Conquest of Knowledge: The British in India

Faculty:
Vinay Lal | Professor of History | University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
Email: vlal@history.ucla.edu
Avishek Ray | Assistant Professor | Dept. of Humanities & Social Sciences | NIT Silchar
Email: avishekray@hum.nits.ac.in

Course Overview:
What colonialism has done to the world -- the postcolonial democracies in particular -- during the last two centuries is astonishing in terms of the scale of social change it has 'engineered', and devastating in terms of its impact on depleting the diversity of ‘knowledge production’ that existed outside the (West) European frames of ‘modernity’. This course examines the transformations wrought in India by the British, principally in the intellectual technologies of governance, rather than focusing, as was common for many decades, on histories riveted upon military conquests, the lives of proconsuls, or imperial policies and nationalist responses. It ventures into a sustained critique of the colonial systems of knowledge and the pervasive categories they furnish through which the world is sought to be understood, whether in the erstwhile colonies or beyond.

This course can reasonably be described as being grounded in the philosophical and political insights that are to be derived from the work of Bernard Cohn, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, and Ashis Nandy, among others, and will invite the participants to reflect on a set of pressing questions: What were the forms of knowledge produced by colonialism? What kind of histories did the British write, not only of their own conquests, but also of the Indian past? Indeed, why did they write histories at all, and what negotiations did they have to undertake to accommodate their histories to indigenous forms of knowing? What were the languages of governance, and what kinds of ‘translations’ did the British aim at achieving? How did the British approach Indian texts, what intermediaries did they use, and with what consequences? How did they transplant Indian notions of the text with their own notion of the text as one fixed in perpetuity? What was the nature of British record-keeping in India, and what forms of objectification did the British create with the census, statistics, government reports, cartographies, ethnographies, and other forms of knowledge? What does it mean to characterize the governance of British India as a form of ‘rule by records’ and ‘rule by numbers’?
Objectives
The objectives of the course are to:

1. Introduce participants to some of the most significant primary literature -- official documents, histories, ethnographies, gazetteers, parliamentary papers and reports -- of the colonial state in India. It is worth reiterating that this course will focus **predominantly on primary sources**.
2. Probe into the modalities of knowledge formations in the context of colonialism vis-à-vis Eurocentric ideas of modernity, more often than not (mis)construed as an unfinished project in the non-West.
3. Engage with issues that concern a range of socio-political and cultural shifts in South Asia, emerging out of its encounter with colonialism and modernization, which may help better understand how modernization processes occur in general.

Course Details
Duration: 16-22 December 2016 | Total Hours: 20 | Total Modules: 3

**Venue: Virtual Classroom, Computer Science Building**

**Module A: Colonialism and the Conquest of Knowledge**

December 16 | Friday

**Inaugural Session: 10:30 AM to 10:55 AM**

**Lecture 1: 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM**
*Colonialism and the Politics of Knowledge: Introductory Remarks and Comparative Frameworks*

**Readings:**

**Lecture 2 & Discussion 1: 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM**
*Governing India: Norms, Etiquette, Requirements*

**Readings:**


Selections from the Minutes and Other Official Writings of the Honourable Mountstuart Elphinston, Governor of Bombay, ed. George W. Forrest (London: Richard Bentley, 1884), ix-x, 77-116, 253-373, 559-578.

♣ Further/ Optional:


Lt. Col. John Briggs, *Letters Addressed to a Young Person in India: Calculated to Afford Instruction for His Conduct in General, and More Especially in his Intercourse with the Natives* (London: John Murray, 1828) [The work is dedicated to John Malcolm].


{A lengthier list of John Malcolm’s writings, can be found here.}

December 17 | Saturday

**Lecture 3: 10:00 to 11:30 AM**

*The Historians’ Knowledge of India: Problems in the Interpretation of Colonial Histories*

**Readings:**


♣ Further/ Optional:


{Other editions: “Lord Macaulay’s Essay on Lord Clive”, ed with notes by William Henry Hudson (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1910). The text with annotations by Vincent A. Smith, as well as other links, can also be accessed here.}

Lecture 4 & Discussion 2: 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM
On the State & Techniques of Governmentality

Readings:
Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians*, 320-342 {and, skim through 422-553, if you wish}.

Module B: Forms of Colonial Knowledge

December 19 | Monday

Lecture 5: 10:00 to 11:30 AM
Forming the Subject and Commanding the Native: Language & Education in the Colonial Project

Readings:
*Adams’s Reports on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Behar, Submitted to Government in 1835, 1836 and 1838*. With A Brief View of Its Past and Present Condition, by Rev. J. Long (Calcutta: Home Secretariat Press, 1868), 55-136. [Please note that page numbers are confusing; the numbers that have been given correspond to the numbers of the PDF document, which has pages 394 in all. What you are reading is Adams’ First Report, which begins at p. 55 of the PDF.]

Lecture 6 & Discussion 3: 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM
Social Reform and the Parliamentary Paper: The Case of Sati

Readings:

♣ Further/ Optional:
Lata Mani, “The Production of an Official Discourse on Sati in Early Nineteenth-Century
December 20 | Tuesday

Lecture 7: 10:00 to 11:30 AM
The Committee & the Commission: Politics of the Body (Famine) & Politics of the Body Politic (Law & Order)

Readings:
“Report of the Commission Appointed by the Government of India to Investigate the Disturbances in the Punjab”, etc., Parliamentary Papers (Commons), 1920, Vol. 14 (Reports, Vol 6), Cmd. 681. [Also known as “Disorders Inquiry Committee Report”, the form in which you have it; and as the Hunter Commission Report.]


Report of the Indian Famine Commission 1898. Simla: Government Central Printing Office, 1898. Read until p. 69. {Read this text if time permits, but read at least one of the two reports, preferably the one from 1880.}

Vinay Lal, Committees of Inquiry and Discourses of 'Law and Order' in Twentieth-Century British India. Unpublished PhD Dissertation (The University of Chicago), Vol 1, Ch. 6

Discussion 4: 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM

December 21 | Wednesday

Lecture 8: 10:00 AM to 11:30 AM
Anthropology and the Colonial Ethnographer

Readings:
Herbert Risley, The People of India, 2nd ed. edited by W. Crooke (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co; London: W. Thacker & Co., 1915) {Read until p 153, and, if possible, also 154-215. The appendices may be ignored though the anthropometric tables are worth a glance; and the 35 plates at the end are definitely worth a look}. M. Pauparao Naidu, The History of Railway Thieves in India, with Illustrations & Hints on Direction [4th ed., 1915], The Criminal Tribes of India Series, no. 1, ed. with a critical introduction by Vinay Lal (Gurgaon: Vintage Books, 1996), i-xxvii, 120-72 (Ch. 7; 8).

♣ Further/ Optional:

Module C: The Colonial Episteme, Its Futures, and Sites of Learning

December 21 | Wednesday

Lecture 9: 2:00 PM to 3:30 PM

Literacy & The Book: The Printing Press | Literarization, Scriptalization and Colonization

Readings:


K. M. Ganguly, “Translator’s Preface” to the Mahabharata (1883)


December 22 | Thursday

Lecture 10: 10:00 AM to 11:30 AM

The University as a Pedagogic Model

Readings:


Leonard Alston, Education and citizenship in India (London: Longmans, 1910), Ch. 3

R. N. Tagore, The Center of Indian Culture, Lecture dated 9 February 1919

M.K. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, Ch. 18 on Education

M.K. Gandhi, Speech at Banaras Hindu University, 4 February 1916

♣ Further/ Optional:


Lecture 11: 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM

Science, State and Ideology

Readings:

Rammohun Roy, Letter to Lord Amherst (11 December 1823)


Vandana Shiva, “Reductionist Science as Epistemic Violence”, in Ashis Nandy (ed.), Science, Hegemony and Violence, Ch. 7

♣ Further/ Optional:


**Discussion 5 & Closing Remarks: 2:00 to 3:00 PM**