

Colonial Self-
Fashioning
in British India,
c. 1785-1845

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*Visualising Identity
and Difference*

By

Prasannajit de Silva

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In memory of my parents,
M. W. Sugathapala and Helen Barbara de Silva

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE BRITISH IN INDIA

In around 1785, William Palmer, a major in the East India Company army, was painted by a European artist, possibly Johan Zoffany or Arthur William Devis. The resulting portrait (Fig. 1-1) shows Palmer with his Indian wife and their family. Almost 60 years later, in 1842, William Tayer's *The Young Civilian's Toilet* (Fig. 1-2) was published in London. A plate from a somewhat quirky book consisting of just six vividly coloured lithographs, each accompanied by a page of description,¹ it shows a British man in Bengal preparing for the day whilst being attended by a clutch of Indian servants.

These two images differ in many obvious ways: one is an oil painting, the other a coloured lithograph; one is a formal portrait, the other a light-hearted depiction of customs and manners; one is a private family piece, the other an image of a fictional subject intended for publication; and they suggest contrasting approaches to colonial life. However, despite all these differences, the two pictures engage with a common theme: each portrays a British man whose life and lifestyle have been significantly affected by his residence in India; and both show the complex interrelation of European and Indian influences on their subjects, and indicate ways in which Britons in India sought to fashion their identity and project it to a wider audience.

In this book, I look at some of the means by which members of the British community in India represented themselves and their ways of life through visual culture during the period spanned by these two images. My analysis is structured around a range of depictions of British life in India, generally by British artists who were themselves resident there. I explore the role of this visual material in negotiating questions of identity for the members of colonial society, or at least of that section of it which is

¹ William Tayer, *Sketches Illustrating the Manners and Customs of the Indians and Anglo-Indians* (London: Thomas McLean, 1842).



Fig. 1-1. Johan Zoffany (?), *The Palmer Family*, c1785, oil on canvas, 98 x 125 cm (© The British Library Board. Foster 597).

represented. In examining examples of such work, I consider how people in this expatriate group sought to position themselves by reference to their surroundings in India and to their compatriots in Britain, and what this says about the tensions inherent in their sense of themselves in the context of the colonial project in which they were engaged. The images generally deal with small-scale domestic or social subjects, and were largely produced with a British audience in mind, so forming part of a complex dialogic relationship between members of the expatriate community and their metropolitan counterparts.²

Most research on British art in India from this period has concentrated on representations of Indian landscapes, buildings, and people, or, to a lesser extent, on history paintings showing, for example, scenes from the Anglo-Mysore Wars. Such images present, if not exactly a monolithic view

² In this book, I use the terms “metropolitan” and “metropole” to refer to Britain, that is as part of a binary of metropole and colony. I use “domestic” in the sense of relating to the home.

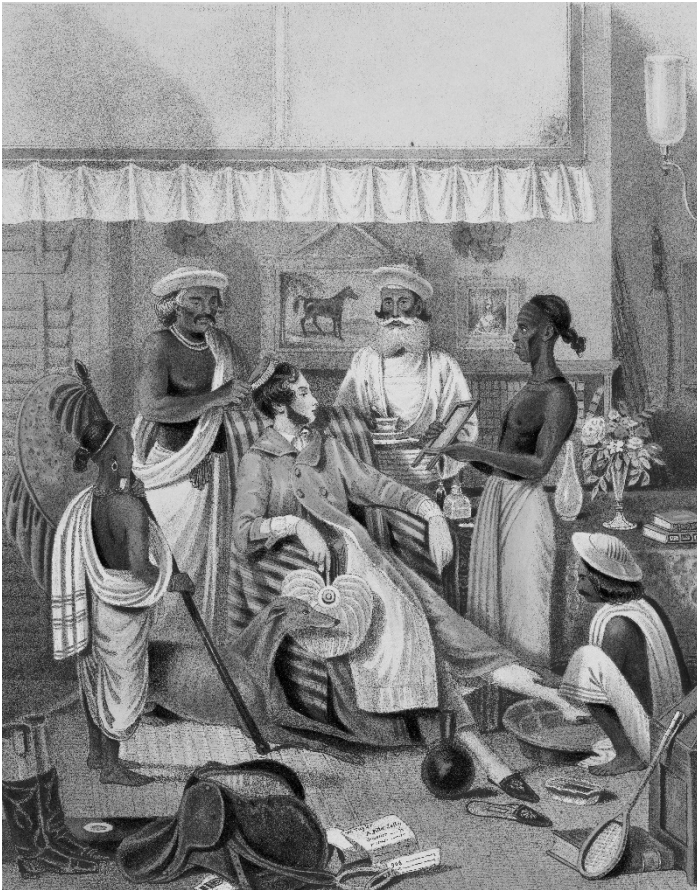


Fig. 1-2. William Tailyer, *The Young Civilian's Toilet*, 1842, coloured lithograph (Plate I) from *Sketches Illustrating the Manners & Customs of the Indians & Anglo-Indians* (© The British Library Board. X42).

of their subject matter, one in which the critical dichotomy is between British and Indian, or colonisers and colonised, so that the positions of the colonial and the metropolitan British are largely undifferentiated. This is hardly surprising, since Britons in India not only participated in the relevant discourses, but were also vital agents in their formation: as Gayatri Spivak observes, British soldiers and administrators played a key role in constructing “the object of representations that became the reality

of India”,³ an enterprise which encompasses many of the artists discussed in this book.

However, one area in which the British in India could, and, almost by definition, had to, construct their own separate discursive position(s) was in their representations of themselves and of their own lifestyles, and this is what links the works I discuss. These are images that have been comparatively little studied, and this parallels, or is perhaps even a consequence of, their relative lack of status at the time they were produced: they were not generally important paintings created for exhibition in London or engravings for grand publications, nor were they intended as major contributions to the British discourses of India. Even where such pictures have been addressed, they have often been looked upon simply as transparent depictions of an underlying reality, rather than as active interventions in an evolving discourse through which the identity of the expatriate community was being fashioned. A more subtle analysis of such images opens up the possibility of separating out the varied voices of those engaged in different aspects of the colonial enterprise.

The extent to which the British in India achieved (or, indeed, even sought to achieve) a distinct identity has been a question for debate. P. J. Marshall argues that “beyond what seemed to others to be certain mild eccentricities of lifestyle, no clear British-Indian identity ever emerged”, and Sudipta Sen proposes that, regardless of the impact on identities in Britain itself, an effect of empire was to accentuate British nationalism in the British community in India.⁴ E. M. Collingham, on the other hand, concludes that British India developed into a self-contained world with its own norms, which fostered “the construction of a distinctive Anglo-Indian body.”⁵ Although not irredeemably contradictory, these various statements do indicate the complexities of the issues involved. Moreover, they are all based on the full period of British rule, and, regardless of the eventual conclusions, the matter was very much in play during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives”, *History and Theory* 24 (1985): 249. It is important to emphasize that my attempt to unravel the self-representation of the British living in India is not intended to downplay their instrumental role in the wider imperial project.

⁴ P. J. Marshall, “The Whites of British India, 1780-1830: A Failed Colonial Society?” *International History Review*, 12 (1990): 27; and Sudipta Sen, *Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British India* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xxix.

⁵ E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 201.

British India

The period covered in this book was marked by great changes in the role of the British in India and in the way of life of the expatriate population, as, having been involved almost wholly as traders until the middle of the eighteenth century, their power and influence grew. The classic view of the British in imperial India is one of a small controlling group which had little real engagement with its surroundings, marked by an emphasis on racial aloofness and separation, and by the apparently resolute maintenance of a British way of life and British values. This dominant stereotype, derived mostly from the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, may contain a large element of truth, but its application to the period I am considering risks a degree of anachronism. Certainly, the British in India were then a small group, a feature that inevitably generated some sense of vulnerability,⁶ but the question of the extent of engagement with a wider India was one that was still in the process of being resolved. It may well be that many aspects of the basic pattern of subsequent British rule were established during the period covered in this book—indeed, Thomas Metcalf suggests that much of the “framework of the Raj” was in place by 1820⁷—but the trajectory was far from straightforward. Amongst other things, there was constant tension between the pressures to adopt and to reject elements of an Indianised lifestyle, and the images discussed here show an active engagement with the issues involved.

The traditional model of the British Raj has recently been countered by an alternative vision of a late eighteenth-century ethos of racial integration and harmony, a conception which appeals more readily to modern multicultural sensibilities, and is apparently exemplified in an image like *The Palmer Family*. As a result of its reinterpretation, this period is increasingly being “recovered” from the overlaying of Victorian attitudes, although at the risk of creating an alternative, insufficiently contested view of early British colonialism in India.

The years I am covering can thus be regarded as marking the shift between these (admittedly oversimplified) characterisations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Whilst I do not claim some uncomplicated teleological narrative, the material discussed does, I believe, explore the

⁶ For example, an article in the *Westminster Review* highlights the presence of a population of 50,000 whites among 80 million “natives” (*Westminster Review*, 4 (1825): 268).

⁷ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 27.

negotiation between elements of these positions, as well as suggesting that neither was as straightforward as sometimes portrayed. Importantly, the archetype of the eighteenth-century “White Mughal” living in relative harmony with his Indian environment is in some ways a modern recasting of the earlier figure of the “nabob”.⁸ Until the late eighteenth century, there was scope for East India Company employees to engage in lucrative trading on their own account as well as on behalf of the Company, and the nabob, living an extravagant life in India and then returning to Britain after making his fortune, became a pervasive stereotype in Britain, often perceived as posing a threat to British political and social stability.⁹ Moreover, nabobery was seen as symptomatic of a broader concern about corruption, financial scandals, and misgovernment, which were widely portrayed as endemic amongst the British in India.¹⁰

The period covered in this book therefore saw the playing out (and the substantial resolution), in both practical and discursive terms, of controversies whose parameters had, at least broadly, been established at its outset. Critical among these were the disputes within British society, both in India and in Britain, between what might loosely be labelled as Orientalising and Anglicising tendencies. Saree Makdissi characterises these as “two antithetical paradigms of British imperialism and colonial

⁸ The term “White Mughal” comes from William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (London: HarperCollins, 2002). A “nabob” was originally an official in the Mughal Empire; but, from the eighteenth century, the term was increasingly used to refer (often in a pejorative sense) to senior East India Company employees in, or returning to Britain from, India (Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: The Anglo-Indian Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1903; repr., Ware: Wordsworth, 1996), 610-612). For further discussion of the “nabob”, see Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips, “‘Our execrable banditti’: Perceptions of Nabobs in the Late Eighteenth Century”, *Albion* 16 (1984): 225-241; Renu Juneja, “The Native and the Nabob: Representations of the Indian Experience in Eighteenth-Century English Literature”, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 27 (1992): 183-198; and Tillman W. Nechtman, “A Jewel in the Crown? Indian Wealth in Domestic Britain in the Late Eighteenth Century”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41 (2007): 71-86.

⁹ See James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 221-246.

¹⁰ George D. Bearce, *British Attitudes towards India 1784-1858* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 11. See also Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 7-85.

rule”,¹¹ although, in reality, each encompassed a range of more finely nuanced positions, which were often viewed differently in Britain and in British India. “Orientalism” in this context was related to the eighteenth-century European study of Indian society, history, religion, and culture, and, in political terms, involved the application of what were seen as traditional indigenous legal and administrative practices. The developing alternative tactic for the government of British India was “Anglicism”, which argued for an approach based on the transmission of British laws, freedoms, and values (and, in some more evangelical circles, religion).

Case Studies

This book is structured around a series of case studies involving examples of the visual representation, or, more accurately, self-representation, of the British in India during the period in question. These are, of necessity, limited to a fairly specific section of the expatriate population, consisting primarily of military officers and civilian officials. However, they have been chosen to allow an exploration of different aspects of the interactions between Britons and India, and, by taking examples from a variety of genres over a sixty-year period, they provide a range of interventions in the issues involved.

In Chapter Two, I consider paintings, such as *The Palmer Family*, dating from the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries that depict members of mixed-race families in India. The main focus is on a small number of works by professional artists, all of which show people who have been identified, albeit rather conjecturally in some cases, as part of interracial family relationships. They portray, in various combinations, European men, their *bibis* (wives or consorts), and their children.¹² As family portraits, many of these works were less explicitly aimed at a broad metropolitan audience than the images I consider in the chapters that follow.

¹¹ Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 101.

¹² *Bibi*, used in this book to refer to the Indian wife or consort of a European man, was originally the title of a high-ranking Indian lady. Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 115 suggests that the word became a standard term in British India for “native mistress”, although this meaning does not appear in the definition of “beebee” in Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 78, and contemporary documents such as wills often used the term “companion” (Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33).

However, at least some of the pictures can be anchored firmly within a British eighteenth-century tradition of family portraiture, and, as such, they fulfil a function as “one of the ways in which social groups and individuals (collectively and individually) represented themselves to themselves.”¹³ Participation in this genre involved important claims about status: it is easy to see the commissioning of portraits by members of the British community in India as an attempt to imitate or embrace metropolitan aristocratic fashions. Nevertheless, these paintings fail to fulfil metropolitan norms in all sorts of ways: their subjects, whether British, Indian, or Eurasian, all manifest forms of hybridity;¹⁴ the settings and much of the imagery are often unmistakably Indian; and the distinction in some of the works between portraiture and other genres, notably an essentialising form of exoticism, is blurred. The portraits present a narrative of settlement, albeit settlement of a specific kind that was becoming increasingly difficult to locate within the discursive mainstream. Its portrayal within European visual genres constitutes an attempt to negotiate a position that combines both Indian and British elements, something which, I argue, was fundamental to this colonial society as a whole.

Chapter Three considers images of the daily life of the British in India in the first half of the nineteenth century, taken principally from a small group of books published in London between the 1810s and early 1840s: *The European in India* and *The Costume and Customs of Modern India*,

¹³ Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 4.

¹⁴ I use the term “Eurasian” for people of mixed European and Indian ancestry as arguably the least bad of the available options. The labels used most frequently during the period under consideration in this book, “country born” and “half-caste”, are unsatisfactory: the former seems rather quaint, while the latter rapidly became regarded as offensive and degrading by members of the mixed-race community. “Anglo-Indian”, the term now most commonly employed by the community, and hence an obvious choice, was first formally adopted in this sense in the 1880s, although this usage does date back to the early nineteenth century (see, for example, *Westminster Review*, 4 (1825): 262). However, the word can be a source of potential confusion in any historical analysis, since it was more widely applied in the early nineteenth century to Britons resident in India, and so I have limited its use in this book to direct quotations, where the context should make the meaning clear. Other terms that have been used, “Anglo-Asian”, “Indo-Briton”, “East Indian”, and “Asiatick Briton”, now appear very dated. “Eurasian” was in widespread use for much of the nineteenth century, and encompasses descendants of people from many European backgrounds (not just British) who feature to varying degrees in this book, particularly in Chapter Two.

which each contain the same text by Captain Thomas Williamson and the same set of plates by Charles D'Oyly;¹⁵ Mrs. Belnos' *Twenty-Four Plates Illustrative of Hindoo and European Manners in Bengal*;¹⁶ and William Tayler's *Sketches Illustrating the Manners and Customs of the Indians and Anglo-Indians*. These all include depictions of aspects of private or ordinary professional colonial life, and were produced by artists who were established European residents of India. Although they may appear to be merely illustrations of the way of life of their subjects, the pictures can be linked to various discourses fashionable in British publishing at the time: costume books, travel literature, prescriptive guides to behaviour, and early forms of ethnographic taxonomy.

Some of the plates are decorative, but all lay claim to a high degree of authority and accuracy. Their primary purpose was to inform rather than entertain (although those by Tayler have a decidedly humorous edge), and, in each case, the accompanying text is important. The respective authors declare their intention to address certain misconceptions held in Britain about the British in India, something which was a recurring concern among many of the expatriate population, who saw themselves as victims of "ignorance about them at home and the condescension of those who visited India".¹⁷ These works therefore sought to negotiate a position for the British in India within wider metropolitan discourses: on the one hand, there was an apparent wish to retain a degree of distinctiveness, which was, of course, a selling point for the books; at the same time, however, there was a seeming desire for the subjects to be seen as conforming to British norms of behaviour. The visual interventions in this dialogue sought to deal with these tensions in various ways.

Chapter Four focuses on aquatints from the illustrated poem, *Tom Raw*, published in 1828 and generally attributed to Charles D'Oyly.¹⁸ The work follows its hapless eponymous hero through a series of misadventures, from his departure from England through his early career in the East India Company army. The plates are a feature of the book, numbering twenty-five and illustrating scenes from the poem. Their subject matter overlaps

¹⁵ Captain Thomas Williamson, *The European in India* (London: Edward Orme, 1813); and Captain Thomas Williamson, *The Costume and Customs of Modern India* (London: Edward Orme, [1813?]).

¹⁶ Mrs. Belnos, *Twenty-Four Plates Illustrative of Hindoo and European Manners in Bengal* (London: Smith and Elder, 1832).

¹⁷ P. J. Marshall, "British Society in India under the East India Company", *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997): 108.

¹⁸ Charles D'Oyly, *Tom Raw, the Griffin: A Burlesque Poem in Twelve Cantos* (London, R. Ackermann, 1828).

that in the previous chapter, but within the framework of a humorous narrative.

The colonial identities that Tom Raw encounters are complex, as the tensions between distinctiveness from Britain and conformity to (often outdated) British norms remain. Many of the longer-standing British residents in India continue to display elements of an older Indianised lifestyle; but we now also see examples of the aspirational elements of public life in Calcutta, involving activities such as grand dances and carriage rides, which mimic Britishness and seek increasingly to exclude India.¹⁹ This sense of change is counterbalanced by the fact that much of the imagery follows established thematic precedents: hookahs, nautches, Indian servants, hunting, military campaigns. However, the treatment of these is different from earlier works, with a strong element of parody, and it is important to address what this approach might say about questions of identity and British authority.

Chapter Five looks at the phenomenon of the hill station, widely seen as the ultimate archetype of the efforts of the expatriate British to separate themselves from their Indian surroundings. In this chapter, I consider early representations of such scenes to a metropolitan audience through illustrated books, concentrating on pictures of the Nilgiri Hills in southern India mainly from the 1830s and early 1840s, and especially on landscape images taken from three books compiled from the drawings of two army officers, Captain Richard Barron and Captain (later Major) E. A. McCurdy.²⁰

Although the plates I discuss can be located within the wide range of British landscape views of India, I suggest that they follow less in the usual picturesque tradition than in a broadly topographical or cartographic one, and that this in itself has implications for the idea of claims to territory. The pictures are suggestive of a narrative of settlement which is quite different from those encountered in other landscape representations of India, or in the other chapters of this volume. Here, the sense is of an

¹⁹ Here and throughout, when referring to British India, I use British versions of place-names rather than their modern Indian counterparts. This has the merit of achieving some consistency with my primary sources, although there is often little uniformity in the spellings that they adopt.

²⁰ Captain Richard Barron, *Views in India, Chiefly among the Neilgherry Hills* (London: Robt. Havell, 1837); Captain E. A. McCurdy, *Views of the Neilgherries, or Blue Mountains of Coimbetore, Southern India* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., [1830?]); and Major McCurdy, *Three Panoramic Views of Ootacamund, the Chief Stations on the Neilgherries, or Blue Mountains of Coimbetore* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., [1842?]).

ostensibly much more naturally British setting, and the visual intervenes crucially in this, with echoes of British landscape and a complex negotiation of the position of the Indian inhabitants of the Nilgiris. On a careful perusal of the plates, however, the superficiality of the imposition of Britishness is apparent, and hence its fragility is clear.

The chapters in this book follow a loosely chronological arrangement, but each contains material from a range of dates, and there are considerable historical overlaps between them. Although certain patterns emerge (for example, Chapter Two deals with portraits linked to what may be regarded as an essentially eighteenth-century way of life, while Chapter Five looks at images of hill stations, which were to become an iconic element of the later Raj), I should emphasise that my intention is more to identify common features than to expound some grand narrative. A tentative trajectory can be mapped out, whereby the examples considered show projections of life in India that become successively more British as time passes. Of more significance, however, is the impression that none of them is ultimately very successful in containing the underlying tensions of the colonists' position. Each is riven in its own way by contradictions and problems which remain substantially unresolved, and so each chapter involves a negotiation of colonial identity through visual culture.

The emphasis in much of this material on the small-scale and on private space is significant at a time when the domestic sphere was seen as an important setting for the playing out of wider colonial issues in microcosm, and more generally for the development of national character and identity.²¹ Another important feature was that, at a time of separate but interconnected public and private spheres in Britain, there was in India a less clear division between them and so the British were constantly on display to their Indian subordinates.²² Thus, depictions of even the most apparently simple, domestic facets of expatriate life have significant colonial resonances.

It is possible to place these various images of British India within broad metropolitan representational idioms, and they, unsurprisingly, draw

²¹ See, for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal", in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 375; and Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd, "Introduction", in *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior*, ed. Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 2.

²² Sara Mills, "Colonial Domestic Space", *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 39 (1996): 54-55.

heavily on British traditions. A more detailed analysis reveals how these idioms were articulated, or even subverted, as a result of their redeployment in India. It was a two-way process, as British visual modes were adapted for use in India and then played back to metropolitan audiences. This latter feature raises the possibility of different readings in colony and metropole, and is complicated further by the mediation in many cases of this material through British artists and engravers with no direct experience of India, the effects of which are very difficult to disentangle.

Metropolitan and Colonial Audiences

The items discussed in this book form a small part of the large range of material, textual and visual, relating to India that was available in Britain. In particular, India attracted a succession of professional artists, starting in the mid-eighteenth century with Francis Swain Ward (who was a trained artist, but first went to India with the East India Company army) and then Tilly Kettle. However, the professional artists were outnumbered by amateurs from among the ranks of East India Company employees and their families. Artistic skills were part of a general, liberal education, in addition to being specifically a component of the training of military officers, and many of the educated British in India, men and women, drew or painted as a way of passing the time, or in order to communicate their experiences to their friends and relatives back in Britain.

Among the numerous publications about India were the journals, memoirs, and travel accounts of Britons visiting and resident in India, and these form a contextual framework for the works under consideration here.²³ Marshall suggests that it is reasonable to conclude that awareness of India was quite widespread, although variable, in late eighteenth-century Britain.²⁴ However, while the volume of material was undeniably large, it is difficult to establish the actual level of interest in Britain, which almost certainly fluctuated over time, partly in response to political, military, and economic events. A key part of the appeal was the idea of the exotic, which, as developed during the eighteenth century, went beyond

²³ For an overview of these publications, see Ketaki Kushari Dyson, *A Various Universe: A Study of the Journals and Memoirs of British Men and Women in the Indian Subcontinent, 1765-1856*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²⁴ P. J. Marshall, "Taming the Exotic: The British and India in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, ed. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 52.

mere difference, carrying with it connotations of strangeness, danger, and mystery.²⁵ However, a lack of knowledge about India among the metropolitan British was, as will be seen in Chapters Three and Four, a common theme of many accounts of the time. Such claims were no doubt intended to boost the appeal of works on the subject, but they also tap into a conception of India as vast and ultimately unknowable, and into a consequent British sense of doubt and insecurity about their own position there.²⁶

It is clear that this material was aimed at dual audiences. So, for example, books published in Britain were often intended for distribution among the British in India, as is evident from the subscription lists appended to some such works. Moreover, imports from Britain were plentiful, and there was a flourishing second-hand market for illustrated books and prints, arising from the turnover of British personnel.²⁷ However, it is evident that the images discussed here were also targeted at an audience in Britain. Family portraits were commissioned with an eye to a potential posterity back in Britain, and one can find several descriptions of publications on India among the reviews appearing in the periodical press of the time, although the number of books covered in this way is limited. The published works I consider come from a lower tier—still, in many cases, relatively expensive, but without the scholarly pretensions or immediacy of interest of those that were more frequently reviewed in mainstream periodicals. Contemporary discussion of these works was more limited and generally restricted to more specialist publications. Thus, it is not easy to deduce much about the metropolitan market for them, beyond the broad categories of potential readers which they claim for themselves in their introductions: typically, those returned from India, those about to go to India, and those with friends or relatives in India, as well as the general reader seeking knowledge.

The extent of the sector of the potential market in Britain constituted by those with Indian connections is difficult to estimate. An article in the *Edinburgh Review* in the 1820s referred to the existence “in every large town, [of] whole clubs of intelligent men, returned after twenty or thirty

²⁵ See G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, “Introduction: Approaching Enlightenment Exoticism”, in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, ed. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 1-22.

²⁶ See, for example, Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 24-48 for a discussion of the sublimity of India in the rhetoric of Edmund Burke.

²⁷ Mildred Archer, *Company Drawings in the India Office Library* (London: HMSO, 1972), 6.

years' residence in [India] in high situations".²⁸ Meanwhile, the retired East India Company civil servant, W. B. Hockley, suggested that:

almost every family has some relative, or intimate acquaintance, in that distant country, concerning whom they feel a desire to learn the habits, and manners of the society, into which he may be thrown.²⁹

Of course, he was presumably talking about "almost every family" within a particular social milieu, and, as an author himself, would have had a vested interest in trying to talk up the degree of curiosity in the field. However, the widespread nature of personal links to the Empire has also been suggested by more recent research.³⁰

Colonial Society

In taxonomies of imperialism, British India is never regarded as a "colony of settlement" in the way that, say, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are. Indeed, whether British involvement in India at this stage constituted imperialism or colonialism is a debatable semantic point: for example, Edward Said uses the former term to mean "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory", and the latter as "the implanting of settlements on distant territory."³¹ I have not sought to draw any such fine terminological distinction, because, for the main subjects of my writing, the two processes were intertwined, and the position of British India was by no means pre-ordained. However classified, British influence was expanding at this time, both within the country and through various border conflicts, and the significance of British dominion is indicated by the fact that, by 1800, the British centres of Calcutta and Madras had the largest populations of any cities in the subcontinent.³² Nevertheless, great swathes of the country remained under indigenous rule, some more nominally than others.

²⁸ *Edinburgh Review*, 48 (1828): 315.

²⁹ W. B. Hockley, *The English in India* (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1828), v.

³⁰ See, for example, Catherine Hall, "British Cultural Identities and the Legacy of Empire", in *British Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kevin Robins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 31.

³¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 8.

³² C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 68.

Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson suggest that settlers generally retained less allegiance to their home country than did those sent to administer colonies of occupation, and that they were, in some sense, “both colonized and colonizing”.³³ Such an approach offers possible criteria for helping to situate the British community in India during the period under review. It may sound far-fetched to regard the British in India as colonised, but there are clear indications that they were engaged in struggles against aspects of the regime to which they were subject. These campaigns involved military unrest,³⁴ growing disenchantment among junior administrative officials,³⁵ and agitation over property rights and press freedom,³⁶ themes which ran through the period under consideration and which are referred to specifically in Chapter Four. The existence of such fissures is indicative of (and, in some periods, critical to) the sense of themselves as somehow distinct, which was held and displayed by the British in India.

Of the British population in India during this period, many worked for, or were related to those who worked for, the East India Company. The Company’s employees, or “servants”, were divided between the military and the civilian, the latter being involved with its trading operations and increasingly with the administration of the areas under its dominion. Although there could be tensions between the Company’s military and civilian employees, depictions of daily life in British India (of the sorts that feature in Chapters Three and Four) show an apparently easy social interaction between military officers and administrative officials. Service in India, whether civilian or military, was often seen as offering opportunities to those with limited prospects in Britain, and hence drew heavily on professional, banking, and commercial families and on lesser

³³ Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson, “Settler Colonies”, in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Henry Schwartz and Sangeeta Ray (London: Blackwell, 2000), 363.

³⁴ Marshall, “Whites of British India”, 31-32; and Peter Stanley, *White Mutiny: British Military Culture in India, 1825-1875* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998), 52-54.

³⁵ Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 221-224; and Nigel Leask, “Towards an Anglo-Indian Poetry? The Colonial Muse in the Writings of John Leyden, Thomas Medwin and Charles D’Oyly”, in *Writing India, 1757-1990: The Literature of British India*, ed. Bart Moore-Gilbert (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 72-73.

³⁶ Bearce, *British Attitudes*, 96-100; Marshall, “Whites of British India”, 33-35; and Natasha Eaton, *Mimesis across Empires: Artworks and Networks in India, 1765-1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 72.

landed groups, and also disproportionately on Scotland and Ireland, as was the case more widely in British colonial projects.³⁷

In addition to the Company employees, there were stationed in India regiments of the British army which were quite distinct from the Company's troops. Ordinary soldiers (in both the Company and Crown armies) constituted the majority of the British population in India. The East India Company Registers of Recruits include details of the former occupations of those who enlisted, and a perusal of these shows a selection of labourers, agricultural workers, carpenters, and so forth,³⁸ suggesting that they were broadly representative of the (male) working classes in Britain.

There were also a few British private businessmen (such as plantation owners), professionals, small tradesmen, and artisans. British domestic servants existed in very small numbers in India, but they were widely regarded as more expensive than their Indian counterparts and less reliable, being prone to leave employment when other opportunities arose.³⁹ In general, competitive pressures from the indigenous population meant that a British civilian working class never developed to any material extent, and, moreover, the formation of such a group was usually actively discouraged by the authorities because of concerns that it might undermine any sense of British racial superiority. However, there did exist a small, poor European underclass consisting of "orphans, vagrants, prostitutes, convicts and lunatics".⁴⁰

Class was thus a clear differentiator within British society in India, and various broad analyses have been made of the resulting hierarchical structure. For example, Anthony King proposes a four-tier model: the governing elite; government officials and commissioned officers; those in commerce and the professions; and non-commissioned ranks, clerks, and minor shopkeepers.⁴¹ This structure was, of course, heavily influenced by

³⁷ P. J. Marshall, "British-Indian Connections, c1780 to c1830: The Empire of Officials", in *Romantic Representations of British India*, ed. Michael J. Franklin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 51; and Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, 2nd. ed. (London: Pimlico, 2003), 128-132.

³⁸ OIOC: L/MIL/9.

³⁹ Captain Thomas Williamson, *The East India Vade-Mecum; or, Complete Guide to Gentlemen Intended for the Civil, Military, or Naval Service of the Hon. East India Company* (London: Black, Parry, and Kingsbury, 1810), 1:334-335.

⁴⁰ David Arnold, "European Orphans and Vagrants in India in the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 7 (1979): 105.

⁴¹ Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 60-61.