

Rosie Macqueen

Title: “Us and Them: The English-Formed Identity of Colonial India”

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Deborah Bauer

Paper written for: History J495: Senior Seminar – European Imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries (Fall 2016)

Rosie Macqueen writes: I am a history and international studies student, especially interested in the Baltic Region and the intricacies of abstract concepts like national identity and patriotism. I studied abroad for a semester at the University of Tartu, in Estonia, and have traveled frequently in Europe and North America. I am a senior student in my final semester at IPFW, and a part-time education specialist at Science Central children’s museum. After graduation, I plan to move to Washington DC and do work with the Smithsonian Institute, ideally with the American Indian Museum, or the African American History and Culture Museum. I thrive on the chance to teach a curious audience, especially on subjects that are not well known in the American cultural psyche.

Abstract

The period of English colonial rule in India came alongside the Enlightenment in Europe, which established ideas of nationality, self-determination, and the sovereignty of rulers within their own countries. However, those European nations with empires were not willing to let their colonies go for the sake of post-Enlightenment ideology and morals, and so manufactured reasons to continue colonial rule while staying within the “moral high ground” of the Enlightenment and the Civilizing Mission. This was how England justified colonizing and ruling the Indian subcontinent. Through both the East India Company (1600-1858) and the Raj (1858-1947) governments, English imperialists and Orientalists created justifications to rule India, and to counter every possible reason for independence or autonomy. To cement their “rightful” position as ruler of India, imperialists and Orientalists picked apart India’s history, society, and religions, searching for “proof” of India’s barbarism, which in contrast, would imply England as a civilized nation. This was during a time where “sciences” like social Darwinism were legitimate, and so there was little doubt to the truth of these findings. However, the reasons derived from this “proof” were inherently contradictory, applying inconsistent and “flexible” stereotypes and characteristics to the peoples, religions, and cultures of the subcontinent. Hinduism was barbaric because it was a “polytheistic” religion, yet at the same time, it was put on par with the pantheons of ancient Greece and Rome. India had a grand, ancient history, yet its people were stuck in the past, unable to move on without England’s help. The hierarchical society, or caste, was condemned as barbarous, yet encouraged to ease administration. Indian Muslims were brutal savages and killers, yet they were respected as warriors. Indians were expected to get an English education, yet the opportunities to use those educations in a career were extremely limited. Hindu men were submissive and effeminate, yet sexually savage and violently lustful. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, English imperialists forced these contradictory ideas to coexist, manufacturing new “reasons” to rule every time locals would object or attempt to revolt. Stereotypes of Indians were so ingrained into the English mentality that the “noble” Civilizing Mission could never be fulfilled in the subcontinent, resulting in the systematic and continuous oppression of the peoples of India, and aggressive backlash towards any attempts to make

Indians equal. Despite these stereotypes, Indians were absolutely capable of nationalist thought and action, creating multiple national movements in the 19th and 20th centuries, which eventually culminated in Gandhi's popular, non-violent revolt, and the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947.

Bibliographical note

I generally used secondary sources as my starting-off point, tracing them back to their primary sources and corroborating that information. I cross-referenced those primary sources against one another, finding frequent contradictions in the English interpretation of Indians, sometimes even within the same document. I highly recommend Thomas R. Metcalf's *Ideologies of the Raj* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1994) as an excellent introduction to British perceptions of India with numerous primary sources listed, as well as *A History of Modern India: 1480-1950*. (ed. Claude Markovits, trans. Nisha George and Maggy Hendry. Anthem Press: London), which tells events more from the Indian side.