of loveliness” (*The Era* 19 December 1885), hypnotising and oozing in erotic excess, and as another Indian attraction available at the exhibition. These excitements are reflective of deeper layers of discourse, including those resided in theatre and in the anti-nautch campaigns (which I will outline further shortly). Yet, at the same time, while the ‘real’ nautch girl in exhibition inspired emotionally anxious and sexually charged responses upon which ideas of Indian femininity and immorality lingered, she also presented an especially ambivalent form of entertainment. The exhibition of nautch in this sense interrupted other interpretations that had come to define Indian women, and this conflict is important in that it exposed certain ideas about Indian femininity as fictional. Consequently, unlike other exhibited entertainments, including craftsmen, ethnological models and spectacles, the nautch girl was a site upon which fantasies were projected but were also exposed. In turn, fictitious inventions of identity that Empire relied upon, however fleetingly, were created and unmasked.

It is significant that nautch was often a marginal entertainment. Although initially hotly anticipated, the nautch girl received far less attention than the other Indian entertainments. Furthermore, the attention the dancers *did* receive mostly referred to their sexuality rather than their art. Unlike the craftsman, who although consumed as primitive was also declared highly dexterous, the dancer, who was most likely trained in her art from infancy, was valued for her looks and sexual appeal, and rarely for her skill. This issue is representative of women’s histories generally, and also of a wider objectification and silencing of Indian dancers during imperialism more specifically. As Hubel reminds us, the individual lives of dancers in nineteenth century India, their ideals, experiences, ways of life, were valueless to colonial records and were therefore not recorded. Their history cannot be recovered “in any form that has not already been altered by our own concerns” (2005: 121). Responding to these problems, I am not looking to

recover a lost voice for the nautch girls who were recruited to perform in London's exhibitions. Such a task is not only impossible, but any attempt would do so lies within the rhetoric of rescuing a voice that was largely unimportant to audiences of the time, who were more interested in the success of the woman's beauty and sexuality. Instead, in response to Britain's objectification as well as to the limited archives, and within a broader interest in the British imagining of Indian identity, in this chapter I look to the British experience and interpretation of nautch girls in exhibition in order to view the significances of those interpretations. I rely largely on periodicals, in which nautch often played a supporting, rather than a leading role, and thus I grapple with yet more gaps. However, reception evidence suggests that when watching nautch performance, consumers questioned the narratives raised in other media.

I am interested in more than merely the diversity in consumer response to nautch. The consequence of this diversity is that the discourses which enshrouded the nautch girl in politics and on the stage were drawn into question through the exhibition of the 'real' nautch girl. Again, however, I must stress that this chapter is not looking for a lost 'truth.' Where the women were from, and what particular regional dance forms they were performing for British audiences is unrecorded and remains unknown. This absence in the record is in itself indicative of the marginalisation of women, their arts and their power. In this way, I follow Spivak's (2010) argument that the subaltern voice is silenced; for certainly in the records the voice of the nautch girl is spoken for, rather than speaking (an issue that Chapter Six will query). Nevertheless, I also argue in this chapter that the narratives that were awarded to the exhibition of nautch girls helped both to confirm and to disrupt British expectations of Indian women, and at once authenticated, undermined and exposed the West's fantasy of the East.

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Although the history of the nautch has been well documented, little is known about the Victorian encounter with 'real' Indian dancer at the heart of the

Empire during the height of the British Raj. 'Nautch' was an Anglo-Indian term itself, and holds no equivalent in Indian languages. The history of nautch in India formed and changed under the terms of colonialism, reform, Indian nationalism and revival, which remain the principle areas of investigation in contemporary literature. The only other substantial research on nautch in Europe lies in Bor's chapter 'Mamia, Ammani and other *Bayaderes*: Europe's Portrayal of India's Temple Dancers' (2007: 39-40). Bor has looked at *The Bayaderes* (another term for Indian dancing girl or nautch), who, performing at the Adelphi Theatre in 1838, were the first Indian dance troupe to tour Europe. He argues that the group were celebrated as the greatest curiosities of London and operated as a legend come true. However, he fails to recognise that it was later in the century when nautch was more widely produced in the Empire's capital. By this time memory of the *Bayaderes* had faded. As *The Morning Post* reminded readers in 1885 "the dancers afford most Englishmen the opportunity of witnessing the celebrated nautch dance for the first time in their lives" (21 November 1885: 1). Significantly, exhibited nautch girls at this time operated both as popular curiosities, as Bor discovered with the earlier nautch tour, but also as a point of contention within the colonial fantasy, a matter Bor fails to identify. The encounter with nautch women corporeally rendered 'real' a politics of identity that transformed Indian women into immoral temptresses or oppressed victims (narratives upon which imperial power was partially founded) as it exposed the fiction. Furthermore, although Bor engages with literary accounts of the *devadasi* (Hindu temple dancers who were renamed nautch) in order to understand their reception in Europe, he fails to recognise the importance of other media, including the stage, and broader shifts in British-Indian relations, that produced nautch identities and against which the 'real' nautch was consumed and comprehended.

The nautch girl in London performed against the backdrop of artistic representations and missionary and civilising dialogues, which in some ways cemented a set of preconceived notions. Political and cultural representations offered the British public two conflating discourses of nautch, against which the 'real' nautch was known and judged. The first, evil and/or spellbinding; the



second, overtly sexual, backward and oppressed. It is, therefore, necessary to outline the wider portrayals of nautch before the encounter with nautch in London can be understood. Further, although contextualising the nautch offers few clues into where the London nautch were recruited, whether they were *devadasi*, *tawaifs*, or belonged to other regionals dance forms, broader descriptions of the nautch girl does help to frame the historical way the nautch girl was created, known and comprehended. Significantly, the London nautch was entangled in profound objectification and highly asymmetrical British imperial relationships with India. What also becomes significant is that the real nautch girl “of whom so much has been heard” (*The Pall Mall Gazette* 10 December 1885), also re-negotiated the relationship with the Other. In this chapter I also show that performers were not always interpreted as vivified illustration of political rhetoric and literature. Made visible in London, nautch at once energised moral panic in what was consumed as the excess of female sexuality, as she appeared powerful, beautiful, disappointing and absurd.

While situating the nautch in her socio-political landscape, I do not seek to rupture contemporary understanding of the colonial persecution of nautch, rather I seek to engage with this literature in order to address the exposure of nautch in London, and to ask how did the ‘real’ nautch play on the British imagination? In asking this question, what becomes important is that the exhibited nautch not only offered another representation of India in the exhibition arena, but it evoked and erased stereotypes of feminine exoticism and sexual excess that were playing out on a broader scope. This issue consequently paints a process of popular imperialism, and helped to produce descriptions of the Orient as exotic, mysterious, ancient and savage—issues, as we know, upon which colonialism and its forms of knowledge, notions of civilising and procedures of reform were drawn. While the tangible embodiment of the exotic female fantasy inspired emotional responses that were shaped by the wider socio-political sphere, it also paradoxically disassembled stereotypes. In this chapter I largely focus on the 1885 Liberty & Co. and 1885-6 Portland Hall exhibitions, which were particularly significant events. Although nautch was also recruited for the 1895-6 Empire of India (and Ceylon exhibitions), a number of Crystal Palace exhibitions and Earl’s

Court exhibitions, it was the 1885-6 events that caused the largest stir of excitement and incongruity. This chapter, then, reveals the ways in which sensational Others and exotic femininity were taken up in the heart of the Empire, and questions how the corporeal encounter played on racial fears, gendering, sexual anxieties, and illusory ideas about Indian femininity.

## THE NAUTCH GIRL IN INDIA

It is important to outline what was going on with the nautch girl in India at this time. The nautch girls of India are specific nineteenth-century historical victims of British and Indian patriarchy, elitist feminism and anthropologies that supported the imperial cause. James Mills, James Todd and Herbert Spenser, for example, all believed that the degraded status of women in Indian society pointed toward a backward society. The British, who placed themselves at the pinnacle of civilisation, broadly viewed Indian culture as ancient and static, against which the British assumed a 'duty' to uplift India from its premodern roots (as Chapters Two and Three have discussed). Within this discourse, the nautch dancer was the very definition of sexual and retrograde religious practice that for anthropologists and reformers was as uncivilised as it was exotic. It is not without significance that the exhibition of nautch coincided with a time when it was transforming into an important topic in ethnographic research as well as public debate over 'civilising' India.

The story of the nautch girl in India is not unknown. Dance as a significant discourse in civilising ideology and as an important element for the strategies of imperialism has been discussed in the field of dance studies (Chakravorty, 2006; Joep, 2007; Meduri and Spear, 2004; Paxton, 1999; Srinivasan, 1983; Wallace; 1988; Hubel, 2005; Soneji, 2012), anthropology (Thobani, 2017) and postcolonial theory (Dirks, 1992; Spivak, 1996). As these scholars show, nautch, an anglicised corruption of the Hindi/Urdu word *nach*, meaning dance, originated in British-ruled India, and is, as Chakravorty asserts, representative of the "cultural and political transformations in India due to the impact of British colonialism" (2006: 116-7). Nautch was a term given by the

British to Indian dancers, yet while including numerous temple and folk dance forms, often referred to the widely discussed *devadasi*. *Devadasi* were Hindu temple dancers, dedicated to worship and wedded to the temple, whose traditions were obliterated by anti-nautch legislations. Their techniques followed the traditions of the *natyasastra*, a Sanskrit work on dance, and they performed classical movements practiced and repeated over centuries. In fact the *devadasi*, trained in the arts from infancy, had established themselves as professional experts by the thirteenth century. They sang, danced, recited poetry and were important community figures who also happened to entertain male patrons. It was during the nineteenth century when the *devadasi* art, lumped by the British with other dance forms, courtesans and prostitutes as nautch, was targeted and almost destroyed (Meduri and Spear 2004: 435-440). It was during the era of colonisation when distinctions between the *devadasi*, the accomplished nautch, and the common prostitute blurred into a rampant objection to all female dancers. This objection included a number of anti-nautch legislations, including the 1860 Indian Penal Code and the later 1934 Devadasi Act, which led to the demise of the *devadasis* social and economic freedoms. As a result, dancers were ostracised from society and rendered unemployed, and many women were forced to enact the Orientalist narrative which had been attached to them, having little other choice than to turn to common prostitution (Meduri and Spear, 2004: 439).

Scholars have broadly identified the history of nautch under the conditions of imperialism, and recognise that Indian dancers became an important issue for administrators, missionaries, Hindu reformers and Indian nationalists, all of whom viewed nautch—in all its various components—as a cultural practice that was built upon vice. The rediscovery of the *Natyashastra* in European archives between 1865 and 1894, which became important to Indian nationalism that took pride in India's aesthetic history (Meduri and Spear, 2004: 437), only recast nautch as a corrupted temple practice by looking for a 'purer' original. A leading attack came from the anti-nautch campaigns led by missionaries, including activist and feminist Josephine Butler (leader of the protests against the C.D. Acts), American born Dr. Kate Bushnell and Mrs. Elizabeth Andrew. Like the earlier Western voyeurs, missionaries grouped a

range of regional dance forms together as nautch. Although there were major differences and little to no connection between the *devdasi* of South and East India, the North and Northwest *tawaifs*, other regional dance forms such as the *lavani*, *nachwali* (common dancers), singers, courtesans and prostitutes, differentiations were lost to those who ran the anti-nautch campaigns, just as they were largely lost to colonial settlers. Working within and helping to provoke the shift in British–Indian relations, especially those of a sexual nature, missionaries believed that the *devadasis* were treated as nothing more than property and commerce by corrupt temple workers. Understanding nautch and *devdasi* to be one and the same, missionaries—including female missionaries who regarded themselves to be feminists—were shocked by the *devadasis*' embodiment of religion and eroticism. Women who wedded themselves to their gods yet were also sexually free (for they usually had patrons, and could exercise choice to some degree, depending on region/ time period), and whose virginites were sold upon reaching puberty, could not be understood through the Evangelist's gaze.

Campaigners viewed nautch girls as victims fallen to lives of debauchery, and set about to 'liberate' their Indian 'sisters'. Seeking to relieve dancers from prostitution, Butler launched brutal efforts to teach nautch girls Christian values (Wallace, 1998: 180-81). Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp (2003) have edited an extensive compilation of articles, pamphlets and letters written by Josephine Butler. These show that as Butler turns her eye on India, the collection reveals "the same combination of public agitation and pressure for parliamentary repeal that had brought success in the home campaign" (Jordan and Sharp, 2003: 1). Bushnell and Andrew aligned with Butler's firm belief that 'fallen women' were the victims of male desire and male laws, viewing prostitution as a trade qualified by men. These women saw themselves as saviours, and blamed male lust for Indian women's moral demise. Their crusades against the *devadasi* indicate "the reasons behind the participation of one female group in the suppression of another" (Hubel, 2005: 122).

The groups of prostitutes and nautch girls who accompanied British regiments in India, meanwhile, were another source of anxiety, with venereal disease coming to the particular attention of politics and governance (Levine, 1994: 579). Officials in the Indian army held firm that the common man—who was lacking in education—needed an ‘outlet’ for his instincts (Jordan and Spear, 2003: 1-2), while campaigners (including Butler) believed that the army was endorsing prostitution and abusing women through medical examinations. Both believed that sexual restraint on the man’s part indicated his intelligence. While working in Geneva, Butler was pleased to see a large portion of young men condemn the notion that vice was the sign of manliness, and she measured the men who aligned with her views to be both intelligent and ardent (Butler, 1909: 229). Army Officials and missionaries alike therefore equated the patronage of prostitution and nautch as indicators of an undereducated sort of man who was driven by his natural desires. As Jordan and Sharp argue, from “having been almost the mark of a man, sexual profligacy came to be seen as something not commensurate with army regime” (2003).

Strengthening the drive against the *devadasi*, the anti-nautch campaigns were joined by a powerful group of Indian social reformers who were influenced by Western ideas and Victorian moral values (Srinivasan, 1983: 76). As Srinivasan (1983) and Spivak (1996) explain, social reformers operated within desires to break the *devadasis*’ economic power and within British discourses of modernity and reform. Chatterjee (1989: 623) points out that indigenous administrators were working with Western discourses as a response/rejection of British domination. The rewriting of dance history by the nationalist elites and revivalists, Chakravorty contends “obliterated in one sweep the history of the *devadasi* and nautch dancers from the national history of India” (2000-2001: 113). Other scholars however, have shown that despite the demise of Indian dancers under new ideals of femininity being dictated by male Hindu reformists, the *devadasi* tradition continued for a long time in Karnataka. Ramberg (2014) and Soneji (2012) both discuss the fate and survival of the *devadasi*. Through ethnographic fieldwork and historical research Soneji (2012) reminds us that the history of the *devadasi* is

unfinished. Meduri and Spear (2004: 440) similarly reference actions of resistance by *devadasi* women. Yet, these scholars also all recognise that without a valued place in the conventional Hindu domestic system, *devadasis* were reduced to subalternity.

## SHIFTING BRITISH ATTITUDES

Without question, the dancers' subalternity, although joined by Indian reformists, was led by a British shift in attitude towards nautch during the transfer of Company rule to the Crown, which, for present purposes, is more crucial. For this, we need to look only a little further back. As Ghosh (2006), Thobani (2017) and Collingham (2001) explain, although nautch dominated the entertainment scene throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and was enjoyed by the East India Company Official, the associations of nautch with prostitution under Crown rule threatened the British-ness of the rulers in India, who increasingly sought to separate themselves from Indian women in order to exert their own difference, 'purity' and power. Ghosh (2006) charts the changing attitudes of the Anglo-Indian, who before Crown rule immersed himself in Indian culture and during the Raj anxiously distanced himself from sexual activities with Indian women. British Officials began to feel uneasy about the 'impropriety' of Indian dance, marking what Collingham has described as the Anglo-Indian's transformation from the wealthy East India Company servant, known as the nabob, to the sahib: "a sober, bureaucratic representative of the Crown" (2001: 3). The British in India, who had once intermingled more comfortably in Indian culture, now wore their British ideals like an armour, and viewed nautch as immoral and disgusting (Collingham, 2001: 54), a notion that was shared by anti-nautch campaigners.

This view was not always male-led, and the ideas lay also in notions of British womanhood. Nautch was viewed as a problem of womanhood not only for British men, but also British women. During the reign of the Raj, British men in India were encouraged to marry English women, and disassociate

themselves from the joys of Indian culture in the restoration of 'home' standards. After being crowned Empress of India, Queen Victoria stimulated colonial settling by encouraging the migration of marriageable British women to India, leading to "a significant *gendering* of India" (Singh, 1996: 11). British values of family and domesticity now travelled to India in a far more tangible form, and as British women occupied India it was believed that they needed protecting from native life. Indeed, "the main premise of the colonial gender system was a *rescue scenario*, whereby the sexual purity of British women, and by inference of the colonial society, must be preserved by the closed enclaves of domesticity or civilisation" (ibid). British male sexuality, believed to be easily provoked by exotic female sexuality, transformed into something to be feared and mistrusted, and became a global liability. As Hyam explains, Britain's "narrow, blinkered, defective and intolerant attitudes towards sex... all too successfully imposed on the rest of the world" (Hyam, 1992: 3). It was with the closure of British-Indian exchanges, and the entrance of British women into the colonial sphere, that nautch invigorated anxieties over a man's ability to control his visceral nature, and therefore his British-ness. On those grounds, it was viewed as an entertainment best avoided, though before well-enjoyed.

The Prince of Wales' visit to Madras in 1876, during which he was entertained by a nautch performance, echoes changing tolerances of nautch. *The Graphic* described the event, reporting that for the Prince's pleasure the nautch girl "began by a continuous wriggle... then she suddenly changed her mood, and jerkily capered as if galvanized, contorting herself spasmodically and ungracefully" (*The Graphic* 29 January 1876). The nautch girl was clearly encountered as a repulsive and graceless figure. Nevertheless, she was also in danger of captivating, and this was perceived as threatening, particularly to white women whose men might be seduced.

Fig 5.1. Miscellaneous  
Illustrations. *The Graphic* 29  
January 1876

Fig 5.1, an illustration of the event, captures the white woman's fear of the white man's enjoyment of nautch. The Prince of Wales' wife looks at her husband, gauging his reaction to the dancer. It is in her look that the anxiety lies: the dancer, with her twisting body rising and her arms thrown behind her head, demands all eyes, except hers. The Prince of Wales, meanwhile, is engaged in the performance, leaning forward to view the dancer. The scene reveals the growing anxiety of the body, its wants and pleasures and the growing fear of racial mixing. The illustration is also indicative of the increasing solidification of separations. For although the Prince is engaged, there is a very clear division between East and West, which is reflective of the British removal from the pleasures of nautch entertainment, and Indian culture along with it.

Meanwhile, though British policies, Hindu reformers and missionaries encountered and campaigned against *devadasi* tradition, nautch was being



consumed in Britain. British views of nautch understood the nautch girl as a woman married to a Hindu god, yet under the Raj she transformed into something more like a showgirl to entertain a wealthy clientele, and nautch girls were soon persecuted for being 'prostitutes.' In London, the nautch girl was a frequent character not only of newspaper experts, which largely conformed to narratives being drawn elsewhere, but also of popular culture, which had also found a taste for the exotic East. As a product of shock, difference, glamour and promiscuity, the Indian dancer fixated Orientalist fantasy and she became a compelling character of entertainment. Colonial policies of nautch may have been a distant issue of foreign politics for the British public, but theatre, art and literature that brought the nautch 'home'. As we shall see, it was against the representation of nautch in popular culture that the 'real' exhibited nautch was judged.

## SHAPING THE ENCOUNTER

The Anglo-Indians' attendance of nautch in India was a regular topic in the British press, which began to scorn those who attended the entertainment—meaning that even in Britain nautch was becoming labelled as taboo. For example, the *Illustrated London News* informed readers that while the early settlers of the East India Company were regularly entertained by nautch, "of late years this has become comparatively rare" (19 December 1857: 602). Similarly, the *Women's Herald* declared "[a] very necessary protest has been made against the laxity shown by too many Europeans in countenancing the nautch dances, the dances are lascivious, and the songs grossly immoral, the influence of such entertainments is to debase and defile" (June 29, 1893). During the reign of the Raj, nautch became a site upon which new orders of power and separation between the colonised and colonisers were drawn. For this reason, the figure of the nautch "encodes an entire history of transcultural global relations... Her production rests on the essentialisation of racial-cultural identities on all sides of the post/colonial divide; it also acts as a

screed upon which various forms of racial-sexual desire, as well as spiritual and artistic aspiration, can be projected” (Thobani, 2017: 23-24).

The nautch girl had a long history in English depictions of India in European travel writing, memoirs, diaries and poetry, dating as far back as to Marco Polo’s accounts in 1307. As Qureshi (2011: 173) argues more broadly, literature was a resource used to judge human displays, and provided a point of comparison and authentication. In fact the pamphlets that described exhibited peoples lives and customs, which could be purchased by patrons, often relied on travel literature (Qureshi, 2012c: 30). While often enjoyed by the East India Company official, the British imagination had long conceived nautch as intoxicating and immoral, and travel memoirs, as Hubel explains, symbolise the wonder and sexuality which Europeans equated with the East (2005:123). By the eighteenth century, the nautch girl was understood in Europe as a woman of the temple, yet the majority of literature also labelled her a wanton courtesan, a devious temptress and a prostitute. Although the tales of nautch in literature occasionally questioned the nautch girl’s grace and beauty, dancers were most frequently described as mysterious ‘beings’ who appealed to the baser instincts of men. Nineteenth-century newspapers often featured excerpts of travel diaries, capturing British interest in the allure of the nautch girl, whilst historically associating her with loose character. In British newspapers nautch girls were habitually described as the “prettiest and most graceful creature[s] ever seen” (*Leeds Mercury* 10 July 1886). “It is their languishing glances, wanton smiles, and attitudes not quite consistent with decency, which are so much admired” observed Mrs. Kindersley in her travel diary (1777: 231-232). The nautch girl was also was given mythic and magnetic quality. Recounting the “wonderful beauty” of nautch girls, C.J.C. Davideon, Esq, in *Diary of Travels and Adventures in Upper India*, declared that the nautch girl was a “creature that you would walk a thousand miles barefoot to see” (*Lloyd’s Weekly*, 19 November 1843). Nautch girls were associated with an overpowering seductive and dangerous beauty, flirtatiously telling stories of passions, love, despair, jealousy and hope “by their looks and movements alone” (*The Times* 23 March 1859: 12). It was widely agreed that these girls possessed a devious and inebriating attraction

over the sensibilities of men. *The Life of Mrs. Shirwood* published in 1854 informed readers that the nautch girl had influence “over the other sex... This influence steals upon the senses of those who come within its charmed circle in a way not unlike the effect of an intoxicating drug” (cited Wallace 1988: 180).

The illustrations of nautch that regularly appeared in British newspapers repetitively linked nautch to religious rituals. In imagery the nautch girl was often sketched as a practitioner of savagery, fire-worship and idol-sacrifice; depictions that more firmly inserted the notion of oppositional religious moralities and Britain’s ‘obligation’ to civilise. Figure 5.2 featured in *The Graphic* 22 in June 1878, for example, represents nautch as a ritual of outdoor fire-worship, characterising the dancers as animalistic wild women. Similarly, Figure 5.3, ‘Pictures from India’ supplemented an article in the *Penny illustrated and Illustrated Times* about the Prince of Wales’ attendance of a nautch dance in Madras. The illustration was, according to the article, a copy of a ‘native drawing.’ The article that ran alongside the image informed readers that the nautch girl was attached to “Indian idols” and that the women themselves were chosen for their beauty. Showing semi-naked women dancing wildly in front of a temple, the drawing supposedly ‘evidenced’ “the immense elevation of Christianity over Indian superstitions” (*Pictures of India Penny illustrated and Illustrated Times*. 16 October 1875).

Figure 5.2. *The Graphic* 22 June 1878

Fig 5.3. Pictures of India *Penny illustrated and Illustrated Times*. 16 October 1875

The idol-worshipping sexually enticing Indian temptress was also a regular feature of the stage. *The Nautch Girl* opera at the Savoy Theatre in 1891 for example, which ran an impressive two hundred performances, told a story of an Indian Rajah whose son falls in love with a nautch girl of low caste. The girl's beauty is so overpowering, the Rajah's son eats beef in order to rid himself of his own caste so that he will be free to marry her. Chapter Two has outlined the literature that deals with nineteenth-century theatre, explaining that Gould (2011), Ziter (2003), Gregory (1991), Hall and Rose (2006), Booth (1981), Bratton (1991) and Richards (2016) have all engaged with depiction of the East on the Victorian stage. These scholars commonly agree that portrayals of distant places amidst the zenith of the British Empire became associated with spectacle, delight, and mystery. Within the exoticising of the East, the Indian female body was a particular and thrilling highlight, and was "significant within the context of imperialism and its components" (Barlas, 2015: 179). Alongside the Hindu widow, the nautch girl, alluring, evil and abused, was the most widely distributed stereotype of Indian women during the nineteenth century (Wallace, 1998:180). While on occasion protagonists, representations of nautch were often marginal characters that

added flavours of exoticism and savagery. In opera and melodrama nautch characters were regularly typecast as erotic victims of Brahmin priests, who claimed their virginites at puberty connecting themselves and the girls to the supernatural realm of daemons, deities, snakes and nymphs, and prostitution. The recurrence of the Eastern woman on the popular stage continued to objectify the female body and linked that Eastern femininity to oppression and Otherness, whilst making the nautch girl commercially and politically viable.

At the same time, theatre also enabled the exotic female body to evade discourses that the anti-nautch campaigns attached to nautch (Barlas, 2015: 179). Unlike other Indian topics, including the 'Mutiny' (as discussed by Gould (2011), Richards (2016) and Yeandle (2015)), portrayals of nautch were not made topical in wider debates. Instead, theatrical productions depicted them as 'creatures' of seductive charm and immoral decadence, which fed broader notions of rescuing and civilising, rather than referring to specific legislations or reform. This nourished a general mode of thought about Indian femininity and civilising, rather than rallying support for specific reform efforts. What is more important for the purposes of understanding reception of the 'real' nautch in London, is that theatre had long perpetuated a farcical yet 'palatable' version of nautch. Nautch characters of the stage were a point around which victimisation, evilness or tales of forbidden love were sketched. These were inauthentic characters of the stage that impersonated an eroticised and highly inauthentic version of nautch. For example, in the 1877 operatic ballet *Nautch Dance* (in Paris called *La Bayadere*) the nautch girl was played by Anna Pavlova. The dance was choreographed by Ruth St. Denis (who went on to produce other dance performances based on Indian themes including *The Dance of the Black and Gold Sari*, *The Cobras*, *Yogi* and *The Cosmic Dance of Siva*). Ruth St. Denis was a particularly important actor in dance revival when nautch became an expression of Indian culture (Chakravorty 2006: 117). However, despite her strive for authenticity, the movements and costumes of nautch characters devised by Ruth St. Denis were only a dull imitation of nautch tradition. Although arguably blurring the boundaries of cultures in the production of transcultural art (as Barlas 2015: 200 claims), actors who played nautch not only performed outlandish

storylines, they also could not replicate, and had no access to the ancient movements that had been practiced by Indian dancers for centuries. The result was that the 'real' nautch girl, in particular her movements, offered something very different, unexpected and unknown to audiences to whom the story of the nautch girl was becoming so familiar through other media.

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These—briefly—were the major media and discourses through which the nautch girl of India was conceived, known and targeted. In Britain, she was a temptress of the stage, a figure of immorality, seduction and also cultural evil. Her beauty and her 'wanton' looks stole upon the baser instincts of men. According to artworks, the nautch girl was the incarnation of savage devil work; she was figure who required Christian salvation from idols by the British. All the while, nautch was also a very real threat to the increasing divides between the British and Indians, along which racial purity and power were drawn. She was the focus of 'rescue' campaigns led by anti-nautch movements, which while seeking to 'civilise', supported the strategies of imperialism and British power. She was also the 'cause' of venereal disease amongst British troops, and a victim of the Contagious Disease Acts. What is interesting is that the 'real' nautch exhibited in London worked within, yet also exceeded these discourses. The exhibition of nautch both revelled in and demystified the inventive figure that had been so widely illustrated, as she was being re-objectified as a successful or unsuccessful incarnation of exotic sexuality.

I thus now consider the exhibited nautch in the two parts in which they were broadly being encountered. The first explores how the nautch operated as a tempting and sexual exoticism; the second explores the breaking of fantasies. While I pay attention to the issue that nautch girls existed as ethnographical curiosities, and like other Indian performers they were imported as *commodities*, I am primarily interested in the embodied discovery of the 'real' nautch in London. On one hand, encapsulating imaginative and other representations, the 'real' nautch was consumed as exotic, sexual and

captivating. On the other hand, she was encountered as monotonous, unappealing and boring—narratives that were incongruous with the wider discourses being dictated by reformers and popular culture. This disappointment de-glamorised and discredited the invented Other, and exposed the fantasies which other descriptions were spawning. Corporeality and spectatorship were essential to the invention and the re-production of identities. When making these arguments, I do not seek to downplay the issue that nautch illustrated highly unequal power relations, or that nautch re-established the (male dominated) margins of Victorian ideas about the respectable behaviour of women in the colonial homeland and beyond. Rather, I hope to reveal that with the performer's body written upon, Western values found their embodiment in the dancer, yet her exposure also reflected and constructed, and to some extent exposed and resisted those values for a home audience.

## PART 1: EMBODYING FANTASIES

Before arriving to London in the winter of 1885, newspapers around the country excitedly reported that a number of nautch girls had departed India for upcoming performances at the Albert Palace in London, and they were widely expected to be the new sensation of the metropolis. “The chief and crowning attraction of this invasion,” an initial review of the 1885 exhibition declared “will be the nautch girls, who will pose and gesture, glide, duck and swim, which they call dancing - and why not? - all to the weird strains of native airs played on native instruments, tom-toms, and own cousins to zithers and such like” (*Manchester Times*, 24 October 1885: 7). Anticipated to be an exotic fantasy-come-true, the exhibition of nautch was expected to be hugely popular. Although they never materialised as the “crowning attractions”, the nautch girl was sometimes read as an embodiment of an exotic and immoral charm. One keen observer commented that as a rule nautch girls were “exceedingly good-looking and invariably immoral” (*The Sporting Times* 24 September 1887: 6). Although another reporter wondered if the “best” nautch girls would ever be introduced to England, he admitted

that the nautch girls of London's "soft dark eyes" and "flowing raven hair" were "bewitching" (*Hull Daily Mail* 1 January 1896). Another reporter was permitted to meet the nautch girls at their lodgings. Arousing the descriptions of travel literature, he described the nautch girls of the Albert Palace as "dark-skinned beauties" who looked upon him curiously with their "great black eyes" (*The Pall Mall Gazette* 10 December 1885). The journalist admitted that the girls stole upon his senses and reserve. Testing out his limited knowledge of their language the journalist attempted, abashedly, to say words of welcome to the "dark" women from the "flowery East." According to his report, a light gleamed in one of the girls' eyes at his knowledge of her language, and they had a whispered conversation "that need not be repeated." He was then entertained by a dance, and as the fiddler and drummer seated themselves on the floor:

the Nautch girl entered, having changed from her workday garb for the ample folds of gauzy muslin and red stockings. She fixed the rings on her feet, and giving a motion to the orchestra began a sort of slow step dance, which she accompanied by a low, monotonous chant, rising as the music grew quicker into a loud musical cry of great volume, the body moving in snakelike contortions.

(*The Pall Mall Gazette* 10 December 1885)

Just as travel diaries had warned, the dancers conjured intoxicating sexual magnetism. Yet this article also represents the embodiment of an icon, and an encounter that was tangible. Being able to converse with the nautch girls was a particular point of excitement, an opportunity that had only once before been extended to the British at home. Another reviewer noted the crowds' envy when a gentleman's "knowledge of the language" enabled him to sustain "a most interesting conversation with the fairest of the nautch girls" at the Portland Hall exhibition (*The Era* 16 January 1886). What was said in whispered conversations however, was a secretive matter that fed portrayals of the nautch girls' mystery and charm, and the nautch continued to claim an enchanting sexual allure over men. In reviews this was all about the male gaze, so receptions operated in an exoticism and objectification of Indian dancers that was purportedly male-inspired (a notion that was also taken up by female missionaries and their crusades against nautch in India). According



to the press, the nautch girls performed “strange feats for the amusement of men and boys” (*Sporting Times* 8 May 1886). It was male reporters who lusted after the girls, and apparently only Englishmen who looked and made moves to speak with them. As noted, *The Morning Post* reminded readers “the dancers afford most Englishmen the opportunity of witnessing the celebrated nautch dance for the first time in their lives” (21 November 1885: 1). Although women would also have been spectators of nautch in London, for reviewers fixated on the man’s gaze and the power of the nautch girl over men.

Unlike consumption in India however, in London there was a desire to mark the entertainment as respectable. Spectators of the India in London exhibition were reminded that “as a general rule, the Hindostan women regard the Nautch wallah, or professional *danseuse*, with feelings of lively abhorrence” (*Sporting Times* 8 May 1886). Although dance in the nineteenth century was more broadly regarded as a conflicting meeting of sexual immorality (being associated with prostitution) and artistry (including ballet), the nautch women in London were distinguished from the ‘wallah’ (prostitute) and *danseuse* (professional ballet dancer). Some British viewers similarly attempted to differentiate their enjoyment of nautch from native patronage, and suggested that it was the audience who determined the nautch girls’ respectability. *The London News* explained that “[t]he nautch, as a mere exhibition, is perfectly decorous; but the ordinary professional female dancers hired for the amusement of wealthy natives do not bear a good reputation” (4 April 1891).

Nevertheless, the nautch girls’ exoticism, strangeness, immorality and power to intoxicate British men stir simultaneously in these reports, as they had done in literature and in anti-nautch narrative. While some claimed that the exhibition of nautch was “perfectly decorous”, reviewers generally recognised the nautch girls’ charm, admitting their desires not only to look but also to speak to the women (alarmingly, sometimes even touch them). As discussed, Britain’s depiction of nautch had long dictated that the Eastern dancer possessed intoxicating appeal and influence over the baser instincts of men. This was a characterisation that exhibition-viewers attached to the nautch

girls of London (although, as we will see later, this narrative was also being contested). In numerous reviews the nautch's sexuality was claimed to be as stirring as it was inappropriate. The *Newcastle Weekly* reported that the attire of the nautch girls performing at the Liberty & Co. display "is of the scantiest - a kirtle of the shortest possible dimensions with an upper dress of the tinniest gauze" (13 November 1885). *The Era* similarly noted that the nautch girl "is a being of loveliness not entirely unassociated with impropriety and a lavish display of her "personal advantages." There is a sensuous charm in her every movement, and by her voluptuous attitudes she enthralls the senses" (19 December 1885). Upon meeting the 1885 troupe of dancers in their lodgings and smelling wafts of cooking a *Pall Mall Gazette* correspondent refused to let the "dark-skinned beauties" allude his imagination. "Can it be that the far-famed nautch girl eats—? but no, why spoil the illusion of my youth? And even Nautch girls must eat, for the fumes of food had crept up from the lower regions" (*The Pall Mall Gazette* 10 December 10, 1885). Forced to accept the nautch girl had basic human needs, the reporter also imagined that food fed her sexuality, with 'fumes' rising "up from the lower regions."

The nautch girls' movements were often perceived as sexually magnetic. Their bodies played an enigmatic and caricatured part through dance, supposedly holding mesmerising power over the physical instincts which the 'civilised' West was trying so hard to suppress. Reviews of nautch routinely described dances as bestial and spellbinding. *The Pall Mall Gazette* reporter termed the nautch girl's actions as "snakelike." The dancer's body, moving, curving, rising, and accompanied by climaxing cries, was given a powerful erotic and anti-Christian twist by the British gaze. Often described as "contort[ing] their bodies into the letter S" (*The Sporting Times* 8 May 1886: 2), the exhibited nautch girl paralleled not only the seducing serpent, but also Eve as the fallen woman, and whether praised or condemned was observed as a temptress who awakened the qualities of original sin. Depicted as immoral 'creatures' or 'snakes', Indian dancers stirred anxiety over anti-Christian, anti-Empire temptation, debauchery and man's control over his nature. Referring to 1886 performers, an article reminded that the nautch girl of India "lead a life which is exposed to the worst temptations and vices" (*The*

*York Herald* January 2 1886). A prevailing conclusion was that their charms played all too powerfully on male instincts, perverting Englishmen's self-control. Sexual sensation renewed into the woman's 'invitation' and 'fault' raising not only interracial desire but also anxiety. For the girls, with their jet-black hair, nose rings and costumes, were not only "objects of considerable interest" but were also "not backward in responding to the advances of Europeans" (*Daily News* 23 December 1885). It easily followed that in the changing cultural and political attitude toward sexuality, nautch posed a tangible threat to a man's control over his sexual compulsions, and by extension his patriotism, country and civilisation. It is important to remember that the encounter with nautch in London coincided not with the East India Company Official's prevailing patronage of nautch, but with the demise of the British enjoyment of nautch under Crown rule.

On the home front, the 'real' nautch girls' 'powers' posed an additional threat to national security. A review at the Empire of India Exhibition remarked that one "of the females" had decided she had no intention of returning home, adding that she had said she would be quite willing to marry an Englishman (*Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 15 September 1895). The nautch girl in London appeared dangerous since she claimed not only the British space but also potentially the British man, and thus posed a threat to British civilisation. As both the *Yorkshire Herald* and *The York Herald* reminded: "[t]he Anglo-Indian and European regard the Indian nautch-girl as a relic of a barbaric past; but... often forget that the past of the Western nations was as barbarous" (27 December 1892: 3). One only had to look at the nabob, who was a frequent caricature of the stage, to see the corruptive and degenerative influence of India and its charms on the British body. As the nineteenth century wore on, the nabob, who was well known for enjoying nautch, awakened anxiety that 'British-ness' and racial purity were not fixed attributes. Sleeping with Indian women, the nabob represented a grotesque hybrid of East and West, and symbolised "imperial desire (both sexual and economic) and colonial contagion (both physical and cultural)" (Gould, 2011: 94). Although the nautch girl aroused and produced heterosexual 'norms' (of male desire for the female body), the nautch girl lived outside the Victorian sexual code, which restricted

sex to marriage. She continued to operate as a temptress and a menace to British-Indian relations, and even in London was perceived to be a seducer of white men, white purity, white power and white reserve.

As a commercial product designed to promote sales of luxury Oriental products, the nautch girl in London was also a seducer of white wealth, and therefore appealed to a different clientele than she did in India, and this played a central role in shaping the encounter. In India, nautch enjoyment was increasingly associated with 'low class' form of entertainment. The British India under the East India Company actively encouraged officers to take Indian mistresses as an 'outlet' for what they viewed as natural needs. Prostitutes and nautch troupes toured with British military camps, and regimental brothels regulated prostitution making it readily available to soldiers. Under the Raj, nautch girls were viewed as an incitement to unregulated sexual activity. As Collingham (2001) explains, the growing British disdain for nautch was an integral component of the new regime of power and changing ideas about the body and sexuality, and sexuality was perceived to be a growing threat to self-control and Britain's racial purity. In London, however, the nautch girl was often displayed in events that welcomed high-class spectators, meaning that her body was also a marketable tool for the promotion of expensive Indian goods. The Portland hall exhibition, for example, was a popular site of the upper classes, while the Liberty & Co. exhibition was a commercial advertisement of costly items sold at the department store. Set within these venues, the nautch girl, who was sexually exotic and also artistic, cultural and beautifully clothed, operated as a commodity and appealed to expensive tastes.

I do not suggest that her appeal to a different clientele diminished the nautch girls' perceived threat. Like Victorian fine art paintings of the nude (which as Smith (1996: 1-2) argues coincided with public concern over sexual morality), the nautch girl appealed to high-class susceptibilities as she invigorated invitation into unregulated sexual activity. At once an apogee of superior consumerism, the exhibited nautch girl was also assaultive to morality. She was therefore not only a point of India's moral degeneration, but also

Britain's. Sexual matters were increasingly faced with fear in nineteenth-century Britain, and while the nautch were often exhibited for commercial purposes as imported commodities, they also participated easily with intensifying sexual taboos and fears of racial mixing thought threatening to the British race and Empire. In nineteenth-century Britain "it was increasingly urged that, if the British empire was to survive, the imperial race must exercise sexual restraint, and government must intervene to enforce it" (Hyam, 1992: 1). Social historians agree that definitions of sexual 'normality' and 'abnormality' are social constructs acting "as the mechanisms of control" (Weeks 1981: 5). As Stoler (1995: 4) stresses, the management of sexual practices was fundamental to the colonial order of things. The Victorians, as Hyam (1992: 72) shows, disparaged sentimentalism and lack of sexual control. Indeed, Hyam makes a persuasive argument that sexual attitudes "crucially underpinned the whole operation of British empire and Victorian expansion" (1992: 1). These erotic and interracial anxieties attached easily to the experience of nautch. Since the dancers' seductive charm threatened to seduce British men, she also threatened Britain by extension.

We cannot ignore the issue that the London nautch girl was also at odds with Empire and stood as a paradox in colonial consumptions and moralities at home and abroad. Although it became increasingly viewed that empire was inconsistent with home morality (Hyam, 1992: 72), the nautch in was inconsistent with the morality of empire. While it was in India where anti-nautch campaigns were at their zenith, it was in London where the 'naughty' nautch was being recast as sexually tempting, but also as an expensive and enjoyable cultural delight. It follows that the nautch in London was a complex commodity; she was beautiful and artistic as well as dangerous and tempting. As Chapters Three and Four have shown, India was not slotted into a savage or ugly race. Rather its arts represented premodernity at the same time as they were held in high esteem. Similarly, the nautch girl in London was not only an exotica but she was also expensive, proficient and beautiful. Though the nautch girls did not fit within the canon of the Western ideal female—white, delicate and passive in nature—she instigated new narratives of beauty that provoked and challenged the West's idea of femininity.

The nautch girls were favourably distinguished: their dark skin, hair and eyes were celebrated as beautiful. As seen in the illustrations below (Figs 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6), the nautch girls in London evoked a sumptuous, relaxed and commanding presence. Unlike the African woman, who, as Reilly argues, caused Victorian audiences in London to experience “a sexual prurience and deep desire to encounter the Other, even if this desire was expressed as disgust” (2014: 116), the nautch girls’ appeal was openly acknowledged. Although artworks, including those featured in *The Graphic* and *The Illustrated News* and other popular newspapers perpetuated an ornamented female body, whose exposed midriffs or bare feet showcased an exotic and excessive sexuality, Indian women also appeared unafraid, demure, and authoritative. The issue that this beauty remained inseparable from ideas of exoticism and difference was by no means extinguished, however, the nautch girl here emerges not as a victim, nor a seducer, but a woman in control of herself and her environment.

Fig 5.4  
Indians at Portland Hall,  
Langham-Place.  
*The Graphic*, 6 February 1886.

Fig 5.5 Nautch Girl, Cashmere.  
*The Graphic* 20 October 1875

Fig 5.6 A Nautch Girl Dancing. *Illustrated  
London News* 4 April 1891

## PART II: BREAKING FANTASIES

These responses, which resided in discourses of sexuality, exoticism, threat and beauty, were by no means characteristic of all reviews. The ‘real’ nautch in London generated a wealth of anticipation, excitement, and quite often, escaping the high expectations literature and the stage had conjured, a sigh of disappointment. On the one hand, nautch girls were often judged as erotic and licentious. On the other however, British responses were also often nauseated, as consumers either confessed to the nautch girls’ seductive power, or denied it altogether. Marking a contention between the real and the fictitious nautch, the embodied and the imagined, nautch performers, who were predicted to be celestial and hypnotising, whose mysterious movements and exotic beauty would, literature had taught, hypnotise the bodily instincts of men, were often encountered as dull and graceless in the face-to-face encounter. While many reviews admired and lusted after the women, others commented on the “stomping”, sedate and repetitive nature of the dancer’s movements. The dancing girls go, informed the *Illustrated London News*, “through a series of slow gestures which are supposed to be graceful” (4 April

1891: 431). Similarly, the nautch girls of the Albert Place, according to *The Era*, danced to dreary music “and as it strikes up the nautch girls began to stamp, very much like a Baby Elephant does, to the music... this “stamping” is varied by “stomping”” (*The Era* 19 December 1885). Their chanting was “monotonous” and their charm over the opposite sex was unconvincing (*The Era* 19 December 1885). Exhibitions therefore not only bought the exotic Oriental woman ‘authentically’ to life for London, and dancers not only appeared as an incarnation of stage and political portrayals, but they also delivered an unusual feminine form unlike the British representation of Indian woman that dominated the period.

Reception divided, many expected something more sensual and enthralling of nautch performance, and once transported out of the imagination and into flesh, the nautch girl did not always live up to the lavish, supernatural and frightening descriptions spectators had fantasised over in other media. “Perhaps in this instance, we went in expecting too much” reported *The Standard*, “[o]ur imaginations had been excited by the drawings of the special artists of the illustrated papers, who, having at one time another been entrusted with a mission to India, have drawn upon their imaginations as well as upon their sketch books” (21 November 1885). Meanwhile, a ‘Lady’s Letter’ published in the *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* even declared that the nautch girl at the Portland Hall “was not at all worth seeing” (6 February 1886). The letter explained that the girls “simply performed a few very slow and uninteresting [movements] with much waving of their large ugly hands” (ibid). The dancing girls of 1891 were similarly regarded as “a rather dull and tedious spectacle... their languishing glances would not seem particularly seductive to men of a Western race” (*Illustrated London News* 4 April 1891). We might argue that one way the British experience coped with the palpable sexuality of the dancer was to dismiss her seductive charms altogether. Indeed, those who denied the beauty of the nautch did so at least partly in attempt to separate themselves from their own desires and to mark their difference. Certainly, the rejection of the dancers’ sexuality was made in order to distinguish British ‘race’ by naming nautch as un-seductive. Yet, the rejection was also founded in a conflict between the illusory and the corporeal



encounter. Ironically, read against the imaginative image invoked in literature and art, the 'real' nautch left reviewers questioning if the dancers were authentic. "Touching the nautch girls at Langham-place," declared *The Daily News*, "many visitors seem to be in doubt as to whether they are the real article.... they [the visitors] appear to have expected something different - something more in accordance with the sensuous notions that have been poetically suggested by the Oriental dance" (3 March 1886). Evidently the tension between the fictional and the 'real' was at the core of disappointment. Furthermore, the visceral exhibition, and disturbingly the 'touching' did little to appease questions of authenticity, and ironically the fictional nautch remained the authentic staple.

Other viewers were aware of the profound misinterpretation. As Qureshi (2012c: 24) has noticed in other examples, patrons often faced difficulties in interpreting performances. In the case of the exhibited nautch dancers *The Era* appealed for a stage-manager to "edit and explain the entertainment as it proceeds" commenting that a few interpreters "would be a useful medium of communication" (16 January 1886). Clearly some audiences realised they were viewing a performance form they could not fully understand. Although we cannot know what exactly was indecipherable, for we do not know what regional forms the dancers were performing, whether they be a form of *kathak* or *natyasastr* or even a folk form such as the *lavani*, we can assume that the complex vocabularies of the dancers were largely illegible to a Western audience, who could not understand the dance because they had not learnt the language. Any story telling or acts of worship, which were characteristic of classical Indian dance forms, were lost to British spectatorship. This meant that while some audiences enjoyed the "heel to toe movement" (India in London. *The Graphic*, 6 February 1886: 140) or the "graceful evolutions" (*Illustrated London News* 21 November 1885: 524), and others regarded them monotonous, all misunderstood the connection between art and spirituality. In numerous dance customs, including the *devadasi* and *tawaif* traditions, lie an activity and worship of Siva "as an imitation of that divine action, dance was seen as a path to the soul's liberation" (Bose, 1998: 251). For centuries in India dance held a supreme

place of being as temple and religious practice. Yet the *hastas* (hand gestures) *jathis* (footwork set to specific dance syllables) and *bhava* (emotion) were perplexing to the Western spectator.

At the same time, even if translations had been available, we cannot assume that the nautch girls were performing ancient techniques of temple traditions, it seeming likely that performances were altered to suit a British audience. As the *Daily News* remarked, the nautch dancers “wear less, rather than more than they do at home” (3 March 1886). Nevertheless, within misinterpretation, and aside from questions of adaptation, the Victorian encounter did allow access to something that was unidentifiable and unknown. Thus the dancers’ movements held a degree of agency to participate in, or resist cultural production. The contradictory experiences—which ranged from intoxicating artistry, to inauthenticity, to total monotony—aroused and contested stereotypes. Although they were reduced to either a successful or unsuccessful visual and sexual exotic, they also held the capacity to disrupt fantasised notions of identity, whilst capturing a culture that could not be understood, contained or controlled.

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Re-imagining the nautch for different needs, female missionaries, British officials, Hindu reformists, Indian nationalist and even dance revivalists shared a commonality in their crusades against the nautch, using and abusing her for their own agendas. Inscribed into political discourses, classical Indian dance operated within and for numerous rhetorics, from Empire-building for the West to nation-building for India. All relied upon an unchanging yet reinvented vision of the past, tradition, culture and identity. Thus the nautch girl became a point of conflicting interests, through which dancers’ own voices are silenced. Taken together, the opposing allegories of the dancers momentarily estranged dancers from their own experiences, whilst borrowing discourse from one another. The persecution of nautch epitomises in this sense the selectiveness of Orientalism and Indian nationalism, which held power over which traditions would be studied, which

preserved and which perverted, not for an objectivity it made claim to, but for political causes.

Bizarrely, meanwhile, whilst these conflicting narratives intensified, Britain captured and entertained itself with a tradition that was already being demonised from all angles, and one which would be almost completely obliterated by the turn of the century. It is curious that while the London nautch was made meaningful in a climate of debate and anti-nautch sentiment, as well as the growing fears of female sexuality and racial purity, nautch performances also drew questions over the body and its identity. The commodification of the Indian dancer in London therefore was intertwined in the conquest of the sexual excess of Indian women and in conflicting accounts. Although sometimes consumed as sexually immoral (a consumption which represents the making of the colonial fantasy), for some Victorian audiences the exhibition of nautch also exposed the fantasy as fantasy. The 'real' nautch of London exceeded and unhinged the figure upon which imperial power was justified and reinforced. It follows that although the colonial imagination of classical Indian dance has, as Thobani (2017: 22-23) argues, left a lasting imprint that continues to be repeated, the nautch girl exhibited in nineteenth-century London is both coherent and inconsistent with discourses that encode the colonisers' imaginings. This is also representative, more broadly, of the diverse ways in which exhibited peoples were interpreted that is "fundamentally irreducible to either a single or a typical consumer response (Qureshi, 2011: 181). Yet it also meant, if only for a fleeting moment, that nautch shifted the definitions of beauty and gender for British audiences, capturing an essence of identity, heritage and culture which continues to be important in dance communities, as well as diaspora groups worldwide today, despite the issue that dance revival has been understood as a resurgence of the idealised Indian woman as a passive mother, goddess and dancer. As Chakravorty argues "[t]he revival of classical Indian dance and the construction of Indian womanhood are both reflections of this essential Hindu identity. In the process, the dance itself was removed from its original practitioners like the *devadasi* and nautch dancers" (2000-2001: 112)).

The nautch girls in London remained a secondary figure, an 'extra' of the exhibition, who were often less popular, more perplexing and as a general rule attracted less attention than craftsmen or ethnological models. There were issues to do with translation and alteration, yet we can assume that these dancers were public performers (and were not the *thumri* for example, who were private performers). Despite their artistry, however, unlike the craftsman whose dexterous skills were widely praised, the nautch's talent was left largely unacknowledged in favour of a successful or unsuccessful incarnation of sexual appeal. The exhibition of nautch in Victorian London therefore marks a significant intersection in the repression and objectification of women, the disregarding of women's histories and Britain's anxious and contradictory encounters with female exotica against the backdrop of intensifying Victorian restrictions on sexuality. Indeed, the absence in the archives is indicative of a broader silencing of Indian dancers, and therefore points to the marginalisation of Indian women, their subordination and their consequence only as sexual objects. The extent of performers' passivity however, is called into question in my last chapter, which unpacks the production of the 'Indian' in and by exhibitions, but also the often conflicting relationship between broad narrative structures and individual agencies. In order to recognise the individuals who were displayed, and to pay attention to their sometimes resistive actions, in Chapter Six I chart the tensions between the actions of people and the larger structures that contain them. In doing so, I uncover the invention of loyal and subjugated Indian citizens as well as the activities of actors whose actions lie within India's increasing struggle against the imperial regime.

## **CHAPTER SIX SURPASSING REPRESENTATIONS, RESISTING EMPIRE**

The Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, which opened on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May and ran for six months in South Kensington, was a hugely successful event. It welcomed 128,077 visitors in the first week alone, and over 5.5 million in total. The exhibition included exhibits from Hong Kong, Canada, Australia, Cyprus, Malta, South Africa and the Falkland Islands, yet roughly one third of the space was dedicated solely to India. While the 1886 exhibition “provided the most extensive use of displayed foreign peoples within the context of a nineteenth-century British fair” (Qureshi, 2011: 238-240), out of the 89 people from Africa, Australia, Ceylon, British Guiana, imported to perform, 46 were from India. The space given to India is representative of a growing taste for the Indian subcontinent in British fashion and politics, a taste spawned and indicated by two smaller-scale exhibitions held the year before, which proved India to be a popular commercial subject. The 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition was the first large-scale international exhibition to devote such a large space to India. It included Indian arts, architecture, economic courts, produce, manufactures, anthropological specimens and ‘real’ Indian artisans.

The Colonial and Indian exhibition was a royal affair, and, corresponding with the Queen’s Jubilee, was opened ceremoniously by the Queen Empress herself. Victoria’s attendance was significant not only in that it boosted exhibition publicity, and not only in that enabled the Queen’s own occupation of the India space, but also because it represented Britain’s (and Victoria’s) particular affection for India. During the opening, Victoria incarnated her role as Empress, as she publicly expressed her personal fondness for India to the public, who came to love India because she did. Indeed, Victoria was an integral figure in making India known and popular in Britain, and she became the icon and centre of Britain’s control in India. Exhibitions were integral sites in celebrating the relationship between Queen, country and Empire. Her role as Empress was routinely celebrated on exhibition sites, which often included re-enactments of Queen Victoria’s proclamation as Empress of India. The

Queen's particular affection for India was also represented in her encounters with the Indian performers who were employed in exhibitions. The performers were often invited to meet the Queen for tea, and, widely publicised, these events operated as public articulations of both the Queen's and the Indians' statuses. As I will explain in this chapter, the Queen's corporeal encounter with exhibited 'natives' represents the invention of a loyal and devoted Indian population. In turn, exhibition activities point to the role of exhibitions in forging colonial status and a new regime of power in the post-Mutiny era, one in which ritual, grand ceremonies, and the conception of loyal Indian subjects seem to become increasingly important.

It was also through exhibitions that India's affection and gratitude for Empire and Empress in return was simultaneously invented and performed. For example, after visiting the Queen an Indian performer from the 1895 Empire of India exhibition, named Mr. C Ardresher, made a short speech, translated in *The Standard*, in which he presented Victoria with a silver vase and declared "let there always be peace and health for you, Victoria, through life" (*Standard*, 22 July 1895: 3). Upon his return to Earl's Court exhibition grounds, another Indian man named Irani, also a performer of the exhibition, delivered an address in which, according to newspapers, he announced: "Today we realised the dream of our lives when we started from our own country six thousand miles away we had one wish in our hearts, and that was to see the Queen Empress" (*Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 22 July, 1895). The following year, Imre Kiralfy personally thanked the Queen for enabling the group of Indian natives who appeared at the Empire of Indian and Ceylon exhibition to realise their greatest desire, which was to meet her, to which she replied "it has given me great pleasure to do so" (*The Standard*, 20 July, 1896: 4). These statements of gratitude littered exhibition reception.

It was at the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition where one Indian performer in particular truly incarnated India's alleged love for Victoria. During the opening of the exhibition, as Queen Victoria toured the exhibition site, an old potter who newspapers called 'Baxshiram' stepped out of line to speak directly to his Empress as she passed the Indian Palace. Baxshiram, later

painted for Victoria's own personal collections (see fig. 6.1), was employed for the 'Native Artisan' display at the exhibition, and formed part of a group of craftsmen who awaited the royal procession during the exhibition's opening. Reviews claimed that, stepping out of line, the old Indian man bowed deeply before Victoria as she passed and "in the Oriental fashion read an address to her Majesty in Hindustanee" (*The Morning Post*, 5 May 1886: 3). Most papers testified that the potter's words, spoken in a foreign tongue, were ones of loyalty and appreciation. *The Standard*, for example, affirmed that the old potter of 102 years was "proud to his inmost heart of the kind notice taken of him by the Queen.... that he may return rejoicing and well to his native land" (6 May 1886: 3).

Fig 61. Bakshiram

A potter from Agra, alleged to be over 102 years old. This was one of eight portraits painted by Rudolph Swoboda, commissioned by Queen Victoria, from the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886.

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Queen Elizabeth II

Behind these reports of devotion, however, the potter's address also indicates the anxieties of those recruited to perform, as it reveals an individual who was not fully contained by the invention. Papers not only questioned the potter's

old age, they also saw anguish in Baxshiram's speech. The *Penny Illustrated and Illustrated Times* informed readers that "the vulnerable Buxshiram (said to be 103, but possibly ten or twenty years younger in reality)" could be found in Niche No. 11. The article went on to comment that Buxshiram was "from Agra, and turns the potter's wheel with remarkable dexterity for a "centenarian"" (24 July 1886: 52). *The Ipswich Journal* meanwhile announced that Buxshiram was seeking reassurance from the Queen on the matter of his return home (6 May 1886). The shipping company in charge of the craftsmen's transportation to and from London noted a similar explanation of anxiety. Their report stated that after an urgent appeal was made to extend the artisans' exhibition, they arranged with the craftsmen to stay a month longer in London, though also noted they were persuaded "with considerably difficulty, as they were extremely anxious to return to their families" (*Report of the Royal Commission for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, London, 1886*: 285).

Therefore, while Chapter Five argued that identities were created for exhibition performers and that audiences awarded meanings that although at times disruptive had little to do with the performers themselves, in this chapter I show that performers on occasion made themselves known. However, their 'voice' does also call into question the issue of translation and invention. For example, a number of issues spring from Baxshiram's address to his Empress. The variation in accounts of his statement, whether he was expressing gratitude or anxiety, is suggestive of an interpretation and invention of his words, which in turn highlights unequal power relations and the issues of communication and translation between performer and spectator. That identities were created for the people who were displayed must be acknowledged, and has been largely dealt with in previous chapters. They had become commodities of inventive cultures, entertainments, economies and politics. Exhibitions produced imaginative Indian spaces that were widely marketed and taken as realistic representations (see Chapter One). They spawned spectacular versions of Indian history that Britain owned and claimed (see Chapter Two). They operated as educational sites in the scientific making of race (see Chapter Three), and re-produced a retrograde



form of exotic womanhood upon which notions of savagery and civilising were drawn (see Chapter Five). However, Baxshiram's statement suggests that although the figure of the Indian was represented and transformed for commercial and political purposes through exhibition, we must not assume that the *people* on show were void of any participation or resistance in their display. Although exhibited people were creatively invented, more attention should be paid to human agency and the processes which encouraged (but also subverted) attitudes. This is necessary in order to understand the exhibition of peoples, their encounters and experiences within (and sometimes against) broader discourses, and also to grasp Britain's complex view of India being created and challenged through exhibition display.

These conflicts must firstly be understood as being centred in a relationship between broad narrative structures and individual agency. As Ortner explains more generally, there are articulations between the actions of people and the larger structures that contain them. Ortner insists on a "*dialectical*, rather than *oppositional* relationship between the structural constraints of society on the one hand and the "practices" ...of social actors on the other" (2006: 2). She argues that the development of practice theory is essential to the understanding of the individual without losing sight of the larger structures within which particular actors are embedded. It is a theory "of the production of social subjects through practice in the world, and the production of the world itself through practice" (Ortner, 2006: 16). Practice theory is about the production of subjects and subjectivities. While remaining attentive to the issue of power inequality, this presents an extremely useful tool for critically engaging with the individual agents of exhibitions. Baxshiram's outburst to Queen Victoria, for example, demands that we consider the corporeality of the subaltern in London, who, despite issues of translation, is not only present in the British exoticising of India, but is also reactive. He is shaped by external and existing structures (which his exhibition also helps to shape), but also operates within and against them. He can thus be anchored in larger historical durations as well as conflicts between subjectivity and the subject.

There is, of course, a lengthy historiography theorising surrounding subjectivity. Some of that is rooted within psychoanalysis (Freud, etc), other developments of subjectivity are founded in philosophy, epistemology and Enlightenment thought (Rene Descartes “I think, therefore I am” (1596-1650)). The emphasis on the self as experience, as consciousness even, was a fundamental breakthrough in questions about selfhood and individuality, providing a backbone to all future debates on the subject. However, I must stress that my concern here is not to psychoanalyse the self, or a strive for an understanding of ‘I.’ Instead it is to locate broader subjectivities—being the imperial perceptions and desires which impinge upon subjects—and the incomplete processes of subjectification which lie in the complex experiences of individuals beyond their identities as a subjects. Foucault (1980) argues that subjectivity is not really an existing thing, it is not an expression of truth, but is an invented system linked to power and control, based on dividing us into fixed categories so that we follow the social codes of society (see Foucault’s *Power/Knowledge* (1980) and Strozier (2002) for Foucault, subjectivity, and identity). At the same time, it is useful to be aware that while “the subject is always linked to something outside of it – an idea or principle or the society of other subjects,” every representation is also “understood to be grounded in the ‘I’ that perceives” (Mansfield, 2000: 3/18). Subjectivity, as Ortner (2006: 110) also stresses, is important because it is the basis of the actions of individuals even as they are being acted upon.

The concept of actions of agents within subjectivity picks up on another issue in the scholarship that deals with the exhibition of people. Saloni Mathur (2007) traces the astonishing story of Tulsi Ram, a man also instated into the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition. Ram had travelled to Britain of his own accord in the hope of speaking with the Queen about a land dispute in his village in Punjab. Arriving a number of months before the opening of the exhibition, Ram presented himself as a problem for Indian government officials and the police alike, and was soon well known the police courts for his determined and disruptive attempts to meet Queen Victoria (Mathur, 2007: 70). After refusing an offer of free passage to return to India, Ram was inducted into the Colonial and Indian exhibition—whether choice, penance or

force is unknown—where the once wealthy landowner performed under the fabricated identity of a sweetmeat maker (Mathur, 2007: 75). Mathur argues that being placed on exhibition was a powerful attempt to control and punish Ram, yet also recognises that he could not be contained as compliant subject. Instead, his persistence for justice and his determination that he had a right to speak directly to the Queen was the operation of a resistive actor whose individuality could not be “contained by history’s authoritative representational forms” (Mathur, 2007: 78). Similarly, whether or not Baxshiram travelled to London to hold audience with the Queen, or if he merely seized an opportunity, we must understand his action as a bold move through which he exceeds his inscription as an observed ethnic object. However, there are other important activities in Baxshiram’s proclamation, as well as in the actions of other exhibitions agents, which deserve further attention and build upon Mathur’s valuable insights—namely the cross cultural encounter of the subaltern, the Empress and the metropolis, and even, in a wider sense, the uncertain imperial status of Indian subjects. We must not fail to acknowledge that the individuals who performed at exhibitions were objectified imperial subalterns who were interpreted by/shaped larger belief systems, yet we also must recognise their own, sometimes resistant actions, in which another larger ‘structure’ can also be charted: the accumulating struggle for independence within Western discourses of liberty, freedom and law.

The matters of mimicry and resistance of the showcased subaltern subject in London draw from, but also develop, the current scholarship on the exhibition of people. Encouraging future studies to investigate the role of the individual, Sánchez-Gómez implores that “[w]hilst it is true that the exhibited peoples’ own voice is the hardest to record in any of these shows, greater effort could have been made in identifying and mapping them, as, when this happens, the results obtained are truly interesting” (2013). Similarly, Raymond Corbey (1993: 349-50) demands that we question what exhibited people experienced, probe how they coped with being displayed, ask who they were, what they felt, how they negotiated their identities, and how they influenced audience perceptions. Saloni Mathur (2007: 78) begs a similar methodology,

stressing that scholars have much to gain from concentrating on the incomplete processes of cultural representation. Sadiya Qureshi (2011) has undoubtedly made the greatest efforts to engage with the experiences of the people who were exhibited. Part of the aims of her book *Peoples on Parade* “is to trace the many ways in which performers adapted to their new lives, often resisting being confined to the roles expected of them” (2011: 127). Whilst remaining highly sensitive to the restricted nature of agency, she presents important questions including: were the performers able to decide the terms of their performance? How were they recruited in the first place? What kind of knowledge did their showcases propagate? She acknowledges the difficulties in finding answers to such questions, wary that very few records of performers’ experiences were taken. Despite these challenges, her book provides a vital overview of the exhibition of peoples in Victorian Britain. She stresses that “[p]aying attention to the varied forms of coercion, resistance, collaboration, and encounter involved in shows’ histories highlights the subtle and often all too limited means displayed peoples could use to negotiate agency” (2011: 153). She also explains that exhibition managers played critical roles in producing and shaping shows, at the same time as she engages with the unscripted means through which performers were able to assert themselves against the roles expected of them (2011: see Chapters Three and Four). This leads to her argument that exhibitions involved complex interactions in which showcased peoples cannot be reduced to passive victims at the hands of dominant aggressors (2011: 152).

Mathur (2007: 78) has probed India more exclusively. She explores how a picturesque and traditional India in Britain was inconsistently produced through art, exhibition, consumer cultures and museums from the late nineteenth century to the post-independence era. She (2007: 12) names people on display and their individual plights as crises to the imperial regime. Mathur argues that the 1886 craftsmen’s refusal of the terms of their exhibition signifies that the “bodies on display have their own biographies, strategies, journeys, and petitions that refute their inscription as mere ethnic objects” (2007: 54-6). Mathur views historical actors, including Ram, as subversions to the hegemonic script and as subjects who “function not only

as ideological texts that serve to affirm imperial power, but also as symptoms of crises and *dysfunction* in the embattled domain of cultural representation” (2007: 12).

Building on the works of Mathur and Qureshi, I argue that exhibited Indians reflected and negated knotty imperial statuses, and sometimes surfaced as ambivalent subjects not only of exhibition expectations but also of Empire. What becomes striking is that Indian performers engaged in complex processes of mimicry of Western systems and ideologies, which more broadly were ultimately used against colonial rule. Their showcases were not only helping produce and resist cultural representation, but also operated within the contradictions of Indian status and imperialism. It follows that the strategies of exhibitions can be understood as apparatuses of colonial power, yet the people on display sometimes emerge as agents who reflect change. As Ortner (2006: 17) stresses more generally, the idea that the world is ‘made’ through the actions of individuals also means that it can be unmade and remade.

In this chapter I pay attention to how ideologies central to imperialism were being produced, absorbed, shared and negated, and argue that exhibition activities throw into focus the complex and contradictory imperial status of Indians, as well as issues of colonial power, mimicry and resistance. In a broader sense my analysis here contributes to Ortner’s argument that “social production is never total, always imperfect, and vulnerable to the pressures and instabilities inherent in any situation of unequal power” (2006: 7). The exhibition of people shows that domination is riddled with contradictions and ambiguities. I also argue that the dialectic relationship between the structures of society and the activities of exhibition actors indicates other structures that operate *within* and *beyond* those of the dominant (which I will explain further later). The issue becomes more convoluted when we pay attention to the incongruity of social actors, who cannot easily be slotted into oppositional categories such as ‘compliance’ and ‘resistance’, as Qureshi has similarly noted, but rather often employ both simultaneously, as they are interpreted by powerful others.

One way this issue can be unpacked is through engagement with Pratt's 'contact zones' and Thomas' notion of 'entanglement.' Pratt's 'contact zones' are "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (1991: 34). Pratt argues that the subordinate subject gives himself authority "in the colonizer's language" (1991: 36). This creates a space in which the colonised subject represents themselves "in response to or dialogue with" the "idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror" (1991: 35). Her idea of 'contact zones' provides a valuable way of thinking about the resistance of social actors within unequal power relations. Far from considering agents of the exhibition as autonomous, my understanding follows Ortner's (2006: 130) argument that social agents are embedded within the social/power relations that contain them (although I also urge that exhibition agents are operating within a mimicry of the coloniser that opposes the dominant on larger scopes). Similar to Ortner's 'contact zones' and Qureshi's conclusions, I do not propose a rejection of hegemonic frameworks, or the equalising of highly asymmetrical power relations. Instead, by exploring of the performers' activities in the metropolis, I acknowledge an important point of exchange in the 'contact zone' of the objectified and exploited colonised entering the coloniser's space, and there operating as both compliant and resistive subjects.

The space of shared exchanges raises doubts, as Nicholas Thomas (1991) has emphasised more broadly, about simple us/them, coloniser/colonised dichotomies. Thomas argues that there has been a tendency to conceive the East "as authentic, meaningful stable domains which differ fundamentally from Western social regimes and which resist interpretation on the basis of Western categories" (1991: 3). This tendency, Thomas explains, exaggerates dichotomies and reproduces alterity. Differences between the West and the non-West are thus magnified and history is denied. Challenging the preoccupation with cultural difference, Thomas considers the unequal reciprocal relations between the West and the countries it colonised. Through exchange of goods in the colonial periphery, he views the dynamics of cultural encounters, and stresses a strong case for imbalanced but shared

exchanges, cultural contact and entanglement.

Operating as spaces of 'contact zones', exhibitions also enabled shared encounters, even though the power relations of those encounters were not only highly asymmetrical, but also highly atypical (this was an unusual meeting between the colonised and coloniser, one limited to only a few). Nevertheless, exhibitions were places where cultures and identities were being created and re-produced in dialogical exchange. How individuals worked within and/or exceeded the representations being created for them is important, not only in order to credit the individuals themselves, but also to question the extent of the passivity and subalternity of the displayed, which draws into question the matter of agency. My understanding is that agency is about acts within and against power, that it is dependent on time and place, and that it is shaped by and can halt regimes of power. As Ortnor explains, intentionality is not a requisite part of agency. Someone could have unintentional agency, in the sense of making something happen without consciously intending to. The question then becomes: were all those inscribed into exhibitions socially, politically and geographically outside the hegemonic power structure of the dominant? While I accept Spivak's (2010) assertion that Western 'knowledge' has served as justification for colonisation, and that speaking about the Other is at high risk of sustaining the colonial discourse, through asking this question I also reconsider the agency of some of the performers within their objectification, and within unequal power relations. This is not to suggest that exhibitions were enabling opportunities that were powerful or always resistive, or that imperialism was the only power at play. Yet, it does demand recognition of both the acquiescence and conflict of the subordinate subject in the extraordinary setting. The question that follows then changes to: if those inscribed into exhibition did access the structures of the dominant, what does this indicate? By attending to this question we see, as Qureshi and Mathur also show, the resistance of actors against their representation. Yet we also see the mimicry of Western values, and surprisingly India's defiance and its future independence. In turn the decline and fall of imperialism can be traced even in the spaces where the ideologies of imperialism were being produced and

propagated with particular force, meaning that power is never total. I will explain this further, but first I need to address the issue of evidence and perspective.

Since very few personal testimonies were recorded, our knowledge of the activities of exhibited peoples is limited. Furthermore, any evidence there is lies in colonial records that have their own agendas, as Baxshiram's outburst signifies (his action being widely interpreted as one of overwhelming appreciation). It is thus largely the British perspective that describes the motivations and experiences of performers. However, this is the only record that remains, and therefore cannot be dismissed. Furthermore, it should not be presumed that the actions of those being recorded had nothing to do with the actors themselves (whatever the interpretation, Baxshiram did interrupt his *Empress*). As Ortnier remarks more broadly "people not only resist political domination; they resist, or anyway evade, textual domination as well. The notion that colonial or academic texts are able completely to distort or exclude the voices and perspectives of those being written about seems to me to endow these text greater power than they have"(1995: 188). I agree that while we should remain wary and sceptical of colonial archives, neither should we disregard them as unreliable evidences. Although sparse, the record of the exhibition *Indian subaltern in London*, which can be found in press reviews, India Office archives, official reports and the diaries of exhibition managers, can reveal something of the Indian experience in and of London at the height of the British Raj. Whilst being the most challenging area in terms of 'retrieval', the agents who were involved in exhibition display offer important insight into the complicated landscape of human showcase and of India's increasingly complex social-political imperial position. This is not to say that I can recover a 'lost voice'. As Mathur agrees: "the very structure of the colonial archive does not allow for such an unmediated act of historical recovery" (2007: 54). The aim here is not to complete a profile or attempt to offer a full biography of the people involved in these events, this is neither necessary nor is it possible from the limited historical record. Instead, I aim to show that individuals impacted the metropolis in other ways than



mere objectification, as they can indicate a process of 'contact zones' and colonialism that is powerfully dominant, rather than hegemonic.

More broadly, the denial of the individuals' participation in texts represents the crux of the problem in postcolonial studies that I have already indicated, and one that Ortner (2006) similarly notices. Ortner appropriately insists that although texts remain embedded in highly unequal power relations, they are also influenced by the people who those texts represent. In making this argument, Ortner forces reconsideration of Said's contention that we cannot know anything about the real Orient, or Spivak's conclusion that the subaltern cannot speak. I similarly contest the assumptions that the subaltern is voiceless by showing that while exhibited people were objectified as exotic examples of human Otherness, with the dominant writing their own desires and dreams upon them, texts do 'leak' sketches of their experiences, which evade textual inventions and domination. Furthermore, to deny that those people had real and sometimes resistive (whether or not intentional) experiences during their time as exhibits does so at the risk of re-subordinating them and writing histories that are skewed by postcolonial apologies. This brings us back to an issue that Qureshi (2011) and Mathur (2007) have already highlighted. Qureshi writes: "it is worth being more critical of the criteria currently used to establish displayed peoples' status within these projects; otherwise, these people risk being reestablished as freaks renamed as cultural icons" (2011: 283). Mathur insists that attention to the incomplete processes of cultural representation acknowledges "the structures of defiance and the forms of conscious intervention on the part of historical actors that exist in relation to dominant strategies of representation and that operate at the level of everyday life" (2007: 78). Both look beyond oversimplified classifications of passivity or agency and toward the 'contact zone' and 'entanglement' of the exhibition space that I have identified above.

As we turn our attention to the exhibited Indian subject, there is something more to be drawn from the textual evidence of performers' experiences and activities. While Mathur stresses that exhibited people have never been fully contained by representational forms, and while Qureshi pays close attention

to the experiences of performers, I pay attention to specific examples—including the 1886 Liberty performers' dispute over the terms of their display, the outburst of the old Potter at the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition, the activities of exhibition manager T.N Mukharji, and the pay disputes of Indians in the metropolitan space—in order to chart the production and invention of colonial identities, but also to trace the growing conflict of imperialism. I explore how exhibition actors who contested their display were involved in a process of mimicry of British values of liberty, democracy, and freedom of speech, which were taken up, as Chatterjee (1993) argues more broadly, as a form of resistance and used as a derivative discourse against colonial rule. This suggests that exhibited peoples not only produce and deflect the strategies of display; they also indicate broader discourses being absorbed and transformed through the Indians' appropriation of the dominants' values.

The 'derivative' nature of mimicry and nationalism in the Indian context, as scholars explain, is contradictory in nature. As Anderson argues, nationalisms are cultural artefacts which involve a "complex crossing of discrete historical forces", and in order to understand nationalisms we have to consider how they came into historical being (1983: 4). Chatterjee more importantly questions the argument that 'Eastern' nationalism involves rejection of "the alien intruder and dominator who is nevertheless to be imitated and surpassed by his own standards" (1993: 2). By critiquing the theories of John Plamenatz and Hans Kohn, Chatterjee queries whether Indian nationalism really dismantles colonial institutions, pointing out that although it drives for independence, it remains dominated by the structure of power it seeks to undermine. Deviant nationalisms are "a revolution" Chatterjee argues, "which at the same time, and in fundamental ways, [are] not a revolution" (1993: vii). Chatterjee criticises Elie Kedourie's assertion that nationalism is a European export alien to the non-European world, and is by these standards an annihilation of freedom. At the same time, he is wary of Anthony Smith's argument that nationalism is important in the stability and reform efforts of developing countries (Chatterjee, 1993: 7). Neither can form the question, he argues:

why is it that non-European countries have no historical alternative but to try to approximate the given attributes of modernity when that very process of approximation means their continued subjection under a world order which only sets their tasks for them and over which they have no control?

(1993: 10).

The question, Chatterjee stresses, proposes that it is *thought* that dominates and subjugates. This demands that nationalist thought is a problem of the bourgeois-rationalist conception of knowledge. Chatterjee importantly contends that nationalism could both give “rise to mindless chauvinism and xenophobia and serve as a justification for organised violence and tyranny” at the same time it is also about an urge for progress and freedom (1993: 2-3). Although challenging political domination, nationalist thought accepts the premise of ‘modernity’ on which colonial power was based (Chatterjee, 1993: 30). The process of mimicry therefore, is a complicated exercise of agency. While it is out of the mimicry of Western political ideas—and their adaptation—that Indian nationalism emerged, nationalist thought is not independent from the ideology of colonial domination, and is therefore bound to the knowledge systems of the West (Chatterjee 1986: 10-11). Nevertheless, whilst India was obliged to copy British economic, cultural and political practices in order to become ‘modern’ and ‘civilised’ and therefore independent, Indians, including Gandhi, were “able to step outside the powerful frame of the civilizing mission ideology, albeit with the help of British critics of ‘Western civilization’” (Watt, 2011: 22).

Briefly, these are the major contradictions of nationalist discourse; they are also the contradictions that present themselves in the activities of exhibited peoples, who whether complying or resisting are trapped in the colonial rhetoric of exoticism and inferiority of Otherness. This is a problem that doesn’t have a ‘way out’ or a tidy conclusion, but rather transpires within the actions of exhibited peoples who sometimes corroborated and sometimes contested these definitions being created for them. This in turns demands the importance of popular culture in the inventive production and evolution of culture, of Empire and of subjects. I am not suggesting here that those inscribed into exhibitions ceased to be exploited cultural objects within the

discourses of commercialisation and popular imperialism. Rather, in this chapter I chart the fantasies being created and performed as cultural truth, as well as the activities that resist, which in turn suggests the complexity of subjects, of imperialism and of changing colonial definitions and statuses. My aim is to stress the broader conflict of Indian status being reflected and stimulated through exhibitions encounters. My argument is that exhibition agents exposed the contradiction of colonial rule; being its desire to create a subjugated Indian population at the same time as it seeded an ideology of liberty and right, which could be used against its regime of power, even though that resistance operated within Western values.

#### ANIMATING FANTASIES: INVENTING PHILANTHROPIC GUARDIANS AND GRATEFUL SUBJECTS

Exhibited people were placed into situations that were made relevant to the ideologies of imperialism, and were made meaningful in those contexts. This is crucial, and must be dealt with before any agency can be located. In environments that celebrated the modernity of the West, Indian performances easily attached to the cultural project of control, helping to construct new categories and oppositions between identities, making them readable and—most significantly—alive to large audiences in London. It is undeniable that exhibitions invented cultural characteristics and oppositions for the coloniser and colonised, and framed them as cultural ‘realities’, and thus indicate some of the dynamic strategies of power. As Bhabha insists: to understand colonial power “it is crucial to consider its regime of truth” (1994: 94, 96). When considering the agents of exhibition display, we must first ask how the ‘truth’ central to power was being created through them. I need only draw on a few examples since previous chapters have also demonstrated the exhibition creation of identity (see Chapter One especially). Here I consider more attentively how the actions/testimonies of exhibited people were made relevant to the narratives which Empire relied upon, including philanthropic guardians and grateful subjects. Furthermore, although the relationships

between individuals and power structures in this sense are dialectical rather than oppositional, they also involve translation and invention.

Fig. 6.2 Natives offering gifts to the Queen 8 July 1886  
Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

There was another occasion on which Baxshiram, the old potter who interrupted the royal procession at the opening of the Colonial and Indian exhibition, met with Queen Victoria. Along with the other 'natives' from the exhibition, Baxshiram received an invitation to tea with the Queen at Windsor Castle. The event, illustrated in Figure 6.2, was viewed as an opportunity for the Queen's subjects to express their gratitude, and it signifies the larger structures that particular actors of exhibitions became embedded within, even beyond their appearance as exhibits. As the painting suggests, the accounts of the metropolis transformed the 'natives' into humble and appreciative Others. In the image, one man bows deeply before Victoria, while the other natives wait respectfully in turn to meet her. All offer her gifts, respect, allegiance and servitude. An encounter is suggested at the same time as a clear estrangement between the coloniser and the colonised ensues. The

Queen and Englishmen are clothed in black, the natives in their colourful attire, clothes being a symbolic assertion of power and separation.

Victoria also hosted tea for the exhibits from the 1895 Empire of India exhibition, an invitation that according to the press fulfilled the performers' greatest desire. After visiting his Empress, an Indian performer from the exhibition delivered an address in which he declared:

Today we realised the dream of our lives when we started from our own country six thousand miles away we had one wish in our hearts, and that was to see the Queen Empress. Through the kindness of Mr Imre Kiralfy we have stood today in the immediate presence of the Queen – possessor of that vast empire beyond the sea whose millions of people long to see her. Yes, to-day, we had that proud honour.

(Visit Of Indians To The Queen. *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 22 July, 1895)

The testimony easily transformed into a practice of incorporation; the performer's declaration functioned as an extended ritual of British philanthropy and 'parentage' and Indian submission. Clearly, invitations to tea helped to publicise a range of compliant, devoted and subjugated Indian citizens, and they highlighted Victoria's alleged commitment and benevolence to her Empire outside the confines of the exhibition. At the core of Victoria's encounter with exhibited peoples lay the notion of her goodwill and interest in India, ideas which evidently could be invented, circulated and absorbed in diverse ways by social agents. For example, meeting the Queen was not only an awe-inspiring experience for performers, it also particularly inspired Bengali exhibition official Mukharji, who was employed at the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition. "I tell this to my people" he wrote "be he from the rugged plains of Peshawar or the alluvial swamps in the Brahmaputra valley, from the snow-covered Bhot or the scrubby country near Cape Comorin, - that our Empress-mother takes a deep personal interest in the welfare of her Indian children" (1887: 72). Sharing in the celebration of Victoria's munificence and India's subjugation, Mukharji commented on "the gratified expression on her [Victoria's] face when our artisans touched her feet must be imprinted on everyone's mind who witnessed the touching scene" (Mukharji, 1887: 82).

As already suggested, through their own declarations of gratitude, performers may have played roles in this discourse themselves. In the exhibition space this gratitude extended to a range of superiors. For example, the Indian performers from the 1895 Empire of India exhibition allegedly read an address to Harold Hartley, who had been assigned the role of managing their care during their stay in London. According to Hartley, at the end of their stay, he and wife were invited by the performers to attend a *Tamasha*. Upon arrival to the festivity Hartley was presented with a letter, which he recorded in his memoir as follows:

TO HAROLD THOMAS HARTLEY.

SIR, - We the natives of India of every religion, race and language, who have been employed in various ways during the passing year in the Empire of India Exhibition, before returning to our different native countries in India, desire to take this opportunity of expressing to your honoured self and to the Mother of your house, the Most Honoured Lady, Mrs. Harold Hartley, our deep and lasting gratitude and heartfelt thanks for all the truly parental solicitude and kindness with which you have treated us throughout our service in connection with the exhibition. You have indeed been Mother-Father (*ma-bap*) to us, daily looking after us and taking care of us, ever anxious to make our daily lives comfortable and truly pleasant to us, and, we would add, a source of pleasure to us as long as we live.

We can never forget the thoughtful and considerate arrangements you made housing and feeding us, and providing us with amusements ; while above all, you Mr. Hartley, have earned our filial affection and reverence by the ever watchful and intimate care with which you have safeguarded each one of us in the free exercise of our religious observances and rights. It is this that has made our supreme happiness during our stay in the native land of our Beloved Sovereign, the might and august Queen Empress of India.

Dear Sir and Madam Sahib, we shall never, we can never, forget your innumerable and unceasing kindness to us. We find it impossible to fully express our heartfelt sense of it.

We wish you in all the Devine [sic] Names of God, long life, and wealth, and happiness. We also ask you to accept the accompanying Silver Vase of the choicest Indian workmanship ; and we ask this in order that by ever reminding you of our happiness while in England, it may be a source of continued happiness to yourself.

Said in this God-protected Tree of Life, the Great City of London, 12<sup>th</sup> day of October, 1895.

(Hartley, 1939: 76)

The account presents a record of gratefulness and happiness, through which performers indicate their positive experience as life as exhibits as they

fashioned themselves into loyal and humble subjects. It signifies that performers were a 'contact zone' in that they represented themselves in dialogue with the idioms of the colonisers. The letter they presented to Hartley was an expression of thanks for "the truly parental solicitude and kindness" of Mr and Mrs Hartley. Thus, arguably, performers cast themselves as submissive children. And although the statement suggests they felt free to peruse their own religious beliefs, felt well cared and provided for, and were happy, they also became subservient devoted subjects. That the performers invented themselves in this narrative says something about its power.

When engaging with these accounts we must not forget issues of translation. Manipulating the experiences of all performers into a rhetoric of gratitude, the testimony overlooks the anxieties, complaints and the tragedies of performers during their time as exhibits. The record is therefore expressive, but is also edited and transformed. On the one hand, that some performers did enjoy their time as exhibits is evident, and should not be undermined. For example, Hartley was not only presented with an address of gratitude, he also evidently tried to provide the performers with positive experiences. During the summer months, many Sunday outings for the group of nearly two hundred Indian and Burmese performers were arranged to landmarks including Windsor, Hampton Court, and Kew, and one day, as we know, they were taken to meet the Queen. Hartley clearly felt a duty and responsibility to ensure performers were cared for and respected. On the other hand, however, there is also an issue of whose voice is being heard, and which experiences won attention. Despite Hartley's unwavering belief in the performers' contentment, for example, one performer died under his management. On another occasion he was presented with a petition "alleging unfair treatment and signed by all the principle men." Hartley, however, was determined to view himself as a caring guardian and concluded the signatures were false (1939: 8).

Dr. John William Tyler, manager of the craftsmen recruited for display in the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition, similarly disseminated the idea of British philanthropy through exhibition experience. Tyler had been sub-contracted by the shipping company Henry S. King and Co. to oversee and care for the



recruitment of thirty-one skilled Indian craftsmen for the exhibition. In London he was widely congratulated as a considerate and understanding guardian, and the media represented Tyler's care as "an act of humanity rather than one of power" (Mathur, 2007: 66). *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* reported "[f]ortunate is the visitor who secures a genial cicerone Dr. J. E. Tyler, F.R.C.S., C.I.E, who exercised great care and discrimination in selecting the men, and who is unceasing in assisting Sir Philip Cunliffe-Owen in looking after their comfort while they have been in London" (24 July 1886: 52). The press agreed that under Dr. Tyler's care the exhibited craftsmen were "well housed and fed, and are perfectly happy" (*The Standard*, 6 May 1886: 3). *The Morning Post* testified, "those who have been privileged with a view behind the scenes there [the Artisan's quarters] can testify, their wants - which are few- are well tended to" (10 May 1886: 8).

Like Hartley however, Tyler draws into question the issue of recruitment and the invention of performer identities, though this time for different reasons. It has been understood in contemporary works that Tyler recruited the artisans for the 1886 exhibition from Agra Jail, where he was superintendent (Mathur, 2007; Qureshi, 2011). What incentive the inmates were given to travel to London, or if they had any choice on the matter remains obscured, and whether the artisans had been enrolled into exhibition as part of a sentence or a reward is unknown. Either way, scholars have understood that the 1886 craftsmen were not recounting the traditional village traditions being promoted, but were performing skills they had acquired during a reform programme that sold the goods produced by inmates. However, as well as an invention of their identity by the exhibition, there is also an issue to do with 'invention' by contemporary scholarship. Aside from Tulsi Ram, Mathur claims that *all* the other artisans were prison inmates recruited from Agra Gaol. Yet, while the India Office records reveal a correspondence between Tyler and the India Office on the matter of recruiting artisans for the exhibition, the only indication made to the artisans being prison inmates is in reference to two carpet weavers (IOR/L/PJ/6/463, File 2332). Suggesting that the other craftsmen had been recruited elsewhere, the report comments on the complex processes involved in the enrolment of the remaining craftsmen

(ibid). Papers, including *The Standard* (5<sup>th</sup> May 1886), similarly informed that only two workers—the Agra carpet makers and tapestry makers—were prison-taught, and had earlier been freed for good conduct. While remaining sceptical of the veracity of the media, which undoubtedly nurtured the fantasy of the ‘exotic’ and ‘authentic’ Indian, and would therefore be less interested in prison-taught craftsmen, numerous reviews remarked on the lengthy process involved in enlisting individuals for display, suggesting that not all the performers were inmates. Tyler’s task was not easy, as described by the *Morning Post*:

inasmuch as, apart from the prejudices of caste, religion, etc., and the objection held by many to cross the sea, it was necessary to obtain the permission of the native ruler in each district before any capable subject could be deported. In the end Dr. Tyler was most successful.

(10<sup>th</sup> May 1886)

The *World* agreed on Tyler’s excellent and appropriate selection of artisans, and attested the complicated process of sourcing artisans:

Dr. Tyler possessed both the confidence and affection of the natives of the North-West Provinces, and was thus able to surmount all the difficulties and prejudices with which the project was naturally surrounded.

(29<sup>th</sup> September 1886)

Together with the India Office and the press, the shipping company in charge of the group’s transportation also noted the careful selection of performers, stating for example that three craftsmen had been provided by the Maharaja of Bhurtpore and by the Maharaja of Bikanir (*Report of the Royal Commission for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, London, 1886: 285*). This archive convincingly indicates that while two of the craftsmen, the carpet weavers, were recruited from Agra Goal, the remaining artisans were probably recruited elsewhere. Where they learnt their skills, and if they were narrating ancient village traditions remains unknown. The warning that can be taken here is that both exhibition and contemporary accounts suggest that there are many forces that adapt performers’ histories. Indeed, aside from a few cases (including Ram), the records often obscure their experiences, motivations and

actions, and therefore quell contemporary hopes for uncovering lost voices. Instead, as Qureshi argues, the Indian artisans were incorporated into the wider imperial economy as useful workers even where, like Tulsi Ram “they had specifically rejected such an economy in their homelands (2011: 245).

## THE RESISTANT SUBJECT

However, the story of performers cannot end there, since their actions were not always contained by interpretation. Although it is mostly impossible to know who the performers really were, or what their experiences might have been, and while we must be persistently wary of colonial invention and post-colonial re-invention, it is possible on occasion to catch a glimpse of the individuals who acted not only within but also against the narratives being inscribed on them. As Ortner reminds us more generally: “[e]very culture, every subculture, every historical moment, constructs its own forms of agency, its own modes of enacting the process of reflecting on the self and the world and of acting simultaneously within and upon what one finds there” (1995: 186). Paying attention to the actions of performers during their time as exhibits (wherever is possible) not only attends to their agencies (a matter that both Mathur and Qureshi have expertly explored), it also suggests that the larger structures that exhibition agents operated within and against—in particular the heterogeneous Indian population in London and in India’s ideological struggle for independence within Western discourses. Although exhibited subjects were not independent from Western systems—since they were being defined by the terms of the dominant—they did on occasion exploit the dominant’s systems for their own uses. As Pratt claims more broadly: “[w]hile subordinate peoples do not usually control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what gets absorbed into their own and what it gets used for” (1991: 36).

While Bakshiram’s address was quelled into an act of adoration, Tulsi Ram was unsuccessful in British courts, and the petition made by the 1895 performers to their manager was disregarded, not all performers were so candidly regulated. During an Indian village exhibition put on by the renowned

department store Liberty & Co., forty-two Indian performers contested the terms of their display, indicating not only the total failure of the exhibition at large, but also a more forceful resistance to the terms of employment. By making complaints to the police, seeking advice from lawyers and appearing in court, the Indian performers resisted the dominant strategies not only of representation but also of colonialism by claiming their right as British citizens to equal and impartial protection of the law. It is therefore to this case, although elsewhere discussed, that I now turn my attention.

In an attempt to promote and increase sales of their already successful Eastern merchandise, including expensive Indian silks, ornate Oriental furniture, carpets and shawls, in 1885 Arthur Lasenby Liberty, owner of Liberty & Co., adapted his in-store bazaar into a far larger out-of-store exhibition which included a variety of Indian performances (as discussed in the introduction). Despite Liberty's increasing use of industrially manufactured reproductions of handmade Indian goods, the store's exhibition at the Albert Palace sought to showcase to the public the intricate handiwork that allegedly went into producing their Oriental products. The inclusion of live Indian performance was designed to attract crowds, authenticate inauthentic products, and boost profit. Instead, however, the introduction of living artisans into the event generated, as Mathur (2007: 29/41) has emphasised, a great deal of controversy, and ultimately failed on a commercial and ethical scale. The performers' suffering during their time as exhibits attracted world-wide attention over the irony that a civilised country would involve itself in the barbaric act of exhibiting people. Mathur has considered the failure of Liberty's exhibition against the devastating economic consequences of British manufacturing in cloth, wool, and silk in India and the destruction of handicraft production, which went on to become the defining theme in Indian nationalist movements. Yet, the Indian Village exhibits also expose the transnational experiences of the subaltern entering the metropolitan space, as well as other kinds of tensions between actors and structures, social/economic mobilities and political activities.

The group of Indians recruited for Liberty's 1885 display had arrived to a particularly harsh winter in England, and having been observed unhappily

shivering while exhibiting their work, their suffering quickly became the prominent feature of the exhibition. The press widely criticised organizers for the poor timing of the exhibition, and reviews commonly thought it cruel to bring the performers to London in the winter months: “[t]he cold winds over the last few days suggest doubt as to whether it can be altogether kind to have brought these fellow-subjects of ours to begin to exhibit their arts amongst us in our severest season” declared *The Leeds Mercury* (31 October 1885). “The men, unfortunately, are not happy in this gloomy and sunless clime of ours. They shiver visibly” agreed another review (*The Dundee Courier & Argus and Northern Warder*, 13 November 1885: 6). Wanting to find out more about the situation, an anonymous ‘afternoon visitor’ called on the exhibited Indians at their lodgings, which were located behind the Albert Palace, to find out what their troubles were and to discover who was responsible for them. His account, published in the *Daily News* and verified in India Office records, offers valuable evidence alluding to the terms of the group’s employment, as well as the predicament and agency of the performing subject at the heart of the Empire.

The journalist who visited the group described the desolately furnished and dirty condition of their accommodation, reporting that the Indians themselves “looked about as wretched as any poor mortals could look” (*Daily News*, 20 February 1886: 5). The article explained that the Indians had been enticed into exhibition employment in a contract that assured safe travel, comfortable accommodation, minimal working hours (at a maximum of four hours per day), opportunity to visit the sights of London, and the possibility of making their fortunes. According to the journalist, before their departure the Indians were advised by their contractors to provide themselves with “good big boxes” for transporting home all the rupees they would make in London, promised that after working for only six months they would return home exceedingly wealthy (ibid: 5). However, upon arrival to London these dreams were quickly dashed, and for lack of beds, the performers slept on the empty boxes that were meant to be filled with Rupees. “I am not Christian,” one Indian man told the visitor “But I will swear on Bible that I sleep for a month on boxes” (ibid: 5).

The false promises made to the performers intersected with other kinds of economic exploitation/emigration from India, including the 'petitioner class'—a term that referred to the flux of Indians who travelled to London to seek justice in British court (Mathur, 2007: 73-4)—and also to a global economic exploitation of labour. During the nineteenth century, millions of Indians were recruited for employment abroad under the false premise that they would be guaranteed work and wages (Carter and Torabully, 2002). Indian 'coolie' workers were typically shipped directly from India to the Caribbean, Fiji and Mauritius where they were put to work a new system of slavery as 'neo-slaves' in the sugar plantations. Agents even travelled directly to Indian villages, and tricked workers into migration by deceiving them of the great opportunities that awaited them in the Empire, with venerable individuals and women offering particularly easy targets (Carter and Torabully, 2002: 19). The situation gave rise to the indenture system, which attempted to regulate the migration of the Indian 'coolie' labour force, contracting workers into a system whereupon half their wages would be paid before their departure, and the other half would be held and only released upon their arrival home. However, Raj peasants who worked as 'sugar hands' and 'mill hands' in the colonies—Mauritius, Natal, and Fiji—often did not return home after their indentures (Kumar, 2017). The indenture system, as Carter and Torabully (2002), Kumar (2017), and Visram (1986) explain, was legally binding but was also rarely enforced, and thus is an example of the economic strategies of migration and exploitative power relations.

Although the indenture system rarely extended to Britain itself (Mathur, 2007: 72-3), a similar process of temptation and trickery had been used to lure the Liberty performers, whose fantasies of London and hopes for fortunes were left in tatters upon their arrival. Although, like the indenture system, wages, travel, accommodation and duration of employment was a matter of contract for the Liberty performers, the agreed price of their labour was left unpaid. In fact not one of the assurances made to the group was delivered, and the 'visitor' concluded that "the people were cruelly deceived...their hours have been long, their clothing quite inadequate" (ibid: 5). Consequently, they can

be thought of as operating within a 'new system of slavery' (a system Kumar (2017) has re-considered in detail). However, their employment also operated in another system, and after the termination of their employment, the Liberty performers sought justice in London's courts. They were thus not only victims of broader illusions/economies drawn by Empire, they also protested against the deceit of their employers within the British system of law in ways most other labourers could not.

After the company responsible for the Liberty performers all but disappeared, leaving wages unpaid, the group actively sought compensation. Significantly, their actions show the working of agency *within* and *against* asymmetrical power relations. In December 1885, *The Standard* reported that the Wandsworth Police had received complaints from two members of the Indian Village, who informed constables that they had been unduly dismissed from employment, without money or food. Upon hearing this, the officer who received their complaint went with them to the Albert Palace to speak with their manager, who claimed he did not even know they had left their apartments. After the visit, the police concluded that "[t]here was no foundation for the complaints" (*The Standard* 19 December 1885: 2) and the case was rejected. It was not, however, dismissed long, and was taken up again in February, after further complaints by the Indians were made. This time Mr. Nanda Lal Ghosh, 'barrister at law' made an application to go to court on behalf of the members of the Indian Village.

The author of the *Daily News*' article met Ghosh during his visit, whom he mistook for one of the performers and described as a "buttoned up in an overcoat and wearing a flaring crimson turban over a face of considerable intelligence" (20 February 1886: 5). Otherwise decreed a helpless and ignorant group, Ghosh was pronounced as both visually and mentally intelligent. He was now a leader of sorts of the group and "had been foremost in representing what they all felt had been bad usage" (ibid: 5). Ghosh's involvement in the case uncovers resistance to the terms of employment and also marks the expectations/conflict of Indian status. Mr. Ghosh was not a performer; in fact, he had moved from Bengal to England in the 1870s, where

he had been accepted into the Inner Temple at Cambridge University and trained to be a barrister. In 1883 he married Ellen Grove and was called to the bar on 1<sup>st</sup> November of the same year. In 1885, having moved to London, Ghosh was appointed chairman of a committee “composed of few English and Indian gentlemen appointed to advise and assist the Indians lately appearing in the Indian Village, Albert Palace, who applied to the magistrate at Wandsworth Police Court yesterday for advice” (Letter from Ghosh IOR/L/PJ/6/170, File 274). According to Ghosh, the performers had approached him themselves seeking assistance, and having looked into the matter, he concluded that the Albert Palace Association was “really responsible for the contract of the breach thereof and for the deception which has been systematically played upon these poor Indians” (ibid). Thanks to Ghosh’s involvement, the group was offered one month’s wages and return passage to India by debenture-holders. However, in an act of further defiance, they refused the offer in order to hold out for all that was owed to them. In doing so they present a particularly striking example of British systems of law could be taken up by Indians for other kinds of power.

Before I can expand on these points further, I should note that while their appearance in court was unusual, it was not a total anomaly in the landscape of exhibited peoples. Qureshi (2011: 139-40) has described a number of instances when exhibited peoples appeared in court, and called upon the force of law for support. For example, although the contract of exhibited Zulu chief Manyos did not restrict him to the confines of the Crystal Palace grounds, he found himself in trouble in 1853 after taking a stroll through Hyde Park. The judge ruled that there was no legal right in preventing Manyos from venturing outside the confines of the exhibition (Qureshi 2011: 139-40). Other performers meanwhile sought legalities of courts in order to peruse monetary compensation. For example, in December 1887 the City of London Courts granted Owakerson, who was a member of the Japanese Native Village of 1884, the sum of £50 from her employers for travel costs back to Japan. Neither was it wholly extraordinary for consent issues to capture public attention, Satjee Baartman being a prime example. One of the more widely discussed people exhibits, Baartman, a Khoi woman from Southwestern



Africa, travelled to England in 1810 and performed her 'exoticness' in London under the stage name Hottentot Venus where she became something of a celebrity. In 'Displaying Sara Baartman, the 'Hottentot Venus'' Qureshi (2004) provides an important overview and discussion of Baartman's case and highlights contemporary concerns over the quest to return Baartman's body to her homeland. In the context of Baartman's exhibition, and in a global climate still seeking to justify slavery, African exhibits were used as examples of a lesser-evolved race, becoming central to the evolutionary theory which continually placed the White man on top in order to vindicate atrocities, economies and political authorities. Yet, slavery was a highly contested topic, and abolitionists in connection with the African Association took her case to court over slavery charges. In court however, Baartman allegedly appealed that she had consented to her display (See Qureshi (2011: 136-140) for further consideration of consent issues).

Responding to the many legal disputes that accompanied the exhibition of people it became common for performers to be contracted into employment in order to avoid any possible court upheaval. A collection of contracts from various exhibitions, now held in the Museum of London, reveal that as the nineteenth century wore on, exhibition legalities tightened. Daily wages, duration of employment, and living conditions were routinely written into exhibition performers' contracts. All expenses including travel, food and accommodation were commonly covered by the indenture. For example, exhibited craftspeople were usually contracted to produce, and sometimes even sell their own goods, but agreed to hand over all profits whereupon they would be given a small percentage of their sales in addition to their wage. Some contracts even made allowances for performers to terminate their employment and return home at the expense of the exhibition, should they so wish. A template contract written in 1910 held at the Museum of London archives, for example, states that if any native desired to return home "the necessary expenses to enable them to do so to devolve upon the second party". As Qureshi (2011: 135) similarly notes, human displays in the later nineteenth century became increasingly professionalised, and operated with contracts and recruitment offers.

Although performers were able to appeal if contracts were breached, as in the case of the Liberty performers, their benefit within that system must not be overstated. Despite the scattering of court cases involving displayed peoples, and the evidence of contracts, the majority of performers engaged in exhibitions would not have known that legal representation was an option, and even if they did, they would not have had the recourses to take action (Qureshi, 2011: 141). More significantly, the defiance of the Liberty performers returns us to the issue of mimicry, which as Bhabha (1994: 123) argues is a process of disavowal, a strategy of reform and normalises knowledge and colonial power structures. The activities undertaken in courts by exhibited people functioned within British discourses of law but also disrupt colonialism's fantasies of the Other, and therefore its authority—a matter that works within the ambivalent status of Indians and a complex process of mimicry. The Liberty performers are thus not only indicative of Pratt's 'contact zone', they also present a manifestation of Ortner's assertion that "there is a dynamic, powerful, and sometimes transformative relationship between the practices of real people and the structures of society, culture, and history" (2006:133). Their political activity points to and even aggravates one of the central contradictions of colonial rule: that even as it tried to create inferior and obedient 'subjects', the dominant British ideology of liberalism also seeded notions of rights, citizenship and the obligations of political authority to its Indian subjects. This suggests the complex and often contradictory creation of imperial subjects at the same time as it indicates ways in which mimicry can be a deflective discourse of power on a larger scope (even though the liberty performers were not directly petitioning against colonial rule).

The Liberty performers' interaction with London's judicial systems intersected with economic migrations and colonial mimics. It also connected to the complex and unstable status of Indians. As Cooper and Stoler comment more broadly, to whom the status of citizenship and social right should be extended to was a hotly debated topic in the nineteenth century (1997: 1). In particular, the performers' encounter with Ghosh is indicative of the already established and heterogeneous Indian population living in London, which included Indian

destitutes, *ayahs* (nannies), *lascars* (sailors) and servants, but also a population of educated upper caste Indians in professional careers. Ghosh's position was not unusual, and London in particular was experiencing a growth of Indian students during the nineteenth century. Significantly it was this group of English-educated Indian elites who, as Lahari (2000: xi) argues, played crucial roles in the development of modern India. Embodying a subversive mimicry that involved the appropriation of Western concepts of education, law and citizenship, the English-educated elite, which included Ghosh, gained access to the structures of colonial hierarchy. Although many were loyal to the Raj, this was also this group who often began questioning British rule. That the founding members of Indian National Congress met in London during their time as students is particularly significant (see Lahari's (2000) account of Indian students in London, especially p. 176-187), showing that India's struggle for independence was born in and brought to the very centre of imperial power (Visram, 2002: 2). Although Ghosh was not an 'active' resistor of the Raj, he was educated by a system which he then used to protect the rights of other Indians. Exhibitions therefore throw into focus the tensions and complexities of Britain's view of India, as well as India's heterogeneous population in London in the late Victorian period.

Asian resistance to colonialism in Britain, of course, is not an unknown story. As Lahari (2000), Visram (2002) Ahmed and Mukherjee (2011) and many other scholars show, between Victoria's proclamation at Empress of India in 1858 and India's independence in 1947, Indians in Britain enacted and led a range of vital resistances. In 1895, Sir Bhownagri Mancherji Merwanji, state agent for the Bhaunagar Raja, Bombay, was elected as Conservative MP for Bethnal Green. Successfully bringing Indian issues to the fore in the House of Commons, in particular the treatment of Indians in South Africa, Merwanji suggests that resistance was not only led by members of the National Congress, but also through others agents who did not necessarily actively seek to overthrow the Raj (see Ahmed and Mukherjee (2011)). Yet the contradictions of colonial rule—in particular its desire for subjugated/backward subjects and for an educated/civilised Indian population—is acutely potent in exhibitions, which on one had invented and

showcased a so-called primitive and native India, and on the other engaged and relied upon the educated Indian elite, who visited, sent commodities, and even helped manage events. Exhibitions operated as sites that therefore expose deep contradictions in the subjectivities of metropolis. As London showcased a version of India that was exotic and primitive, it was also welcoming Indians into authoritative roles and positions of power, which could ultimately be used against racial discrimination and even imperial rule. Moreover, the social actors of exhibitions, such as the Liberty performers, suggest that resistance did not only come in the form of 'active' political activism or anti-imperial opposition, but also through a subtler demand for freedom, equality and justice. These values are complex, and rely on Western standards of nationalism, enlightenment and progress. Individuals of the English educated elite, including Ghosh and Merwanji are caught in this paradox. Nevertheless, it is also through the acquisitions of British values, enacted in numerous ways, that Indians equipped themselves as political agents and activists.

#### TRAILOKYA NATH MUKHARJI

Indian exhibition official Trailokya Nath Mukharji is an important individual who presents himself as an agent caught within this paradox, and can help explain it further. Mukharji's activities at the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition are significant in that they expose the maintenance and defiance of imperial ideology within a mimicry of Western values. Mukharji was an expert on Indian economic products and was employed as an exhibition official for the Indian Courts of numerous exhibitions, including the 1883 Amsterdam Exhibition, the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition and the 1888 Glasgow International Exhibition. His recollection of 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibition, published in *A Visit to Europe* offers an important first-hand account of the exhibition experience from an Indian perspective. Occupied in a space that sought to stage 'backward' India, Mukharji's memoir also exposes tensions, contradictions of Indian status, as well as the subjects'

internalisation and subversion of Western values, all which emerge in complex form through exhibition experience.

Mukharji's book is well known. It has been widely referenced in contemporary texts as an example of the Indian experience, which for scholars draws on questions of colonial identity/affiliation, the role of Indian art, and the Indian elite's internalisation of colonial definitions being dictated by the West. Mathur argues that Mukharji reflects the class anxieties of the colonial elite who "feared that the end of empire might also mean the end of the social advantages they held from their proximity to the British" and views him as a loyal supporter of empire (2007: 63). Qureshi, meanwhile, is more interested in the "complexity and reciprocal acts of looking" revealed in Mukharji's accounts (2011: 246), while Hoffenberg's (2011: 55) curiosities lie in Mukharji's active participation in the invention of Indian art, and its classification. Cherie McKeich (2011: 107) argues that Mukharji used international exhibitions to promote Indian products, and focuses on the little known relationship between Australia and India which emerged through exhibitions. Joseph Childers (2004) argues that in his memoir Mukharji is "almost painfully aware of the differences between English and Indian" and that his "commentary at once both lauds and lampoons those characteristics that are instantly recognizable as the "essence" of English national identity at the end of the nineteenth century" (2004: 299). Childers contends that as a participant of the imperial enterprise, Mukharji reinforced it. Yet, he also recognises that Mukharji "forced the imperial imagination to come face-to-face with its own boundaries and limits" and that his position in the imperial landscape "simultaneously empowers and circumscribes his agency" (2004: 301/306). However, Mukharji's appropriation and rejection of Western ideologies central to the exercise of British power and the politics that develop from his exhibition experience have been overlooked. Mukharji's book not only reveals the conflicts of the metropolis' view of Indians, and shows how social agents challenge expectations and colonial categories, it also points towards the Indian acquisition of Western ideas of enlightenment. This mimicry indicates new approaches to hegemonic forms of power and even glimpses at a broader Indian modernity that Maharatna has described as an

“awakening of a staunch nationalist sentiment for freedom movement and independence from the colonial clutches” (2013: 1).

Departing Bombay on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 1886, Mukharji travelled to London on the steamer ‘Nepaul’ on a second class ticket, arriving to the Thames of London on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 1886. He had travelled with two other Indian officials, Bengali Mr. Gupte and Mr. U.C Mukharji (of no relation), who had also been appointed to the Colonial and Indian exhibition. Mukharji felt that his higher social rank distinguished him, yet revealingly, in London he also felt that the British public were generally unable to make distinctions between him and the exhibition performers (as had also been the case for Ghosh). And although London was becoming an increasingly cosmopolitan city, like Ghosh Mukharji experienced the expectations of ‘Indian’ which still rarely including the professional or the educated. At the exhibition Mukharji was regularly mistaken for an exhibit and often became an observed part of the display, receiving gawps from exhibition visitors, for example, for simply reading a newspaper, or eating lunch. He noticed that demands of “we want to hear the turbaned gentlemen” followed him everywhere (Mukharji, 1897: 101). Most spectators were ignorant to the fact that he could speak English, and discussed him freely, unaware their conversations were understood. This ‘ignorance’ both offended and amused Mukharji as he transformed the British ‘natives’ into the object of *his* study. He enjoyed people-watching, and would often sit for hours, observing patrons, wondering “[w]ould they discuss us so freely if they knew we understood their language?” (ibid: 101). Yet he also found their encounters “more refreshing than a glass of port wine” (ibid: 102).

While his returned gaze resisted cultural production, Mukharji also experienced the anticipation of difference predicted by Otherness, part of which he internalised and accepted as a colonial discourse. Noting that the ‘Native Artisans’ at the Colonial and Indian exhibition always had the largest crowd, Mukharji remarked that audiences looked upon his fellow countrymen as if they were animals and were:

as much astonished to see the Indians produce works of art with the aid of rude apparatus they themselves had discarded long ago, as a Hindu would be to see a chimpanzee officiating as a priest in a funeral ceremony and reading out Sanskrit texts from a palm leaf book spread before him.

(ibid: 99)

Mukharji's comparison of Hindu to a chimpanzee is particularly alarming, and suggests his acceptance of racist discourse, mocking it as Childers (2004: 303) has argued, even as he participates in it. However, while he appropriated Britain's anthropological habit of comparing displayed peoples with monkeys (see chapter Three), he also challenged Britain's notion of evolutionary status. For example, by equating the British sport of hunting exotic animals to the vicious practices of Nágá tribes, Mukharji transformed the British into the 'savage', and therefore robbed the British of their moral and evolutionary mantle. Mukharji reasoned that the Hindu alone "feels the sorrow of blood shed" and that his religion alone "teaches him to look upon every living thing as his own self" (1887: 73-4). The irony that the civilised European would hunt creatures for sport indicated to Mukharji the persecution of colonialism and its brutality—albeit a brutality against animal and man, who were once again grouped together. He drew on a predatory metaphor of colonialism, condemning sporting practices such as the hunt, which as Pandian explains "were crucial constituents of colonial rule" (2001: 83), and in this way criticised colonialism.

There were other occasions when Mukharji subverted British assumptions about Indian identity, which more directly stem from his experience at the exhibition. "It was from the ladies in particular that we received the largest amount of patronage" Mukharji claimed, as speculation as to how many wives the Indian men had, became their regular discussion (1887: 99). Mukharji was amused by one instance in particular when an Indian performer asked a waitress to marry him, and replenish his total number of wives to two hundred and fifty. To her cries of "O you monster, O you wretch!" the Indian man teased the waitress that he had killed one of his wives because she could not cook porridge, and was now looking to replace her (ibid: 100). The ease of mocking patrons played with the narratives of the imperial imagination and of

stereotypical forms. Although such encounters were perhaps in danger of strengthening racial prejudice, laughter in the face of adversity also exaggerated, exposed and thus eased a deeply rooted colonial fears, including fear of sexual brutality.

More significantly, throughout his memoir Mukharji demonstrates his envy and mimicry of the characteristics the West had ascribed to itself, an envy that only increased through his exhibition experience (and then became an important challenge to the imperial cause). Throughout his memoir Mukharji sourced and admired the attributes he associated with Britishness, often at the expense of rejecting his home nation. He commented that at the cost of travelling to London he was:

probably an outcast from that moment. The old village where my family lived for the last four hundred years, where I was born, will probably no longer be my home. The old stunted mango tree which looks into my room and which always seems to say to me whenever I watch it – “I have seen your father born and die here, I have seen your grand-father, I have seen seven generations of your family,” will probably sorrow to see me no more under its shade. (1887: 27)

Mukharji felt bitter, not towards the anticipated rejection of his home and family, but because of “the unreasonable prejudices of my countrymen” (ibid). His resentment and anxiety are clearly rooted in Western idioms. He consciously desired India’s acquisition of British ideals of masculinity, progress and rationality—a desire that was only strengthened through his time at the exhibition. He was persistently envious of ‘proper’ English character, and admired the quintessence of nineteenth-century British ‘manliness.’ He thought his English friend, Mr. Thomas Christy, who was a frequent visitor of the 1886 exhibition, to be the “ideal” Englishman, identifying him as “strong and stout in physical make, generous, open and stern in mind and unrelenting in his aversion to all sorts of humbug and nonsense. He is the essence of action, as contrasted with the hindu, the essence of inaction” (1889: 86). He then applied these ideas of identity to ideas of power and progress, often in a rationalisation of British rule. Believing that Europe was always on the lookout for new things, Mukharji thought India chose “to go still



more backward” and that an Indian would “not accept new knowledge even if it is forced down his throat with a hydraulic hammer... he has always done his best to shut his eyes against the influence of modern enlightenment” (1887: 77-8). “[P]ower and prosperity in a nation depend on its capacity to change” (1887: 76) Mukharji remarked. Mukharji felt that Europe offered a state of development which India may not reach for centuries, and that progress and prosperity was an unreachable future without British rule. He supposed that Britain’s thirst to understand India, to utilise its resources and unlock its potential granted it a right to rule, and judged that India, on the other hand, was ‘native’ because it was so unwilling to progress. His assessments here undoubtedly assumed and re-produced imperial rhetoric, as well as the categories being created for India in the exhibition, such as traditional, backward, static, and premodern.

Mukharji therefore articulates larger structures and assumptions upon which power is based, representing himself in dialectical response with the idioms of the dominant. Pledging allegiance to the Raj while stressing their own social advantage, upper-caste Indians, including Mukharji, collaborated with European enlightenment tradition and the supposed obstacles of civilising—including India’s refusal to change and the people’s unwillingness to accept new knowledge. Nevertheless despite those obstacles, Mukharji believed the British administration was capable of wiping away “all trace of savagery from the country” and cleansing “the land of filth and dirt” (1887: 126). He believed British rule would:

Stamp out preventable diseases which cut off vigorous manhood and shock civilised humanity, to make roads and railways, to import the benefit of education to the ignorant masses, to shew them the road to wealth and prosperity, to teach them to eat, dress and live like men, and generally to bring this interesting people within the pale of modern civilisation. (1887: 126)

These statements reflect a wider process of mimicry amongst the Indian elite in London, who could distance themselves from India’s ‘backwardness’ as they cast themselves into authoritative roles and maintained their own

advantaged social positions. Not surprisingly, as Bates argues “Indian elites were seen to share features in common with their European masters: assets that could doubtlessly be enhanced with the aid of Western education and under the beneficence of British rule” (1995: 4).

Mukharji’s views are also reflective of the issue that at the same time as Britain was looking for ways to subjugate and render Indians inferior, it was also trying to create a class of Indian Englishmen through education. These various strands of the colonial enterprise appear and collide in exhibitions where they often stood in contradiction and tension. Indian managers, educated, well-dressed and able to speak English, were perhaps one of the greatest surprises to visitors, revealing the expectations of ‘Indian-ness’ and the ways in which those expectations were being challenged through the exhibition space. The participation of the Indian elite in exhibitions exposes Bhabha’s (1994: 121-131) analysis of the ambivalence of the coloniser’s attitudes toward the colonised, but also the expectation and conflict of the ‘Indian-ness’ that exhibitions were helping to invent. For example, through his command of English and his educated replies to spectators’ questions, Mukharji challenged the expectations of ‘Indian’ created in part through the exhibition.

The processes of Mukharji’s mimicry—being his desire to emulate Britishness—also involved disavowal, connecting to a complex process of mimicry which I have already discussed. Mukharji fluctuates between contradictions in which he celebrates British rule (including its rationality and civilising influence), and condemns it (including the hunt), wherein he proposes a path of improvement for India which is not contiguous with Britain’s imperial enterprise. Although Mukharji believed a modern India could only be achieved through India’s adoption of British policy, his ultimate hope for India was that it would one day achieve independence. Along the way, Mukharji uses the familiar phrases of the Irish Home-Rule debate. In fact Mukharji arrived to England as Gladstone’s Home-Rule Bill was passed in parliament, and admired Gladstone for defending the Bill on the grounds of justice (1887: 54-55). Mukharji believed it to be a sin “to rob a neighbour of

his kingdom” (ibid: 55). He also noted that the Irish controversy was closely watched by Indians who knew England would one day have decide a bigger Home-Rule question—“the Home-Rule for India” (ibid: 59). Mukharji wanted to see his country progress, to launch itself from stagnant national life, but also hoped for independence. He therefore stands alongside an educated Indian population who felt the injustice that enlightenment was not being applied to non-Europeans. Thus Mukharji stands as an example of Chatterjee’s assertion, in all its problematic and thematic complexity, that nationalist thought “rejects and accepts dominance, both epistemic and moral, of an alien culture” (1993: 11). In turn this thinking denies the colonial claim that colonised peoples were inexorably backward and incapable of self-rule. Furthermore, Mukharji shows that progress was not just conceived as a condition of the British race but was also viewed as a potential of the Hindu race (who, as Chapter Three has explained were believed to share a common, though diverged, ancestry).

What also becomes interesting in the case of Mukharji is that British sympathised with his hopes for independence. An article on Mukharji in the *Spectator* commented that “[h]e [Mukharji] sees the necessity of British rule, though he has aspirations, for which, indeed, no one can blame him, for Home-rule” (19 October 1889: 24). This sympathetic reaction to Mukharji’s aspirations, in spaces where British agents stressed their guardianship and superiority, undoubtedly interpenetrates with Britain’s increasing uncertainty about Empire and rule abroad. Mukharji rippled the imperial ethos, which, as the century progressed, was beginning to acknowledge and even sympathise with India’s desire for independence (see Chapter Three for further discussion of how exhibitions engaged/influenced this change). This is not to deny that Mukharji’s hopes for independence are complex. Rather it shows that although he does not affiliate directly with Indian nationalism he does point to the creation of a new Indian nation, which he envisages as emulating British values of modern enlightenment, rationality and new knowledge.

Mukharji indicates an issue discussed by Chatterjee (1993) and Kaviraj (2010) that the modern Indian state is inextricably linked to colonialism. He

can thus be located in what Chatterjee has described as ‘the moment of departure’. It is at this point, Chatterjee explains, where nationalist thinkers accept the essentialist difference between East and West. Yet there is also something else going on here. While Mukharji internalises and accepts differences between the British and Indians, his mimicry of Western values points to the awakening of nationalist sentiment for independence. Mukharji’s attitudes, which were stimulated through his exhibition experience, therefore lie in a mimicry that is situated in a confidence in Enlightenment that is not only produced and upholds Western power, but also subverts it.

Mukharji’s experiences highlight other kinds of social hierarchies operating through the exhibition space which reflect/stimulate larger unequal migrations and economies. While embracing an ideology of civilising, Mukharji spoke of the role of British ‘education’ played in allowing “so many of her sons to break through the trammels of caste, to rise above old prejudices and superstitions” (1897: 1). As Malhotra emphasises, in reinterpreting caste, the Indian elite “wrought changes in it to fit in with their various social and political goals” (2002: 6). Mukharji, representative of the English educated elite, also fed an assumption that racial superiority could be found in the scientific ‘rationality’, ‘curiosity’ and ‘intellectual exploration’ of the British. Although feeling liberated, Mukharji was a product of Western education, which upheld colonial institutions (including the British documentation and ‘fixing’ of caste—see Chapter Three), at the cost of re-subordinating others, including the performers imported for display at the exhibition. He can also thus be thought of as a product of the British creation of loyal (often governing) elite produced through the institutions of school and university (see Cohn, 1996, for discussion of the elite).

Recognised as an official of high social standing, Mukharji travelled to London as a member of privileged migration, and is a component of not only of Britain’s complex view of Indians, but also other kinds of social and economic hierarchies. That he negotiated the terms of his employment stands as an expression of his status, his agency in unequal power relations, and the asymmetries between the Indian elite and the Indian subaltern. On numerous

occasions throughout his employment Mukharji requested additional payment. Before agreeing to travel to London and provide his expertise for the exhibition, Mukharji appealed to Mr. Buck that he would require an allowance of R75 per month in addition to the wage already agreed. A series of letters between Officials ensued, disputing whether or not the extra charge was justified and appropriate. Many felt that the opportunity of visiting London should be regarded as reward enough. Others recognised the discrimination facing Indian officials, and agreed further funds were reasonable. A statement on the matter concluded:

The principal rule which governs the deputation allowance of an European Officer does not, we understand, apply in the case of a native of India, and we propose therefore, to allow these officers to draw their full pay during their absence from India; as they have to maintain their families in India they could not otherwise afford to go. We also propose to grant them a further sum of R2,000 each to cover the cost of their passage to and from England and all other incidental expenses connected with their deputation.

(National Archives, India. Files no 1. Serial 3/032)

A few months into the duration of his employment at the Colonial and Indian exhibition, Mukharji demanded another pay rise, writing that “[a]s I find that my expenses in London will be more than I estimated, I shall be obliged by your taking the necessary steps to pay me through the India Office R175 per month” (ibid). His request once again was granted, and his salary increased from R75 to R175 p/m/c.

Despite the salary increase and the remarkable way in which he asserted his needs, Mukharji requests expose a racial pay gap. Mukharji’s total cost for his services at the exhibition, inclusive of his travel fees, pay rise and other allowances was R5,770 (roughly £420), and covered six months of employment. The total fell short of what British experts were paid. Sir George Watt, for example, received a total salary of R2, 600, in addition to an advance of R1000 made to him prior to his employment, for only a little over three months service. Furthermore, Mukharji’s salary is not indicative of the salaries of exhibition performers, who were paid significantly less. For

example, the according to the *Daily News* visitor, the contract of the 1885 Liberty performers showed they would receive salaries ranging from 25 to 75 rupees per calendar month, depending on their gender and skill. The visitor went on to note “[t]he rupee, reckoning for exchange, may be taken to be about one and sevenpence” (ibid: 5). The wage of the Liberty performers would therefore equate to, at its highest, around £5 p/c/m—a far cry from what Mukharji was earning.

It is not only racial and gender pay inequality (as well as labour exploitation) being raised here; the question of why performers chose employment as exhibits must also be drawn into query. Although a salary of £5 p/m/c would not make the performers lavishly wealthy, it was a healthy wage even by British working class standards, especially since the performers were not required to pay for their travel or living costs. Taking into account that wages in Britain were tending to grow steadily between 1813 – 1902 (Ball and Sunderland 2002: 101), whereas the Indian economy under British rule was stagnated, suffering de-industrialisation and was experiencing a decline in unskilled and skilled wages (Rosser and Rosser 2004: 463), it is highly likely that on this wage the performers would be earning significantly more in London than they could in India. Qureshi (2011: 135) makes similar conclusions that exhibition employment offered people considerably higher wages, which suggests one good reason that they chose exhibition work.

There is an important issue of hierarchy and Indian access to power. Despite the agency of the Albert Palace Indians within the law and against the terms of their employment, performers continued to operate as sites upon which the notion of Indian inferiority was drawn. While their plight received global attention, the Indians were also recounted as victimised and powerless. “The Albert Palace show of the Indian Village has come to an end,” stated an Australian paper, “the poor half frozen Hindoos have returned to their own land and one feels mortified to think what an impression they must have carried away with them of the country of their great Empress” (*The West Australian*, 2 April 1886). On account of the unhappy situation in which the ‘afternoon visitor’ found the Indian group of the Liberty exhibition, he hoped

and believed, that other exhibitions would henceforth be deterred from displaying people. His article concluded:

Their performances, naturally enough, have been very unsatisfactory, and their importation a signal failure... It has been a wretched business throughout, and the moral of it seems to be that without some sort of precautions for the protection of helpless and ignorant foreigners against the unscrupulous agents for exhibitions, this sort of importation ought not to be permitted. Perhaps it is a matter of satisfaction that the failure of this venture has been so signal that is not likely to meet with imitators. (ibid: 5)

These accounts shattered romantic visions of London and exposed the unglamorous aspects of the metropolis' amusements, as well as the cold-handed grip of British power, at the expense of recasting India as passive victims entirely without agency.

Despite the afternoon visitor's prediction, Liberty's venture was met with many imitators. In fact, the idea of displaying people in 'native villages' had already been copied in another exhibition: 'India in London', which was in full swing at Portland Hall, Langham-Place. Living India was then reproduced the next year at the Colonial and Indian exhibition and was to be a recurring feature of exhibitions throughout the remainder of the century, and into the next. What remained was a stereotypical view of India, and the re-articulation of loyal and submissive Indian subjects. The activities of Indian agents in this sense dissolves into a broader and overriding subjectivity.

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The idealist translation of India, and in particular the romanticising of colonial rule, persists in British archives and contemporary culture. For example, the old potter, Baxshiram, who stepped out to speak to his Empress at the Colonial and Indian exhibition, was also the subject of a painting commissioned by Victoria (see Fig 6.1). Used as an example of the variety of age, caste and occupational skill on offer at the exhibition, and to satisfy Queen Victoria's personal interest in India, Bakshiram was one of eight

artisans from the 1886 exhibition singled out to be painted by Rudolf Swoboda. As Mathur indicates, this collection commits to the rampant colonial desire for an 'authentic' premodern and exotic India (2003: 12). Yet, this romantic view of the East, which overlooks the exploitation of the exhibition and of the colonial era as well as the resistive subject it contains, has since appeared at the National Gallery's 'An Indian Encounter: Portraits for Queen Victoria' exhibition (2002-03) and in 'Artist & Empire', a major exhibition at Tate Britain (2015), representing, in a broader sense, the West's continued invention and sentimentalising of the East.

It is imprudent to propose that exhibited people operated *only* as entertaining expressions of orientalised identities. The significance here is that while exhibition displays were made relevant to and supported the imperial ethos by inventing Indian subjects who wanted/needed British rule (and created an image of India that prevails in the post-colonial present), it is also in those locations where subversions also claim space, if only a little. 'Contact zones', the derivative values from the West that are taken up against colonialism, as well as power and resistance are the issues that exhibited peoples draw upon, expose and on occasion bind together in unanticipated ways. In turn popular culture is exposed as a site of invention that is made meaningful to entertainment, the ideologies of imperialism and the prerogatives of the governing. However, in these broad historical moments there are more specific activities that exceeded the narratives being drawn by the dominant. For example, if we look beneath the narrative created for Baxshiram, there lies an individual. Although ultimately subjugated, the moments of agency found in the activities of performers, however small, must not be overlooked. In Baxshiram's address to Queen Victoria he was no longer a lesser or helpless subject of the Empire, he was no longer a mere spectacle, but a human being with hopes, fears, and even some agency. The intentionality of his outburst was probably not to object to British power directly, yet by defying his role as a passive object he invariably did so. His boldness only intensifies if we are to consider him a criminal serving time, leaving a further unanswerable question over whether he was disputing his sentence. Either way, however, he represented not only a collision of the subaltern periphery



and the ruling authority of the Empire, he proposes a disruption both to exhibition invention, and to postcolonial perspectives that deny the presence and agency of Indian subjects. Most crucially, it is in the performative space of the exhibition, which by fashioning a fictitious India that is premodern and incapable of modernity at the same time as it created agents who on occasion navigated the very systems of modernity and mimicry, that the success of British invention of India as a timeless or passive place, but also the breakdown of Empire becomes surprisingly clear. Even in those creative spaces where the ideologies of imperialism reigned high, exhibition displays also trace India's move within and against British power as a process of ideological resistance, albeit often a mimicry ideology.

## CONCLUSION

The exhibitions of the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth transported a diverse collection of foreigners to the Victorian metropolis, where those people were often exhibited in their 'natural' habitats. Whether small or large scale, exhibitions during this period routinely built 'authentic' environments for people to be displayed in. These included the 'native' village, chaotic street, or even the exotic city. The Albert Palace and the Portland Hall exhibitions were both relatively small events, yet both went to great lengths to build Indian villages, inside which a range of Oriental goods and people were showcased. The far larger 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1895-6 Empire of India (and Ceylon) exhibition and the Franco-British exhibition at White City erected Indian places, Indian bazaars, Indian market places, mosques, and palace courtyards on far larger scales. These fabrications of place are characteristic of the later nineteenth-century exhibition, which often included performers in the hundreds who "appeared to have been "immersed" in the grassy plains, parched savannahs, or rocky slopes of their homelands' natural environment" (Qureshi, 2011: 272-273).

The exhibition of African peoples, including the San, Hottentot or Zulu, were some of the most frequently exhibited spectacles in the later Victorian era, *Savage South Africa* being a particular highlight. Yet, the exhibition of India was also a very popular and recurring entertainment. By exploring the exhibition of India in Victorian London, my work has drawn on and contributed to the growing literature that considers the exhibition of people, recognising the showcase of a culture that could not be fully designated as inferior, but was also being recognised as an ancient and artistic civilisation. My contribution also lies in acknowledging the diverse modes through which Indian people were displayed during this time, and I have reviewed the numerous ways in which India was being corporeally represented and encountered in both living and static form. Unlike the exhibition of other countries or ethnicities, a range of Indian performers and entertainments were

showcased in the Victorian metropolis, including nautch girls, craftsmen, ethnological models and spectacles. Viewing space and place as integral elements of staging and giving meaning to the exotic body, my work has focused on the imperial century, and solely on the exhibition of India. However, there is plenty of scope for further research into the exhibition of other foreigners: Native Americans, the Irish, and Indigenous Australians included. Since the display of peoples from India differed to displays of people from Africa, and evidently occupied a different branch of anthropological scrutiny, entertainment, political relevance, imperial desire, and even resistance, it would be interesting to see what connections can be made between other ethnological displays and the production of ethnic difference, beyond the formation of more generic white/black, inferior/superior, coloniser/colonised binaries.

Although a more specific look at India only partially fills the lacuna in scholarship, I have shown India in exhibition to be particularly significant. Staged at the heart of the Empire, exhibited Indian entertainments allegedly produced entertaining and 'educational' accounts of India's geography, its history, evolution, tradition, gender identity and its social and cultural status, and in doing so claimed to represent a 'complete' view of India. On the contrary, while marketed as objective veracity, exhibitions produced styles of identity for Indians, making India and the Indian body a commodity of inventive cultures. As Bhabha reminds us more broadly, identity is not pre-given but rather is "the production of an image of identity" (1994: 64). The different ways and methods of representation through which India was performed and known in the exhibition space persuasively composed an 'all-inclusive' version of Indian identity for the public's consumption and offered it as reality. As I have argued in the chapters of this thesis, the insidiousness of exhibitions lies in the issue that they framed fantasy as non-fiction and in their validation of a range of stereotypes as cultural realism or scientific fact. Exhibitions thus indicate the inventive and stereotypical ways that Indian culture, its historical, social, political and anthropological status, was produced and actualised in and by the British imperial imagination and under conflating powers; colonisation, trade, entertainment, science included.

The imagery which shows helped to create through theatrical modes were far from ephemeral, rather they set a range of lingering stereotypes including the romantic, premodern, traditional, backward India. Indeed, the Western stereotyping of India that exhibitions helped style is prevalent in contemporary depictions, pointing to the persistent appeal and power of the style as well as the continuities between past and present. Films, for example, including *Eat, Pray, Love* (2010), *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011), and more recently *Victoria & Abdul* (2017) often perpetuate these images, and many reproduce nostalgia for the Raj as they recapture a romantic view looking East. Furthermore, with the history of colonialism neglected in school curriculums, the West perpetually sensationalises India. India is enduringly marked and known as magical, beautiful, dirty, impoverished and technologically backward, while Crown rule continues to be commemorated. As Mathur notes: “the categories of caste, tradition, village, and the craftsman continue to re-emerge in significant ways and often remain the primary precepts through which postcolonial culture is imagined and staged” (2007: 167). Daboo (2005) draws similar conclusions with the mega-musical *Bombay Dreams*, which was seen by over one and half million people. She argues that, despite moments of resistance, the production perpetuated stereotypical images of India and Indian people in a kitsch aesthetic and clichéd plot that conforms “to an imperialist definition of ethnicity” (2005: 331).

Similarly, post-war and post-independence exhibitions also repeat a range of aesthetics and values that earlier events helped to produce. For example, although the festival of India, held in London from March to November in 1982, claimed to signal “a new era in the politics of representation”, its themes were not new (Mathur, 2007: 27). Rather they operated as a continuation of imperialist definitions, economies and ethnographies (2007: 27-28). Alike to exhibitions of the nineteenth century, the festival of India was a spectacular showcase of Indian arts and crafts. It was designed as the largest exhibition of Indian art and was arranged to the theme of the Indian perception of the universe through 2,000 years. The idea was that the series

of events enabled India to be presented on its “own terms” (Vatsyayan, 1982), and the festival included a range of fringe entertainments, including demonstrations by traditional artists, dances, music, as well as seminars. In doing so the 1982 exhibition restored styles, synergies and meanings that formed alongside colonisation, and presented ideas about the value of tradition and appeared in juxtaposition to the urban city. The festival also repeated a range of interests that have clear connections with past concerns being roused in part through the Victorian exhibition, including the heritage, cultural value, and artistic ‘reality’ of Indian art, as well as the promotion of Indian-British relations. It therefore must be understood as a re-production of a range of powerful interests that were born out of the conditions of the imperial enterprise. As Daboo notes more broadly, the vision of India being spawned in postcolonial popular culture re-produces the imaginations of the narratives and aesthetics of the colonial past. Victorian exhibitions are part of the roots of this past, insisting upon as they shaped stereotypical views that resided in imaginings of India’s exoticism and cultural lag. They marked Britain’s modernity, its superiority and its right to rule those deemed so premodern and degenerated. The historic imagination therefore, is one to do with commercial and economic stereotyping, with Western ideas of itself, with imperial power and its modes of knowledge. The Victorian exhibition therefore rendered India a stereotypical and consumable commodity-framed-factual; a commodity useful to the past regime of power but also one that prevails in contemporary Western popular culture.

The exhibition of Indian entertainments also shows how numerous discourses and practices became incorporated into the imperial ethos. By engaging in ethnological theory, spectacle, and history, exhibited Indian entertainments show commercialism, colonialism, ideas of identity and anthropology to be intricately entwined. This conflation becomes especially clear under the consideration of intent and purpose of shows. As seen, exhibitions featured Indian entertainments for numerous purposes: they were designed to entertain large crowds and to ensure the commercial success of shows; they were devised to show ‘real’ India to Britons, and to educate them on the matters Indian history and of human evolution; they even became sites on

which anthropological theory was produced, and they were envisioned as profit-generating enterprises of inauthentic goods, and therefore connected to the market of fashion and high-class consumerism. These objectives contributed to the production of 'India' that was traditional, artistic, backward, evolutionary inferior and historically shackled. This not only points to the dynamic nature of imperial ideology, it also shows exhibited India to be a particularly critical contribution to the innovation and rationalisation of white supremacy through the invention of India, which was deemed neither savage nor fully civilised, and under other forces, including show business, anthropology, and public education.

Much of my work has dealt with the formulating relationship between entertainments and Raj ideology. At the knotty centre of Indian entertainments, and tracing the conflicts and transformations of the Raj regime, lie connections being created between exhibits and the systems of imperialism, and ultimately exhibited entertainments became sites upon which MacKenzie's (1984) 'popular imperialism' materialised. Attending to the numerous ways in which Indian people were represented through exhibition therefore undoubtedly charts the rise of Empire and the heyday of the British Raj, and the vibrant ways in which the imperial enterprise was performed, embodied and condoned to the British at home. Imperialism, as numerous scholars argue, was also a cultural project for control, which "needed to be brought home and engraved in the hearts and minds of the people in whose name great sums of money were spent and large numbers of lives were lost" (Gould 2011: 1). Using MacKenzie and Gould's lessons as an accepted argument, I have explored more attentively the connections between imperialism and exhibited people in the Indian context, which has often been overlooked in scholarship. That the public endorsement of the Raj arose partly through the prism of exhibitions, which welcomed audiences in the millions, is paramount not only because the narratives of imperialism were the dominant discourses that inventively became attached to shows, but also because it is around power that resistance takes shape.

In order to understand imperialism and resistance in this context, it was vital to understand how, why and where the strategies of imperialism manifested. It is not without significance that the exhibition of Indian entertainments ensued during a time when the West sought cultural as well as political ways of creating and maintaining its dominance, racial superiority and political authority in India. In order for the Raj to succeed and be accepted by the home population, certain beliefs about India had to be created and maintained. Exhibitions certainly played a colourful role in this process, creating and authenticating versions of Indian history, India's alleged anthropological status, as well as its manufacturing and gendered identity. As Chapter Two discussed, exhibition spectacles that featured India presented audiences with "the past and present history of India" (*The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, 25 May 1895). They thrilled audiences with scenes, songs and dances shown on a monumental scale, as they taught them about "most important incidents of Indian history" (Kiralffy, 1896: 15). Spectacles contributed titanic narrative, historical tales, and accounts of civilising to the illustration of India within the exhibition arena and invented histories that inserted the British as moral and inevitable successors of the Indian Empire. The ethnographic displays and the sheer range of Indian entertainers discussed in Chapter Three meanwhile, helped to produce anthropological knowledge of Indians' supposed evolutionary status, defined initially by physical anthropology and later through an anthropological 'discovery' of India's diverse population. The spectators' participation as embodied examples of the evolution of man at its pinnacle suggests a potent and forceful manifestation of racial thought, in which ideas of India's lower evolutionary status becomes embodied knowledge. The exhibition of Indian artisans discussed in Chapter Four were both showcased as, and interpreted as representatives of India's supposed 'primitive' cultural identity. Craft was therefore both a product of and a crucial moment in the narrative of the modern, and helped to create colonised/coloniser oppositions. Finally, the exhibition of nautch girls brought to life a version of exotic femininity that was often perceived as immoral and sexually corruptive, upon which notions of civilising, reform and rescue came into fruition.

There is little doubt that Indian exhibits showcased subjects that the British public could enjoy, discern and subjugate, or that it is through those forms of displays in which India was being racialised, gendered and historically and anthropologically branded. Exhibitions were made relevant to the discourses upon which the colonised assumed a right to rule, and, at its heart, the Victorian exhibition of India is a historically specific story of power and colonialism. In this story I have also shown the importance of spectatorship, and argued that the audience are not mere bystanders or passive viewers, but also helped to produce the colonial scene. Significantly, exhibitions offered audiences more than simple opportunities of *looking* upon examples of the world's peoples; they allowed a physical transportation to the colonial land. By meandering through Indian streets, by meeting Indian 'natives', by strolling amongst ethnological displays, audiences participated in the creation of space and its content. As Chapter One argued, by attending and populating the exhibition space, the spectator operated as a dialectical component and even an author of scene. It follows that the colonised/coloniser oppositions being created and performed were made all the more powerful through the transformation of a vague abstraction for those whose Empire was 'out there' into embodied knowledge. Exhibitions created spaces in which the British public 'discovered' India and could actively and performatively participate in social, cultural, and power relations, and act out their roles as colonisers of India. Spectatorship and embodiment therefore enabled the values of society to become theatrically explored by audiences who entered exhibitions as cultural and empirical tourists, who in turn embodied a set of stock images being drawn through exhibition. As the public populated exhibited India, public proprietorship of the colonial land was evoked and authorised. This marks the British public at home as part of a process of colonisation, identified by Said (2003), when Europeans encountered lesser-developed countries of the East and measured their civilisations and cultures as exotic, premodern and less evolved by comparison in order for political conquest.

Embodiment also pinpoints the crucial problem in any contemporary attempts to reconstruct the exhibition of peoples, even those works which seek to



subvert the phenomenon. Those who attended *Exhibit B*, for example, the art installation I discussed in the introduction, were also re-embodying the roles that spawn and reproduce racism. Like the Victorian exhibition, the looking and the freedom of movement of *Exhibit B*'s spectators re-objectified the performer and stressed and even reawakened their chained immobility (both literally and figuratively). The viewer is recast as dominant and the exhibited body as abused and powerless in whichever way the viewer looks, interprets, or reacts.

My concern here has not only been to do with the manifestations of racism, it is also to do with the manifestations and the ambivalences of imperialism. Although nineteenth-century exhibition entertainments re-formed the spectator as dominant, these performance forms were also contested sites. Significantly, the paradoxes and contestations of performances indicate the power of imperialism as they point toward the imperialism's partial nature and its instabilities. This is a surprising result of what were profit-generating, crowd-pleasing events that have been widely understood to be firmly wedded to the imperial enterprise. Scholarship that engages with the exhibition of peoples generally contends that imperial domination was communicated particularly strongly through representations of the 'savage' colonised subject (Corbey, 1999; Greenhalgh, 1998; Hoffenberg, 2001; MacKenzie, 1984; Mathur, 2007; Maxwell, 1999; Munro, 2010; Pickering, 20001; Qureshi, 2011). Exhibited people have been understood in scholarship to have defined a savage/civilised traditional/modern divide and rationalised colonisation on the basis of these binaries. While I agree we must not downplay the production of power and racism attached to exhibited bodies, I have also sought to remain attentive to the dynamic connections between popular culture and imperialism as a powerfully persuasive but unruly relationship. This moves beyond the recognition being drawn that imperialism formed not only around antithesis (the civilised and the savage), but also around a complex vista (the modern and the ancient). In this way I have contributed to Bhabha's comments:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of ordinary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

(1994: 2)

Crucially, by paying attention to the 'in-between' I have charted the making and resistance in the rapport between popular culture and imperialism, culminating in my final chapter which glimpsed toward the future fall of Empire and India's mounting struggle against the British Raj through the exhibition experience.

In this thesis I have been attentive to the discourses being spawned through exhibition display which fit less comfortably within a conclusion that exhibited people *only* served the prerogatives of white power. Consequently, I have treated the exhibition of Indian bodies in the nineteenth-century metropolis as a larger configuration of popular imperialism, at the same time as I have also considered how Indian entertainments show imperialism to be circumscribed. The displayed bodies produced a multiplicity of cultural effects and meanings which need to be acknowledged if we are to understand more fully the invention of cultures and identities, as well as the associations of those inventions with the project of colonialism. Significantly, Indian performance in exhibition indicates both the dynamic rise of power, its creative manifestations, but also an excess and a future demise. Imperialism, after all, as numerous scholars agree, was neither omnipotent nor omnipresent. In this respect, my work has contributed to a growing critique of Saidian postcolonial theories, including the works of Hoffenberg (2011), McClintock (1995), Trautmann (1997), Cooper and Stoler (1997) and Dirks (1992, 2011), who tend to agree that Orientalism is problematic in that it assumes an endemic Western prejudice against the East, as it repeats Eastern subordination and suggests colonialism to be monolithic and unchanging. In order to address this, these scholars urge for a more complete view that attends to the dynamic, complex and competing agendas of power.

Following and contributing to this theory, I have paid attention to the cultural and political meanings shows aroused; the complex and often contradictory ideologies that simultaneously stirred. Certainly, not all British interpretations of India in exhibition, be they intellectual or otherwise, formed within Britain's quest for power. As noted, there were other forces at play in representing the East, including entertainment, curiosity, nostalgia, escapism and commercialism. Of course, many of these forces also fed into the economic and political dominance of the West. Others, however, indicate surplus, or a rejection of modernity and colonialism. It thus follows that although colonialism compellingly and persuasively impinged on historical moments, it was not all-powerful. Chapter Four argued that the exhibition of craftsmen not only enticed visions of exoticism and primitivism, but also initiated other pressing anxieties and fears in Victorian culture. Craftsmen performed a range of cultural oppositions that the Raj relied upon, including traditional, primitive and slow. Yet Indian craft also initiated questions about design, craft, mass production and imperialism, the damaging effects of modernity on craft and traditional ways of life. Consequently, the exhibition of Indian craft played a role in framing modernity—and British rule by extension—as an unwanted and destructive threat to Indian craft. Native artisan displays therefore created colonial oppositions; oppositions that inferred India's supposed backwardness as well as its artistic integrity and dexterity, which the modern world was believed to have lost, or be losing.

As well as contradictions, the idea of craft also indicates continuities. Themes of survival, economic and social value, and of documenting craft tradition roots contemporary issues to do with the protection of traditional arts and crafts in India today, and indicates further links between the colonial past and post-colonial present. Craft continues to be seen as quintessentially Indian, a symbol of the continuity of India throughout time. Fear of the industrialisation of craft is felt most acutely by the Indian elite, who continue to use craft as a link to national identity and heritage in their modern lives. As Venkatesan explains “[c]ertain utopian visions that arose in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India as a reaction to growing industrialization have meant

that selected hand-made things have come to be highly valued in some circles in elite urban India” (2009: 78). Master skills continue today be regarded as “rare and irreplaceable resources, generally acknowledged as living links to the past and as means of preserving cultural meaning to the future” (Liebl and Roy, 2003: 55). The concept of craft survival is centred in a reaction to colonialism and mass-production, and therefore is a British-inspired reaction. Indeed, exhibitions participated in an imaginary impulse to protect Indian craft traditions from industrialisation. Progress and power was thus maintained as the prerogative and peril of the West, whose job it was—paradoxically—both to teach and also to preserve the weaker Other. Although Britain’s complex view of India and imperialism was being created and challenged through exhibition display, the craftsman’s own voice in these narratives is rendered unimportant and left unheard.

Contestation did also ensue within the exhibition space, and chapters have been organised in order to pay increasing attention to the ambivalence, contradiction and change of the imperial project, and in order to chart India’s very real struggle toward future independence. This is seen not only through the ideas and interpretations that challenged, but through the agents of exhibitions, who must not be overlooked in these conclusions. Although the prevailing presentation of Indian people at exhibitions drew subjects that were backward, premodern and exotic, display also charts the increasing uncertainty of imperialism and even indicates India’s political awakening. Resistance in the exhibition space comes in the form of broken stereotypes, such as the burly Indian seen in Chapter One, or the dull nautch girl of Chapter Five. For, as Bhabha argues, the origin of the Self or the Other is impossible when representation is conceived as a complete object of vision, and when such an attempt is made the Orientalist stereotype is simultaneously evoked and erased (1994: 66-8). The instability of the Raj is clearly seen in Chapter Two, where Indian representations in exhibition spectacles threatened the loyalty of Indians. A critique of colonialism also ensued through the exhibition of Indian craftsmen considered in Chapter Four, who were viewed as victims of imperial expansion. Chapter Six charted more attentively Indian defiance of imperialism within exhibition

spaces. This final chapter revealed that on occasion certain agents of exhibitions operated as resistive subjects. It also explained that there were multiple paradoxes in the exhibition space that reflect the contradictions of imperial rule—in particular Britain’s desire for subjugated/backward subjects at the same time as it sought an educated/civilised Indian population. The political activity of the Liberty performers, for example, worked within this contradiction, indicating that British ideology seeded notions of rights, citizenship and the obligations of political authority to its Indian subjects. The 1885 exhibition also signposts the future disobedience of the exhibition space, as well as another fruitful area of research.

The 1924 exhibition is characteristic of the post-war exhibitions, and, similar to Victorian exhibitions, played a role in reassuring the public of their claim to dominance and soothing anxiety during a time of memorial, shock and political uncertainty. Similar to the 1851 Great exhibition, the 1924 event even stimulated a rapid succession of exhibitions across Europe and the U.S., which like their predecessors “reflected profound concerns about the future and deflected criticism of the established political and social order” (Rydell 1993: 5). Also like their predecessors, post-war exhibitions were appealing precisely because they offered relief and escapism from the realities of the modern world, and stressed the “development of empire as the key ingredient for national recovery” (Rydell, 1993: 6-7). However, these events were not entirely successful, and the echo of former glory that entertained millions before the war haunted the new present. The scale of exhibitions, which before the war had delighted and amazed, appeared crass to a world economy suffering war expenses and other heavy losses. More significantly here post-war exhibitions candidly trace the fall of imperial sentiment. That they renewed as sites upon which Indian rights and Indian status lingered is particularly significant. For example, Indians boycotted the 1924 British Empire exhibition as a protest against the resistive rights for Indians to settle in Kenya.

While Indian resistance grew in the years after WWI, the roots and ripples of that resistance can be located not only as far back as 1885 with the formation

of the first modern Indian nationalist movements, but also in earlier exhibition venues. The actions of the Liberty performers who appeared at the Albert Palace in 1885 (the same year that the National Congress met for the first time), not only shows the rejection of individuals to the terms of their representation (as Muthur (2007) argues), it also charts other important power structures including evolving Indian status, Indian nationalism and Indian mimicry of Western ideology. Thus the unruly exhibited subject operates a lens through which the struggle against British rule can be glimpsed; identifying, on a larger scope, that mimicry can be a deflective discourse of power. Most importantly, the unruly subjects expose imperial dominance as an incomplete container and insufficient suppressor of the subordinated. The actors discussed insist that although exhibited bodies were unquestionably objectified imperial subalterns who were interpreted by and shaped larger belief systems, to deny their agency also denies a process of change and challenge within the imperial regime. Resistance, even in seemingly insignificant forms, is located even in spaces where exploitative power seems to be all-consuming, and it is the actions of individuals (including unintentional acts) that indicates and drives resistance most powerfully.

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