2008

IMPERIAL KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL DISPLAY: REPRESENTATIONS OF COLONIAL INDIA IN LATE-NINETEENTH AND EARLY-TWENTIETH CENTURY LONDON

Alayna Wilburn
University of Kentucky, alayna.wilburn@uky.edu

Recommended Citation
http://uknowledge.uky.edu/gradschool_theses/558

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Kentucky Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.
ABSTRACT OF THESIS

IMPERIAL KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL DISPLAY: REPRESENTATIONS OF COLONIAL INDIA IN LATE-NINETEENTH AND EARLY-TWENTIETH CENTURY LONDON

The cultural venue of European exhibitions in the late-nineteenth century enabled the promotion of the modern nationhoods of imperial powers. This study examines the official attempts of Britain to project its imperial power and modern nationhood through exhibits of colonial Indian “tradition” in London. It traces the historical dynamics of such Indian displays in three exhibitions: the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition, and the 1924 Empire Exhibition. The juxtaposition of Indian “tradition” and British “modernity” at the exhibitions denoted India’s inferior “difference” from Britain, and thus the necessity of imperial rule in India. The exhibitions also evidenced the tensions of such notions with those of Indian modernity, especially by the inter-war period. Chapter One examines how the spatial and architectural landscapes of the exhibitions made visible the hierarchies of British imperial rule in India. Chapter Two discusses exhibits of India’s supposedly pre-industrial socio-economic conditions. Chapter Three assesses the ethnography of the exhibitions, and how they denoted the racial inferiority of Indian “natives” at the same time that they recognized the political power of Indian princes and middle-class elites.

KEYWORDS: Exhibitions, Colonial India, Modern Britain, Imperial Hierarchy, Cultural Display.

Alayna Wilburn

10/23/08

Copyright © Alayna Wilburn 2008.
IMPERIAL KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL DISPLAY: REPRESENTATIONS OF
COLONIAL INDIA IN LATE-NINETEENTH AND EARLY-TWENTIETH CENTURY
LONDON

By

Alayna Wilburn

Dr. Phil Harling
Director of Thesis

Dr. David Hamilton
Director of Graduate Studies

10/23/08
Date
RULES FOR THE USE OF THESSES

Unpublished theses submitted for the Master’s degree and deposited in the University of Kentucky Library are as a rule open for inspection, but are to be used only with due regard to the rights of the authors. Bibliographical references may be noted, but quotations or summaries of parts may be published only with the permission of the author, and with the usual scholarly acknowledgments.

Extensive copying or publication of the thesis in whole or in part also requires the consent of the Dean of the Graduate School of the University of Kentucky.

A library that borrows this thesis for use by its patrons is expected to secure the signature of each user.

Name                        Date

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
IMPERIAL KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL DISPLAY: REPRESENTATIONS OF COLONIAL INDIA IN LATE-NINETEENTH AND EARLY-TWENTIETH CENTURY LONDON

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By

Alayna Wilburn
Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Phil Harling, Professor of History
Lexington, Kentucky

2008

Copyright © Alayna Wilburn 2008.
The following thesis benefited immensely from the support, insight, and direction of my thesis Director and Co-Directors. Dr. Phil Harling, my Director, has inspired my historical research since my first semester in the history program, and his consistent encouragement made this thesis possible. Dr. Ellen Furlough also provided constant support both within and outside my courses with her and my thesis would never be complete without her direction. Dr. Karen Petrone, as well, gave me instructive and supportive comments for this thesis. I truly thank these wonderful professors for their informative and personable assistance throughout my graduate work with them.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ iii
LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................. v
LIST OF FILES ............................................................................................................... vi

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .................................................................................. 1
  The Meanings of Tradition ......................................................................................... 2
  Exhibitions and their Historical Contexts ................................................................. 7
  Post-war Changes ................................................................................................... 11
  Social Hierarchies and the Native ........................................................................ 16

CHAPTER TWO: EXHIBITIONARY LANDSCAPES AND VIRTUAL TRAVEL ............. 21
  Imperial Spectacle and Tourism ........................................................................... 23
  Architecture and Organization ............................................................................. 28
  Indian Administration in the Exhibitions ............................................................. 39
  Indian Sections at the Exhibitions ....................................................................... 42

CHAPTER THREE: ARTISANAL BAZAARS AND PEASANT VILLAGES .............. 47
  The Colonial Space of Bazaars and Villages in India ....................................... 49
  The Tradition of Indian Artisans and Peasants ............................................... 52
  Handmade Objects and Indian Industry ............................................................. 57
  Simulated Bazaars in the Early Twentieth Century ......................................... 65

CHAPTER FOUR: THE NATIVE ON DISPLAY AND COLONIAL HIERARCHIES 72
  The Economic Ethnography of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition .... 76
  The Native of the Early Twentieth-Century Village ...................................... 79
  The Tradition of Indian Princes ....................................................................... 84
  Class Divisions ................................................................................................. 90

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION ................................................................................. 93

BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................................................................................ 97
VITA ......................................................................................................................... 104
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1      Picture of the Indian Building at the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition .................32
Figure 1.2      Photograph of the Indian Building at the 1924 Empire Exhibition.....................32
Figure 1.3      Map of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.......................................................34
Figure 1.4      Plan of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition..................................................35
Figure 1.5      Map of the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition ..........................................................37
Figure 1.6      1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, Indian Palace.............................................43
Figure 2.1      Woodcarvers and Gold Brocade Weavers (Courtyard of Indian Palace) at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition..............................................................53
Figure 2.2      Model of Native Fruit Shop, 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition.........................53
Figure 3.1      1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition: Native of Oudh, Andaman Islander, Native of Bombay, Rajpoot Rajah..............................................................78
LIST OF FILES

THESIS FINAL ETD .pdf 1.98 mb
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The past is dead and gone; and to be what is past is to be dead. The past has been the builder of the present, and the present is the builder of the future ... Woe to him, who obstructs nature’s progress by clinging to that which is past and gone.¹

From April 23rd to November 1st, the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley offered the first exclusively imperial exhibition in London after the First World War. Its 216 acres of exhibits, along with imperial pavilions representing each colony of the Empire, purported to offer each colony “in its habit as it thrives to-day.”² An official project, the Empire Exhibition strategically rendered cultural visions of India’s “preindustrial past” as reasons for British rule.³ The Pavilion dedicated to India included models of local villages, agriculture and handmade products, and “living displays” of Indian artisans and peasants that fashioned the illusion that non-colonial visitors traversed the boundaries of colony and metropole. It contrasted the “modernity” of Britain’s urban, industrial nationhood against the “tradition” of India’s rural, agricultural, and artisanal locales. In these displays of contemporary Indian “tradition,” the Empire Exhibition depicted India through the familiar representational strategies established in official exhibitions of the late nineteenth century.

The 1924 Empire Exhibition, nevertheless, differed from previous imperial exhibitions in London because it displayed signs of Indian modernity. The administrators of the Exhibition, while viewing India within previous modes of colonial representation,

¹ T.N. Mukharji, A Visit to Europe (Calcutta: W. Newman and Co., 1889), 76.
³ Saloni Mathur refers to visions of Indian pre-industry at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition in India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 11.
could not exclude new ways of imagining India within the visible forces of Indian nationalism, industrial growth, and political participation. The Empire Exhibition represented India within its enduring “tradition” in order to validate British rule, but also attempted to reconcile this with simultaneous displays of Indian modernization.

The following study examines three official exhibitions in London: the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition, and the 1924 British Empire Exhibition. Through travel accounts, official catalogues and guides, newspapers, and periodicals it traces the historical dynamics of India’s hierarchical relationship with Britain. These three exhibitions relied primarily upon imperial Britain’s appropriation and manipulation of three iconic representations of India: the village, bazaar, and palace. The material reproduction of these cultural visions of India at each exhibition, though tied to the political context of their construction, represented their ongoing importance to British imperial power. Their display of Indian “tradition” denoted India’s “difference” from British modernity. The 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition established this cultural entrenchment of India into the ostensibly pre-industrial markets, unchanging societies, and feudal systems of “tradition.” Through a comparative examination with subsequent exhibitions, this study aims to show the colonial relationship of Britain and India in transition by the inter-war period, and to analyze official attempts to mediate India’s entry into “modernity” at the 1924 Empire Exhibition.

The Meanings of “Tradition”

Official exhibitions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries publicly declared the nationhoods of imperial powers, presented European notions of progress and
modernity, and labeled colonized peoples on display as anachronistic and racially degenerate. Following the methodology of Edward Said’s seminal works, Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism, recent scholarship on imperialism analyzes the hierarchical power dynamics of empire through such cultural frameworks as public display. Subsequent studies, variously adopting this schema, assert that public displays transformed knowledge into power and reified the unequal power relations of imperialism. Imperial exhibitions encouraged European colonizers to envision themselves simultaneously as imperial, industrial, modern, and opposite the colonized “other.” The shaping of national identities, therefore, depended upon the construction of both internal and external “others.”

Exhibitions depicted the nationalistic and racialistic claims to modernity and progress by imperial powers as authentic representations of the anthropological and

---

4 Edward Said argued for the political meanings of cultural productions. See Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 2-7 and Culture and Imperialism (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xii-xiii and xxi. In Orientalism, 204, Said demonstrated that nineteenth-century Orientalist views created a “cultural hegemony” over colonized peoples that naturalized an unequal political relationship between the East (Orient) and the West (Occident) by eliding “the Orient’s difference with its weakness.”

5 Tony Bennett, for example, asserted that exhibitionary displays “formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the message of power” in the public arena. See Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” in Thinking about Exhibitions, eds. Greenberg, Reesa, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), 82. Also see Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, eds., Colonialism and the Object (London: Routledge, 1997). In Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), Bernard Cohn provides a close study of how Britain’s “conquest” of Indian knowledge enabled British rule.

6 Scholars have comprehensively evidenced how cultural depictions of the colonial “other” defined the national identities, as well as the class and gender divisions, of European nation-states. In Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), John MacKenzie argues that through imperial display and other forms of popular imperialism, Britons envisioned that their imperial status “was central to their perceptions of themselves” and constituted a “united set of national ideas” that cut across class divisions and party affiliations. For an opposing view see Bernard Porter, The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Porter asserts that the pervasive class divisions within Britain precluded any significant influence of empire on the national consciousness of Britons, especially for the working classes. In contrast, Anne McClintock demonstrates that images of empire in the metropole, in defining the “Western, industrial modernity” of Britons, not only shaped this self-definition of the middle class, but also marginalized sexual and social deviants of the working class. The lower class thus became racialized, and colonized peoples were associated with heterodox sexualities
historical knowledge about contemporary colonial conditions. The technologies of colonial rule transformed imperial “knowledge” of colonized territories into demonstrations of their lack of historical, economic, and racial development and their incapacity for political self-rule. The acquisition and organization of cultural knowledge about India by Britons, a mechanism for asserting imperial power, rigidified the differences between colony and metropole and assigned to the former inherently subordinate qualities. The construction of India’s historical backwardness within a “universal narrative of history” precluded India’s ascent into modernity and elided Indian conceptions of history, modernity, and nationhood.

The imperial retrenchment of India’s social, cultural, and political systems into a series of categories and classifications perpetually labeled India as “traditional” and facilitated British rule. Even as exhibitions contrasted European and colonial identities by depicting the former through representations of “modernity,” they celebrated the distinctive, “traditional” cultures of European states as evidence of a longheld and cohesive nationhood that had progressed into modernity. As Shanny Peer demonstrates in her analysis of the 1937 World’s Fair in Paris, Europeans reconciled their continued tradition with markers of their modern nationhood. They integrated “tradition” into a national identity rather than viewing it in opposition to modernity. Unlike European


7 Nicholas Dirks, Colonialism and Culture (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 2-4 and 9-10. Bernard Cohn explains how the British configured their history in India, which equated the European (feudal) past with the Indian present, in Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge, 121.

8 In Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), Prasenjit Duara characterizes the exclusionary practices of the teleological and linear construction of “History” as part of the process of nation building.

9 Shanny Peer, France on Display: Peasants, Provincials, and Folklore in the 1937 Paris World’s Fair (Albany: University of New York Press, 1998), 2-3 and 9. Markus Heinonen also demonstrates this point in his analysis of Germany’s promotion of its nationhood at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair in “An
exhibits, displays of colonial “tradition” served as proof of their economic and political pre-modernity.

The strategic (re)construction of the Indian village, bazaar, and palace at exhibitions did not represent India’s enduring tradition, but rather how particular village industries, agricultural exports, political hierarchies, and cultural systems facilitated British economic and political hegemony. Officials allied with “feudal” princes and landed elites to consolidate imperial rule in the middle and late nineteenth century. They also organized knowledge of India so that local tribal and caste divisions became totalizing representations of India’s complex socio-cultural systems. Economically, the colonial regime fortified India’s commercial agriculture and landed systems, importing British industry into India and weakening its artisanal productions. India’s relative lack of modernity, one might say, was a product of Britain’s self-sustained presence on the subcontinent.

British officials, therefore, participated in the construction and preservation of Indian “tradition” both in India and at the exhibitions. The juxtaposition of Indian “tradition” and British “modernity” at the exhibitions demonstrated the necessary and hierarchical political relationship of Britain and India, but the exhibitions also evidenced the tensions of such notions about Indian “difference” with those of Indian “similarity,” especially by the inter-war period. The 1924 Empire Exhibition most marked the dynamic between ideas of India’s difference from, and similarity to, modern Britain in its simultaneous displays of Indian tradition and modernity. The idea of India’s

---

“difference,” increasingly viewed in racial terms, persisted in the exhibitions and justified Britain’s longstanding rule in India. Each exhibition, however, also embodied the ongoing contradiction between imperial notions that regarded Indians as fundamentally different from Britons, and thus inexorably incapable for self-rule, and those that regarded Indians as similar to the extent that they could progress into modernity. 11

The exhibitions, for example, illustrated transgressions of India’s “unchanging” hierarchical divisions, colonial narratives of contestation against displays of the Indian “other,” and the ways Indians shaped their representation both in congruence with and in opposition to British depictions of India. As Nicholas Thomas argues, viewing the governmentality of cultural productions through a “colonial discourse” that homogenized the racial differences of colonial societies and reinforced the “totalizing” power of imperial rulers neglects the reality of cultural displays as a “project” that was “localized, politicized and partial.” 12 The multi-layered identities within colonial society challenged notions of India’s monolithic racial difference and the racial “Othering” represented in cultural productions. The construction of exhibitions during times of problematic colonial relations mitigated their highly contained and categorized illusions of imperial integration. 13 Imperial exhibitions also blurred the political and exhibitionary segregation of racially different “natives” on display and non-colonial observers.

11 For a thorough analysis of this tension, see Thomas Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
Cultural depictions of the “other” unraveled as well as reified the “totalizing” power of the imperial West.

Exhibitions and their Historical Contexts

Imperial exhibits in London persistently represented India’s “traditional” landed, agricultural, and artisanal environments of villages and bazaars, and the “feudal” political systems of hereditary leaders. Each exhibition also indicated the specific social, political, and economic contexts of its erection. The 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, held within the 65,000 square feet of the South Kensington Museum, reconstructed colonial India and other British colonies in the imperial metropole. From May 4th to November 10th, approximately 6 million people visited the Exhibition. The British Government sponsored this microcosm of the Empire to fashion the national identity of Britons through their imperial status, hierarchically integrate colonial peoples, and bolster the trading relationships of the colonies and metropole.

In a general sense, the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition resembled other cultural productions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in its promotion of economic and political goals. Unlike French and American exhibitions, many British exhibitions were not state funded, but were backed by private entrepreneurs. See Annie E. Coombes, Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 65.

Administrative imperialists and entrepreneurs viewed the
exhibitions through an instructional lens, wherein exhibits depicted the economic and political conditions of colonies authentically and inscribed messages of power both to colonial and non-colonial visitors.\textsuperscript{16} Notably, exhibitionary goals facilitated the objectives of industrial capitalism and imperial governments.\textsuperscript{17} The display of colonial societies and economies in the metropole encouraged the Empire’s trade across national borders, and familiarized the diverse cultures of the empire with one another. This colonial governmentality purported to unify a geographically and socially heterogeneous array of colonial and imperial peoples, and in doing so, made manifest the political and social hierarchies of colonial rule.

As the first British exhibition dedicated exclusively to empire, the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition coincided with Britain’s consolidation of Indian territory under the Raj, as well as the emergence of Europe’s “new imperialism.” Its displays epitomized British conceptions of India’s social organizations and racial difference after the 1857 Indian Rebellion.\textsuperscript{18} After the consolidation of the 1858 Raj government in India, British narratives stringently asserted and institutionalized India’s ostensibly unchanging hierarchies, its divided and agrarian communities, and its reliance on ‘natural’ leadership.\textsuperscript{19} Prominent exhibits thus included a simulated Indian Palace and Durbar,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{16} Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” in Thinking about Exhibitions, 82.
\textsuperscript{18} In Ideologies of the Raj, Thomas Metcalf argues that after the 1857-8 Indian Rebellion and after the emergence of nationalist appeals by educated Indians for self-rule in the 1880s, British officials more stringently declared the fixity and inferiority of Indian civilization. Britain made its last major acquisition of Indian territory in 1885, with the conquest of Upper Burma. See Sarkar, Modern India: 1885-1947, 15.
\textsuperscript{19} Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, A Concise History of India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 133. Sumit Sarkar explains that the “divide and rule” policy of the empire, for
\end{footnotesize}
reconstructed agricultural and artisanal bazaars, and models of villages encompassing local societies. The reconstructed Durbar reified imperial notions regarding the persistence of the “natural” hierarchies and “feudal” systems of India’s traditional princely states, but also exhibited the consent of Indian princes to Raj governance. Official Britons in India appropriated the historical Indian Durbar, a ceremonial gathering between the ruler’s court and the ruled, and used it as a ceremonial legitimation of British authority and its hierarchical incorporation of princely leadership.20

As an expanded version of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, Indian sections of the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition devoted separate sections to Indian durbars, villages, and bazaars. It opened on May 14th 1908 at Shepherd’s Bush in west London, encompassing 140 acres and including twenty palaces and eight exhibition halls, and garnered approximately 8.5 million visitors in six months.21 The main objective of holding a co-organized exhibition arose from the Entente Cordiale of 1904, a Franco-British agreement against German expansionism and potential colonial conflict. The Exhibition attempted to solidify and foster the bond between England and France primarily through commercial relations.22 Nonetheless, the Franco-British Exhibition

example, constructed ‘martial races’ based on divisions of caste, religion, race, and region. See Modern India, 16 and 33.
demonstrated competitive French and British nationalisms even as it attempted to transcend imperialist rivalries and boundaries.  

The propagandistic efforts of post-war imperialists and entrepreneurs developed an even larger reconstruction of colonial territories at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.  The Empire Exhibition’s 216 acres included amusements, colonial exhibits, and British Pavilions of the Government, Industry, and Engineering. It was at the time the largest exhibition ever held in London, and by its final closing had received approximately 27 million visitors. The 50-acre Amusement park offered rides, games, a children’s section, and a dance hall.  After closing on November 1st 1924, it re-opened in May of 1925 in order to further its objectives and increase profits. The Chief Administrator for the Exhibition from 1924-5, Travers Clarke, declared at its final closing that it “had not completed the task of Imperial education it had undertaken.” Clarke’s administrative concerns resulted from the 1924 Empire Exhibition’s appeal to the spectacular in its amusements and exotic colonial performances, even though entertainment in exhibits did not necessarily preclude education. 

---

23 Orvar Lofgren examines how travel (and exhibitions) fostered the fashioning of nationhoods while simultaneously transgressing national borders in, “Know Your Country: A Comparative Perspective on Tourism and Nation Building in Sweden,” in Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America, eds. Baranowski and Furlough (U. of Michigan Press, 2004). The spatially opposed British Palace of Industries and French Palace of Industries, situated on the sides of the Court of Honour at the Exhibition’s entrance, evinced this Franco-British relationship that attempted to mediate imperial and industrial contentions through economic and colonial cooperation. 

24 Many non-official observers remarked upon the propaganda of the 1924 Empire Exhibition. In “Two Weeks on Our Planet,” 179, Henry Bunn described the Exhibition as a “huge imperial advertisement.” In “An Empire in Miniature. Special Correspondence from Harold E. Scarborough” Outlook 137, no. 7 (June 18, 1924): 278 and 280, Harold E. Scarborough explained that “First and foremost, the British Empire Exhibition is an advertisement. It is professedly designed to stimulate British trade.” He also noted that “the Exhibition is a gigantic object-lesson of imperialism. No British subject can see it without some feeling of pride.”


26 In Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England, 63, Annie Coombes explains that the effectiveness of imperial spectacle relied upon its simultaneous scientific instruction and mass entertainment. Conversely, Andrew Thompson challenges analyses that emphasize the edifying success of exhibitions for constructing national and
that the Exhibition could do more to strengthen the economic development among members of the Empire. The re-opened Empire Exhibition of 1925 therefore appealed more directly to popular preference, expanding “scenic displays and working models” that would instruct visitors about British colonies and their industries.

Post-war Changes

The 1924 Empire Exhibition attempted to recreate the celebratory atmosphere of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition through an exclusive and spectacular display of British colonial territories, but nevertheless evinced the fragile international climate of the inter-war period. As a “miniature replication of empire,” the Exhibition depicted alleged inter-war colonies authentically within London. It coincided, however, with the Empire’s post-war economic and political recoveries and amidst nationalistic calls for self-rule in some colonies. Britain’s industrial supremacy declined with the continued competition from European and American industries and the destabilization of the economy as a result of World War One. Colonial exhibits demonstrated the urgency of bolstering trade relationships and asserting the Empire’s utility in a post-war context.

The volatile political and economic terrain of the post-war period made it particularly difficult for the Raj to project the illusion of imperial integration at the 1924

imperial identities. He explains that the overt imperial theme at Wembley may have reflected concerns about the public’s ignorance of the empire and that the amusement park may have diminished its serious purposes. See “A Tale of Three Exhibitions”: Portrayals and Perceptions of ‘Britishness’ at the Great Exhibition (1851), Wembley Exhibition (1924) and the Festival of Britain (1951),” in Angleterre ou albion, entre fascination et repulsion: de l’Exposition universelle au dome du millenaire, 1851-2000, 97.
29 Scarborough, “An Empire in Miniature. Special Correspondence from Harold E. Scarborough,” 278.
30 Greenhalgh, Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World’s Fairs, 1851-1939, 58.
Empire Exhibition. With the First World War, the visibility of Indian adaptations of “history” and “progress” challenged monolithic constructions of India’s racial “difference” and notions of its immobility within “tradition.” The Indian National Congress, established in 1885, threatened British rule and demanded constitutional recognition of India’s nationhood and modern development. The political system instituted by the British Government in 1858, in which a Viceroy governed India and reported to the Secretary of State of the India Office in London, remained largely the same into the twentieth century. The British government officially affirmed India’s capacity for constitutional devolution, though not political independence, in the 1917 Montagu Declaration. Civil unrest in India, and the urgency to collaborate with moderate nationalists who demanded progress towards self-government, led to this declaration of constitutional intent in 1917. The Government of India Act of 1919, which gave Indians more legislative power in the provinces, began the process of decentralization and devolution from British control. Until the inter-war period, India’s economy was driven by Britain’s capitalist industrialization and primarily exported raw materials and imported British industry. By granting India some input in fiscal policy, the 1919

31 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, revised ed. (London: Verso, 2006); Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 26; Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation, 205-227. Duara and Chatterjee modify the Andersonian approach to nation-building and thus reject that colonies wholly imported Western modes of nationalism, primarily in opposition to imperialism. These scholars argue that India’s cultural specificities, such as the pervasive religious element within Indian society, enabled Indians to cultivate a national identity separate and different from the material dominance of Britain. Chatterjee explains that, although Indian elites asserted their ability to adopt and identify with the material (political and economic) elements of British modernity, Indian society displayed “the marks of ‘essential’ cultural difference so as the keep out the colonizer from that inner domain of national life and to proclaim its sovereignty over it.”

Reforms recognized India’s industrial and commercial growth as separate from, and thus less controlled by, British economic interests.

British administrators did not intend the reforms of 1919 as a move towards immediate self-rule in India but rather as a means of allying more closely with Indian elites and thus safeguard the foundations of Empire.34 Into the 1920s, Indian Nationalists realized the hollowness of the 1919 changes.35 The reforms, for example, instituted only minor changes in power structures, as they kept British officials in control of the executive council and gave Indians minimal power in provincial councils. This diarchy system restricted the self-government of the new Legislative Councils of Indian provinces and the Central Indian Legislature. Class-based protests, Gandhian tactics, and nationalist demands continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s until Indian independence in 1947.

The 1924 Empire Exhibition administrators framed India’s changing colonial status within the context of a visible colonial hierarchy and a renewed imperial unity after the First World War. They explicitly recognized that exhibits promoted the new political and economic status of India in the inter-war period, but asserted that Indian progress resulted from British intervention there. According to the Exhibition Commissioner for India, Dewan Bahadur T. Vijayarghavacharya, India played a considerable part in the Exhibition because of its contributions to the war, “and the change in India’s political status as a member of the Empire.”36 India contributed both manpower and financial assets to Britain’s efforts in the First World War, in which the Allies claimed to defend

the self-determination of nations. Although India had defended British interests abroad in previous wars, it assembled the largest colonial army in the world for the First World War. The war resulted in the death of approximately 62,000 of the 1.4 million Indians in the army, the disruption of India’s external markets, and the higher price of imported goods into India. 37 Austin Kendall’s report to the Royal Society on India’s position in the Exhibition asserted that “the people of India came to a more complete realisation of their comradeship with the rest of the Empire … their troops fought side by side with their brothers of the Empire in many fronts; and this … gave a sudden acceleration to the pace of both political and industrial advancement.”38 Since previous exhibitions, Indians attained control over certain branches of the legislature and recognition in the councils of the Empire such as the Imperial War Cabinets, the League of Nations, and the Washington Disarmament Conference. British officials construed that India’s new representative institutions, as the “intellectual supplement” to the 1924 British Empire Exhibition put it, “[were] not indigenous in Indian soil.” The official rhetoric of the 1919 reforms, therefore, viewed “the widening political liberty in British India, together with a growing sense of unity throughout India” as “the outcome of British administration and control.”39

The 1924 Empire Exhibition attempted to mediate the evident contradictions of imperial rule by cultivating a paradoxical set of colonial images in the metropole.

---

Displays affirmed India’s heightened political and economic autonomy of the inter-war period but also continued to depict India through reformulated versions of its princely past, pre-industrial bazaars and villages, and unchanging “native” societies. Within these familiar representational strategies of previous exhibitions, the Empire Exhibition evinced the (restricted) political devolution of the Raj, and the simultaneous political rise of middle-class Indians, through several transformations from previous exhibitions. The Exhibition, for instance, excluded a princely durbar representation, introduced Indian industry and commercial entrepreneurship, and granted comprador Indians administrative authority over exhibits. “Western” educated Indian elites became ever more important to the Raj’s power, and similarly they administered provincial exhibits in 1924. These supposedly acquiescent Indians constituted a new “comprador class” of “westernized” and English-educated Indians who, though not a part of traditional princely leadership, would also mediate between the majority of the Indian population and British officials.

Until the First World War, British officials collaborated with hereditary princes as the rulers of the quasi-independent states of India, rather than these educated and “westernized” Indians, because they conveyed compliance with British authority and could mobilize imperial support within the larger native populace. The hereditary princes of Indian states retained their territory, and although they were loyal and bound to British rule, they did not abide by the legal codes or civic rights of British-Indian territories. The 1919 reforms emphasized this contrast between the “traditional” rule of princely states and the “responsible government” of British-Indian areas. Indian

---


**41** Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, 64-65.
princes, though represented in the Government of India through a newly-developed Chamber of Princes, were excluded from constitutional development. Although Indian princes had a higher social and political rank than Indian “natives,” their representation at exhibitions had typified India’s enduring tradition. With the post-war devolution and the incorporation of non-traditional Indian elites into governance, British officials receded the princely, antiquated model of the Raj government from overt exhibitionary display.

Social Hierarchies and the “Native”

This study frames exhibitions within these historical contexts and considers their manifestations of the social and racial stratifications within British India. It therefore accounts for the evolution of Indian nationalism, the political and economic devolution of the Raj, and changing perceptions of Indian social conditions. The exhibitions continuously associated Indian “native” societies with the “traditional” conditions of princely, village, and bazaar environments. Several scholars have evaluated racialized depictions of colonial “natives” at European exhibitions. The collaboration of official Britons with the “traditional” Indian elites of princes and landlords, as well as the rise of middle-class Indians in the Indian National Congress, demonstrates the importance of both racial and social categories to the colonial regime. The cultural display of lower-class Indians within pre-modern bazaars and villages and alongside agricultural and handcrafted products mirrored their lack of political power compared with middle class and princely leaders.

---

42 For an assessment of social hierarchies in the Raj, see David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Although several scholars have criticized Cannadine’s study for his focus on class rather than race, he illustrates the analytical importance of social identities for Britain’s consolidation of rule.
The “native” peasant and artisanal societies displayed within model bazaars and villages presented India’s pre-industrial economy as well as the spectacle of racially different “natives.” Racial attitudes towards colonized peoples had hardened with the “Indian Rebellion” and other colonial revolts of the mid-century.43 Scholars have assessed the meanings of the “living” displays and the ethnological components of reconstructed villages and bazaars rather than focusing on the material representations of colonies.44 The racial degeneracy associated with “living displays” and models of Indian societies demonstrated the “scientific” evidence of Social Darwinism. They, as well, were depicted through and thus inexorably tied to categories of tribe, caste, religion, and region. Indian “natives” were less racialized by the 1924 Empire Exhibition but they remained spatially, politically, and economically separate from Indian elites. At the same time that inter-war exhibits appropriated Indian peoples for display, they recognized the political and economic advancement of middle-class Indians who helped construct and administer the Exhibition. Inter-war exhibits both incorporated comprador Indian elites and rising Indian merchants, and strategically excluded Indian nationalists.

The following analysis examines how these racial and social divisions were represented, problematized, or contested at exhibitions over time to mark changes particular to the nuances of the British-Indian relationship. Imperial exhibitions reproduced and reified the racial and social hierarchies of colonial India. Indians also transgressed their supposedly unchanging social and racial positions. Europeans,

---

44 For a study on the collecting and public display of colonial objects during world’s fairs, see Carol Breckenridge, “The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World Fairs” Comparative Studies in Society and History 31, no. 2 (1989): 195-216. For an analysis specific to the imperial exhibitions in London, see Tim Barringer, “The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial
nevertheless, continued to view members of the Orient through their privileged “gaze” as objects of an exhibit, even when spatially outside of an exhibition.\textsuperscript{45} This study therefore compares the narratives of non-colonial travelers in India to the exhibition as virtual travel. Recently, scholars have argued for the histories of travel and tourism and their importance to the fashioning of national and class identities in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe. These fashionings included official efforts to cultivate nationalisms, the articulation of particular national visions to the international community, and the exclusion of “others”--such as members of foreign states and of particular classes--from a national identity.\textsuperscript{46} Few studies have combined the dynamic frameworks of imperial spectacle and colonial travel in order to reveal the images of empire they symbiotically produced within European metropoles.\textsuperscript{47} As seen in Alexander Geppert and Antoinette Burton’s respective studies, imperial exhibitions fashioned both imagined and real travel between the colony and metropole.\textsuperscript{48} Elite Britons who traveled to India not only relied on pre-existing conceptions of Indian society that denigrated India as the “other,” but became immersed within a colonial environment that could not be easily contained and


\textsuperscript{47} Another exception is Ellen Furlough’s analysis of the intertwined effects of colonial tourism and imperial spectacle on the construction of a French national identity that was also imperial. See her article, “\textit{Une leçon des choses}: Tourism, Empire, and the Nation in Interwar France,” \textit{French Historical Studies} 25, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 441-73.

classified like the colonial displays of officially-constructed exhibitions. When outside the illusion of the exhibition, non-colonial travelers anxiously attempted to define Indians in opposition to themselves, underscoring that Indians were on “display” as part of a “traditional” culture.

This study is organized thematically, with each chapter illustrating change over time. Chapter One examines the various spaces and temporalities associated with the layout of each exhibition. The cultural geography of the exhibitions demonstrated the political order of Empire and offered visitors the “experience” of simulated travel to the colonies. It also analyzes how the spatial position of Indian exhibits, in relation to British exhibits and other colonial exhibits, as well as the spatial arrangement of Indian courts, made visible colonial hierarchies. Chapter Two explores how the bazaar and village space, and the artisan and peasant displayed within them, represented Indian “tradition.” The construction of Indian villages within the imperial metropole emphasized the local particularities of India and suggested the impossibility of a “national” Indian identity. Conversely, simulated villages portrayed local rurality, pre-industrial handcrafts, and agricultural societies as demonstrative of India’s overall identity and its incapacity for political sovereignty. India’s “traditional” market, while contrasting with Britain’s modernity and industry, increasingly became commercialized and centered on India’s evolving trade relationships. With the perceived success of preceding Indian displays and the selling of Indian handcrafted products in London, British and Indian officials of the 1924 Empire Exhibition recognized the economic profitability of commodified images of a “traditional” India. They also used the popular appeal of bazaars to advertise economic products in the post-war period. Chapter Three analyzes how the model local
societies displayed within villages and bazaars, and the “living” renditions of Indian cultures, represented a particularly “native” explanation for India’s inability for self-rule. As in Chapter Two, it examines the separation of “native” spaces and non-colonial spaces both in exhibitions and travel accounts, and the blurring of these constructed boundaries. This chapter also focuses on the ethnographic depictions of lower-class “natives,” and the social and political significance of their spatial separation from British spectators as well as from elite Indians and traditional princes.
CHAPTER TWO: EXHIBITIONARY LANDSCAPES AND VIRTUAL TRAVEL

The spatial and architectural terrain of exhibitions made visible the Empire’s political hierarchies.\textsuperscript{49} Between the initial planning of the Empire Exhibition in 1913 and its opening in 1924, the British Empire experienced the First World War and a related series of colonial tensions and transitions that altered the political relationships amongst the colonies and metropole. The white-settlement Dominions more assertively demanded increased political autonomy, the Empire grew to its historically largest size with the attainment of former Japanese and German colonies (in the guise of the mandate system), and the Raj began to devolve political power to native Indians.\textsuperscript{50} As the status quo of the imperial system came into question, colonial territories became more crucial to Britain’s position as an international power.\textsuperscript{51}

The constructed geography of the 1924 Empire Exhibition embodied the inter-war changes within the Empire, and administrators attempted to manage new hierarchies in order to obfuscate signs of imperial economic or political disintegration. The 1919 Government of India Act promised eventual Dominion status through gradual devolution.\textsuperscript{52} The Empire Exhibition affirmed India’s nascent path towards Dominionhood through the spatial closeness of India’s Pavilion to the Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand Pavilions and the incorporation of elite Indians into

\textsuperscript{49} In Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 6, Patricia A. Morton explains that “The key to maintaining colonial power was absolute visibility of its hierarchies.”

\textsuperscript{50} For a discussion of Britain’s relationship with the Dominions in the post-war period, see Dane Kennedy, Britain and Empire: 1880-1945 (London: Pearson Education, 2002), 67-70.

exhibitionary administration. While this linkage reinforced India’s heightened political and economic autonomy by the inter-war period, the Exhibition retained markers of colonial hierarchy that qualified India’s more “modern” colonial rank.

These qualifications drew upon previous methods for representing Indian difference from British “modernity” at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition and the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition. The architecture and spatial position of colonial buildings demonstrated the supposed pre-modernity of colonies and their subservient political relationship with the metropole. At the exhibitions, India’s spatial association with local village and bazaar life identified India as a pre-modern and pre-industrial colony. All three exhibitions linked contemporary India with the “traditional” conditions of colonial villages and bazaars. The 1908 Franco-British Exhibition in particular positioned the Indian Pavilion close to other simulated villages, agricultural scenes, and colonial dependencies in order to signal India’s pre-modernity. From the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition to the 1924 Empire Exhibition, the Indian Pavilion divided the provincial and stately sections from “official” sections. The province and state sections primarily depicted colonial India through ethnographic models of bazaars and villages with agricultural and handmade products. The spaces of the Raj government contrasted with these displays of Indian difference, exhibiting Britain’s implementation of social, political, and economic modernity in India.

The architectural representation of each colony in its past temporality contrasted with the modern environment of the metropole and validated British rule. The exhibitions represented contemporary India through the 17th century princely architecture.

---

of India’s Mughal era. In the imperial narrative of Indian history, the Mughal Empire of pre-British rule embodied political despotism and social stagnation. Because the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition was confined to the South Kensington Museum, a simulated Durbar Hall and Indian Palace displayed India’s princely past. The Mughal architecture of the Indian pavilions at the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition and the 1924 British Empire Exhibition were versions of princely buildings in India. The princely architecture of Indian buildings at the 1908 Franco-British and 1924 Empire Exhibitions denoted India’s continued ties to a “feudal” past, in contrast to the modernity of the Dominion colonies and imperial Britain.

*Imperial Spectacle and Tourism*

The 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition established hierarchical images of India in the metropole and their relation to virtual travel. The 1908 Franco-British Exhibition and the 1924 British Empire Exhibition expanded the layout of exhibitions over time, increasingly aligning colonial exhibits with spectacle and tourism. The abundant and manipulable space of Wembley and Shepherd’s Bush enabled the representation of different colonies in different buildings. Elaborate schemes fashioned the 1908 and 1924 Exhibitions into simulated tours of the Empire, wherein each colonial building served as a portal into a different geography and historical era.
British administrators and financiers urbanized and imperialized the London districts of Shepherd’s Bush and Wembley in order to construct the 1908 and 1924 Exhibitions as microcosms of the Empire.\footnote{For this narrative of Indian history, see the intellectual supplement to the 1924 Empire Exhibition: Rt. Hon. Lord Meston, \textit{The Dominions and Dependencies of the Empire}, vol. 5, in \textit{The British Empire: A Survey}, ed. Hugh Gunn (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1924), 175-177.} The development of Shepherd’s Bush into the “White City” of west London in 1908, with white buildings that resembled an “Oriental fantasy,” implemented more elements of spectacle into London.\footnote{A \textit{Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to London and the British Empire Exhibition, 1924}, 45\textsuperscript{th} ed. revised (London: Ward, Lock and Company, 1924), E.} The \textit{Times} advertised the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition as “a veritable City of Pleasure” that would serve as “the most popular and delightful Pleasure Resort in the United Kingdom.”\footnote{Guy Mauve, “Architecture,” in \textit{The Franco-British Exhibition, Illustrated Review}, ed. F.G. Dumas (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), 10.} While the 1922 National Colonial Exposition in France built upon the idea of Marseilles as an established city of the Empire, the 1924 Empire Exhibition completely rebuilt the London suburb of Wembley into an imperial city.\footnote{“The Franco-British Exhibition, Shepherd’s Bush, London, W. To be Opened on May 14\textsuperscript{th} by T.R.H. The Prince and Princess of Wales,” \textit{Times} (London), 8 May 1908, p. 20.} The Chicago \textit{Dial} described this former “rural outskirt of London” as a city in itself, transforming the center of London into “a suburb of Wembley.”\footnote{Yael Simpson Fletcher, “Capital of the Colonies: Real and Imagined Boundaries Between Metropole and Empire in 1920s Marseilles” in \textit{Imperial Cities}, eds. Felix Driver and David Gilbert (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 136-137. In her case study of the city of Marseilles at the 1922 National Colonial Exposition, Yael Fletcher analyzes the urban space of the Exhibition. She views the 1922 Exhibition through its promotion of Marseilles as a “metropolitan port city in the empire,” and thus how this imperial city constructed an illusion of travel to the colonies.} Exhibitions extended and enhanced London’s urban, imperial character, and this fostered travel to London. Visitors primarily viewed the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition through its appeal to the spectacular, and this appeal promoted London as a tourist site: \begin{quotation}Exhibitions extended and enhanced London’s urban, imperial character, and this fostered travel to London. Visitors primarily viewed the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition through its appeal to the spectacular, and this appeal promoted London as a tourist site: \end{quotation}
We are fully awake to the fact that London, like Paris, is a city of tourists and entertainment, and even if exhibitions are no better peacemakers than athletic sports, even though the *entente* be no more *cordiale* next year than last, the White City will remain, with its exotic villages, its restaurants, and its gardens, to prove, what should long ago have been evident, that England, no less than other countries, understands the pleasures of gaiety.\(^59\)

The 1908 *Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to London and the Franco-British Exhibition* discussed the Franco-British Exhibition as a tourist site as well as the tourist attractions of London in general, offering a guidebook section on the Exhibition, a “city in itself,” and a second guidebook section on London.\(^60\) As with the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition, the 1924 *Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to London and the British Empire Exhibition* offered a two-section guide to both the Exhibition and to London. North Americans rarely frequented the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, yet several American journal articles pointed to the 1924 Empire Exhibition at Wembley as a tourist attraction for Americans.\(^61\)

This symbiotic relationship of imperial travel and spectacle emerged in late nineteenth century exhibitions. Colonial sections both substituted for and encouraged actual travel to colonial territories. The London *Times* closely followed the proceedings and displays of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, and continuously advertised the Exhibition as a tour through the subcontinent, declaring that “the principal entrance in


\(^{60}\) *A Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to London and the Franco-British Exhibition, 1908* (London: Ward Lock and Co., 1908), E.

Exhibition-road lands us at once in India.\textsuperscript{62} The \textit{Illustrated Review} of the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition viewed the Indian Pavilion as “a hundred guinea Eastern ‘Cook’s trip’ and more, this tour of an hour or so round the Indian Pavilion.”\textsuperscript{63} Paul Lafage offered a section in the \textit{Illustrated Review} of “the French Colonies,” and viewed the promotion of actual travel abroad as the main object of French colonial exhibits. French colonies constituted “agreeable places to stay at during the cold season,” and this made certain possessions interested “in making themselves known to such great travelers as the Anglo-Saxons.”\textsuperscript{64}

At the same time that exhibitions presented picturesque “tours” of India and other British colonies, European travel to the Indian subcontinent became both feasible and popular under the travel firm Thomas Cook & Son. Thomas Cook first visited India during his “Round the World” tour in 1872-3 to familiarize himself with the subcontinent and to promote subsequent tours to India. He chronicled his travels in published letters to the \textit{Times}.\textsuperscript{65} In 1880, Thomas Cook & Son joined with the British government to develop tours through India. The following year, John Mason Cook, Thomas Cook’s son, established an office in Bombay and published his program, \textit{Cook’s Indian Tours}.\textsuperscript{66} Thomas Cook & Son continued to work with the government and managed the movement of such diverse groups as Indian princes and British workers to the 1886


\textsuperscript{63} Herbert Shaw, “The Indian Pavilion,” in \textit{The Franco-British Exhibition, Illustrated Review}, 266.


\textsuperscript{65} Thomas Cook, \textit{Letters from the Sea and from Foreign Lands: Descriptive of a Tour Around the World} (London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1873), 35.

Colonial and Indian Exhibition. The development of Thomas Cook’s tourist industry thus represented the joining of capitalistic tourism, the nationalistic aims of the imperial government, and the proliferation of Indian images within the metropole.

Thomas Cook & Son also established tours around the world by the early twentieth century. Thomas Cook’s “Around the World” tours advertised a cruise in 1926 that began in New York and visited Egypt, India, China, and Japan. The *Official Guide* to the 1924 Empire Exhibition stressed this linkage between travels in the Empire and the Exhibition. It declared that “in the old days, the Grand Tour was the prize of the fortunate few,” however “to-day the Grand Tour is within the reach of all; and the actual cost of it is just eighteenpence!” The 1924 Exhibition substituted for and democratized such Grand Tours to various colonies. Thomas Cook and Son established two offices at separate entrances to the Exhibition, provided “a staff of interpreters and guides to take visitors around the Exhibition,” and offered “‘Conducted Tours’ of the Empire” during the day.

The 1924 Empire Exhibition created a more elaborate “tour” of the Empire than previous exhibitions. Several restaurants in colonial pavilions served the “national dishes” of New Zealand, Australia, and India. The *Times* advertised that “visitors to Wembley may lunch in South Africa, take tea in India, and dine in New Zealand, Australia, or Canada.” Boats plying the artificial lakes at the center of the Exhibition conveyed visitors across simulated oceans to view the principal colonies. Ex-petty officers of the Royal navy manned the electrically-driven boats, on which “visitors

---

[could] travel from India to New Zealand, the entire length of the lake, or around the Empire, visiting in turn India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and returning again around the islands to India.”  

An article in *L'Illustration*, reprinted in America’s *Living Age*, noted that the pavilions “of Canada, of Australia, and of India are regular exhibitions in themselves, worlds within a world.”

The simulated tours of the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition and 1924 Empire Exhibition evinced the power dynamics of the Empire, demarcating the temporal and spatial distance of the colonies from the industry and modernity of Britain. Exhibits fashioned the illusion that visitors could enter the “frozen times” of African and Asian colonies within the modern, urban environment of London. This spatial mapping of temporal progress displayed colonial time as archaic and European time as part of the “new” industrial modernity, signaling the evolutionary backwardness, and thus the racial difference, of colonized peoples.

**Architecture and Organization**

The 1908 Franco-British Exhibition and 1924 Empire Exhibition represented differentiations in the political statures of colonial buildings through their temporal distance from British modernity. The created landscapes of exhibitions contrasted the non-exhibitionary spaces of London and exhibitionary spaces dedicated to imperial...
Britain against exhibits of colonial India. India’s central spatial position and elaborate architecture in late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century exhibitions manifested its importance to the legitimation of Empire. Indian sections formed the entrance to the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition and were at the center of colonial sections at the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition and the 1924 Empire Exhibition. By the 1924 Empire Exhibition, India’s spatial closeness to the Dominion colonies denoted India’s heightened political autonomy, but within the context of India’s continued subordinate status to the white settlement colonies and imperial Britain.

The architecture of the Indian buildings at the 1908 Franco-British and 1924 Empire Exhibitions represented India within a 17th century princely past belonging to the Mughal Empire. In 1908, the Indian Pavilion combined former Mughal styles with English styles (see Figure 1.1 below). This architectural approach created a hybrid of British and Indian cultures, evincing their shared commitment to the Empire and its hierarchies. 

Visitors to the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition viewed at once the colonial Indian architecture of the Court of Honour and the modernity of British and French buildings. The combined Mughal and Dravidian Hindu architecture of the Court of Honour, the main entrance to the Exhibition at Wood Lane, contrasted with the British and French Palaces of Industry. These buildings flanked the Court of Honour and sought to distinguish colonial India from imperial and industrial European governments. The art nouveau architecture of French buildings and the classicism of the British buildings

75 Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context (New York: Routledge, 1995), 36-40.
represented forms of European architecture. The *Times* favored colonial architecture over that of the British and French buildings because of its exotic contrasts with the modern world: “By far the most pleasing and harmonious structures are the Court of Honour, which is Indian, the pavilion of India, which is Mahomedan in style, that of Ceylon, and those of the French colonial possessions. Beside them the modern buildings, whether plain or fanciful, look meaningless.” Colonial Pavilions of early twentieth-century exhibitions represented the architecture of their respective countries, but visitors recognized them as exotic versions, removing them from the modern, contemporary environment.

At the 1924 Empire Exhibition, the adjacent Burmese and Indian buildings emphasized Burma’s temporal and spatial distance from England in its teak wood construction and India’s distance in its seventeenth-century Mughal architecture. One visitor observed that “the architecture of the Burmese Pavilion has been designed to reproduce faithfully the Burmese architecture of about two hundred years ago.” The Indian Pavilion, to the east of the central artificial lakes at the Empire Exhibition, became a prominent feature of the Exhibition as an “authentic” gateway to a past history (see Figure 1.2 below). The Indian Pavilion reconstructed the architecture of past Mughal princely buildings in order to represent “to those familiar with India … the outlines of the wonderful Taj Mahal at Agra and of the Jama Masjid at Delhi.” A *Times* observer at the Indian Pavilion remarked that “we forgot London and the Western world. Time

---

rolled back to the splendours of Shah Jehan,” the Mughal ruler who constructed the Taj Mahal and the Delhi mosque, Jama Masjid.\textsuperscript{81} As the architectural manifestations of their political power, princely palaces and places of worship were exotic points of interest to Britons who traveled to India.\textsuperscript{82} Once in Delhi, a foreign visitor could contrast “the shrill voices of the meuzzin calling to prayers from the minarets of the Jumma Musjid” against the modern elements brought to India by the British, such as “the locomotive that brings the English to that new capital of India.”\textsuperscript{83} Indian princes, and their depiction at exhibits, thus represented an upper-class antiquity, separate from the “native” India of villages and bazaars, but also historically unchanging. Visitors to the 1924 Empire Exhibition often viewed the Indian Pavilion through this unchanging image, distant from the present and political sovereignties of Britain and the Dominion states.

\textsuperscript{81} “India at Wembley. Splendour of the East. A Bazaar in Being,” Times, 24 May 1924, p. xii.
\textsuperscript{83} Frank Carpenter, From Bangkok to Bombay (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1924), 2.

Figure 1.2. Photograph of the Indian Building at the 1924 Empire Exhibition. Lawrence, *The British Empire Exhibition, 1924: Official Guide*, 3.
Exhibitions spatially, as well as architecturally, mapped the political hierarchies of empire, separating the “modern” sections from the past temporalities of colonial sections. Both the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition and 1924 Empire Exhibition linked Indian sections to a past time in their spatial closeness to depictions of “Old London” rather than to contemporary Britain (Figures 1.3 and 1.4). The 1886 Durbar Hall and Indian Palace led to “Old London,” which “represented European life in feudal times” just as “the palace courtyard . . . equally represent[ed] feudal India at the present day.” Although “Old London” reconstructed a past history of Britain, princely exhibits tied contemporary India to a feudal age. The 1924 Empire Exhibition offered a separate Burmese pavilion, unlike previous exhibitions that incorporated a Burma section within Indian pavilions. This acknowledged the rising political status of Burma, but positioned its building near the Indian building and the Old London Bridge. Burmese nationalists engaged in protests for self-government based on their claims that “Burma is really not a part of India at all.” After viewing the India and Burma pavilions respectively at the 1924 Exhibition, visitors crossed “the Old London Bridge and visit[ed] the British Government’s Pavilion.” As such, visitors experienced the historical eras and distant spaces of colonial dependencies within London’s exhibitionary space before re-entering the modern civilization of Britain as represented by the British Government Pavilion.

---

84 “The Indian Exhibition in London,” The Art Amateur 14, no. 2 (January, 1886): 43. Frank Cundall also referred to the Indian Palace as “a typical Royal Residence in feudal India” in Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 27.
85 In From Bangkok to Bombay, 53-54, American travel writer Frank Carpenter noted that in Burma “the unrest that characterizes the whole Empire of India has gone far in Burma.”
exhibits of the Department of Overseas Trade and other Government offices, signaled the industrial, commercial, and political modernity of the imperial metropole.  


---

87 Ibid., 45.
The spatial layout of the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition also juxtaposed the imperial nationhoods of France and Britain against the colonial status of India. The Exhibition linked the colonies to agriculture and rurality, and the French and British buildings to modern arts and industries. The opposing end of the 1908 Court of Honour entrance, in “the ‘hinterland’ of the Exhibition,” included an amusement area, the Colonial exhibits and their “native villages,” and sections devoted to agriculture. The Exhibition first displayed French and British buildings at its primary entrance, then the amusement sections, and then the crescent devoted to the French and British colonies at

---

the alternate end. The French Colonial section covered 100,000 square feet, with ten separate buildings, including those devoted to Algeria, Tunisia, West Africa, Indo-China, Souks Algro-Tunisiens, Palace des Colonies (with exhibits of the Colonial Ministry, Madagascar, and the Colonial press), a transportable colonial house, and a tasting depot for colonial produce.90

Indian displays were at the center of the French and British colonial sections, but remained on the opposite side of French and British exhibits near the pre-industrial scenes of villages and pre-modern areas of colonial dependencies. Indian sections included the Indian Pavilion, but also rural and princely features such as an Indian Village, Indian Tea House, and Indian Durbar. These Indian sections had “naturally been given a commanding position in the centre of the crescent devoted to the Colonial possessions of France and England.”91 This exhibitionary scheme positioned Indian sections near the Ceylon and Irish village sections, the French colonial section, and “horticulture” agricultural sections (see Figure 1.5 below). The Irish village section contained the handmade crafts of a “traditional” Ireland, while the Ceylon section included this economic “tradition” alongside displays of colonial ethnography.

These visions of India’s enduring princely and landed “tradition” obfuscated India’s political growth, as exemplified by its central position and spatial closeness to Canada and Australia in early twentieth-century exhibitions. The 1908 Franco-British Exhibition and 1924 Empire Exhibition distanced the British Dominion colonies from the agricultural, “native” villages and colonial dependency sections. At the Franco-British Exhibition, several visitors identified Canada, Australia, and India as Britain’s principal colonies and Algeria, Tunis, and Indo-China as France’s principal colonies.92 The colonial buildings of the Exhibition, however, allied India with Asian dependencies, and contrasted British Dominions with French African colonies. As one journalist put it: “French Indo-China has points in common with British India and Ceylon, but the contrast between Algiers and Tunis on the one hand and Australia and Canada on the other is very striking and suggestive.”93 Another observer, as well, noted the distinction between the “young nations” of Canada and Australia, and the “Oriental Dominions” of Britain and the African colonies of France.94

At the 1924 Empire Exhibition, India’s position near the Dominion colonies reified its increasing autonomy within the Empire, but also the longevity of India’s path towards Dominionhood. The Empire Exhibition concentrated the buildings of India, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada around the central artificial lakes, combining India with the Dominion colonies as different but integral members of the Empire. Surrounding the artificial lakes, Canada and Australia resided on the north side, with India to the east and New Zealand to the west (see Figure 1.3 above). The princely architecture of the Indian building distinguished India from the “modern” political status

of the Dominion colonies and the British Government building. The “austere structure” of the neoclassical Canadian building, located on “Dominion Way,” and Australia’s pavilion, located on “Commonwealth Way,” contrasted with the seventeenth-century Mughal architecture of the Indian building. Ludovic Naudeau, a visitor primarily concerned with the authenticity of the 1924 Empire Exhibition and the correspondent for *L’Illustration* in London, often compared British colonial buildings to those of France’s 1922 Colonial Exposition at Marseilles. He noted that India’s structure presented an admirable copy of a colony “under the sky of Asia,” rivaling that of Indochina at Marseilles. Naudeau therefore associated the Indian pavilion with French colonies, rather than white settlement or dominion colonies.

*Indian Administration in the Exhibitions*

The spatial layout and architecture of pre-war exhibitions aligned India with the villages and bazaar markets of a pre-industrial history and the princely past of the Mughal Empire, but by the inter-war period brought India closer to the political status of the Dominions. Similarly, princely exhibits, renditions of local villages and bazaars, and ethnographic displays of lower-class “natives” represented colonial hierarchies within the Indian buildings. Within these state and provincial sections of Indian Pavilions, exhibits appropriated Indian “natives” for display, but increasingly affirmed the political and economic status of elite Indians who helped construct and administer the exhibitions.

---

The administration of British officials over the exhibitions and their colonial sections demonstrated British imperial power and reproduced imperial hierarchies. At the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition and the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition, the India Office in London organized the Indian sections. British administrators oversaw the 1886 Colonial and Indian exhibits under the auspices of the India Office in London and the Government of India. Sir Edward C. Buck was Commissioner for India and Philip Cunliffe-Owen made arrangements for the Indian section with the assistance of J.R. Royle. Upper-class Indians, such as T.N. Mukharji, advised on the construction of the Exhibition but Britons had retained central control. The Government in India, funded by the India Office in London, organized the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition after its decision to participate. The Government of India at first did not declare India’s official participation and this delayed the opening of the Indian Palace until May 27th. Because of this, “the Indian exhibitions [fell] far behind those of Australia or Canada in extent and variety,” comprising 20,000 square feet. Under a grant of 10,000 pounds from Indian revenue, nevertheless, a small English committee, consisting of Sir William Lee-Warner, the chairman, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir David Barr, and Sir Edward Law, controlled the Indian sections.

The administration of Indian exhibits at the 1924 Empire Exhibition represented the broader changes in the Raj government. Middle-class Indians administered the provincial and state courts of the 1924 Empire Exhibition, and this affirmed the political transformations of British India in the post-war period and the Raj’s elevation of Indian

---

97 Cundall, Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 20.
98 Shaw, “The Indian Pavilion,” in Illustrated Review, 266.
100 “India and the Franco-British Exhibition,” Times, 4 Dec 1907, p. 16.
autonomy. The Government of India and the Provincial Governments within India, headed
by the Indian Legislative Assembly, organized the Indian section at the 1924 Empire
Exhibition as a result of India’s heightened political status after the First World
War. According to Austin Kendall of the Royal Society in London, “this shall be
India’s Exhibition, organized and prepared in India, and not from a head-quarters in
England.” Each province built, funded, and filled its court. The reformed constitution
of India (1919) gave Indian provinces a larger measure of independence. The
comprador class of high-caste Indians became even more significant in the inter-war
period as collaborators with the Raj government. Constitutional reforms benefited these
elites by giving them a voice in some fiscal and legislative policies. Inter-war changes
opened up Indian participation in provincial, but not central, administrations. Just as
the 1919 reforms continued to exclude Indian politicians from influential departments of
the government and subjected them to governors’ vetoes, the separate courts of the Indian
states and the provincial courts remained subject to the overall administration of British
officials and comprador Indian elites.

101 Diwan Bahadur T. Vijayaraghavacharya, “India and the British Empire Exhibition,” Asiatic
Review 19, no. 57 (Jan., 1923): 144.
102 Kendall, “India’s Part in the British Empire Exhibition,” 213.
103 Austin Kendall, “The Participation of India and Burma in the British Empire Exhibition, 1924,”
104 Judith Brown, “India,” in The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Twentieth Century,
425-426.
105 Philippa Levine, The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset (Harlow: Pearson Educated Limited,
2007), 162.
Indian Sections at the Exhibitions

The oversight of elite Indian officials over the exhibits of Indian provinces at the 1924 Empire Exhibition demonstrated the restricted political devolution in the Raj and the acceptance of educated Indians as legitimate spokesmen for a modernizing India. These provincial displays and those of India’s semi-independent states, however, often resorted to familiar ethnographic and economic depictions of lower-class Indians that affirmed colonial hierarchies. They offered model villages and bazaars that encompassed agricultural and handmade products, indicating India’s rural and pre-industrial market and also incorporating racialized ethnography. The provincial and state sections, divided from the “official” exhibits of the Raj and British industries, denoted India’s “difference” from modern Britain. Demonstrations of India’s advancements towards modernity, notably in trade and increased political autonomy, co-existed at the 1924 Empire Exhibition with the familiar exhibits of India as a pre-modern colony dominated by British political and economic interests.

The separation of Indian arts, industries, and ethnography into the spaces of provincial, state, and official courts in the exhibitions divided rather than integrated the colony and metropole. The 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition had three main sections devoted to British India: the Artware Courts, the Imperial Economic Courts, and the Administrative Courts. The Imperial Economic Court displayed models of “natives” in their villages and bazaars. The Indian Palace (Figure 1.6 below) extended into a forecourt, within which forty artisans, or “native workmen,” demonstrated their handmade crafts in palace workshops, which many visitors considered as “still common in
many Indian Palaces.”  

The Artware Courts were dedicated to handmade crafts and arts and the Economic Courts displayed objects and samples of agricultural products alongside full-size figures of “natives” in model villages. The Administrative Courts, demonstrating the larger projects of the government, focused on economic and political progress in India. The Eastern Arcade of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, which presented “official” aspects of the Indian Empire, portrayed the modern advancements brought to India through British intervention. Its courts included displays from the Departments of Revenue and Agriculture, Finance and Commerce, Legislature, Military, and Public Works. Administrative sections, separate from India’s provincial and state courts, led to the Indian Palace and its forecourt.

![Figure 1.6. 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, Indian Palace.](image)

---

The 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition almost exclusively depicted localized displays of agricultural and rural societies as demonstrations of India’s colonial identity. Early twentieth-century exhibitions continued to center Indian “industries” around simulated bazaars and villages. Village renditions reached their peak at the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition, which dedicated an entire section depicting an “Indian Village.” At the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition, the Indian building’s six compartments centered on “the relative importance and value of Indian industries and Indian applied arts” and included private exhibits, displays of larger Indian cities, and collections of the native states. The “industries” displayed were agricultural, such as tea planting, jute growing, and cotton cultivation.

Like the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, the 1924 Empire Exhibition separated the central, provincial, and state courts in the Indian Pavilion. The Central Hall, devoted to the central Government of India, contained exhibits of political, social, and commercial development. The central courts included displays of forestry and timber, railways, geological surveys, the army, co-operation and education, commercial intelligence, cotton, and tea. The Education department, the Empire Cotton Growers Association, the Forest Department, and the Indian Tea Association headed their respective sections.

In contrast, the 1924 Empire Exhibition located the agriculture and handicrafts of Indian locales and semi-independent territories in provincial and state courts, alongside a

---

113 Kendall, “India’s Part in the British Empire Exhibition,” 214-6.
limited display of Indian industrialization. Each locale exhibited its principal arts and crafts and “cottage industries,” as well as its unchanging ethnographic features through reconstructed bazaars, models of village communities, and exotic performances. In the bazaars, Indians demonstrated their crafts and visitors bought local Indian products. The South India Madras Court included renditions of Indian snake juggling and dancing. Aside from these familiar depictions of India, individual stallholders displayed manufactured goods, such as the textiles traded in Bombay’s international harbors, which Kendall described as “what visitors may not be expecting to find.” The Exhibition also spatially separated Indian art, with India’s “modern” art developed during British colonial rule in the Imperial Fine Art Gallery, alongside the art of Canada and Australia and next to the Palace of Industry. The Indian Pavilion, however, contained India’s “retrospective” art, signaling India’s link to a past history. The Bombay Court, for instance, displayed murals of “early Buddhist art.”

The division of “pre-modern” provincial and state sections from official sections mapped colonial hierarchies within the Indian Pavilions of the exhibitions. The architectural styles of the Indian Pavilions linked India to a princely past and distanced colonial India from the more modern buildings of Britain and the Dominion states. The spatial landscape of the exhibitions identified the political status of each colony, associating India with a village and bazaar pre-industry but also with the Dominion colonies and industrial progress by the 1924 Empire Exhibition. The Empire Exhibition thus demonstrated that familiar exhibits of colonial economies and cultures had to be reconfigured in the post-war period of economic recovery and nationalist demands for

---

114 Vijayaraghavacharya, “India and the British Empire Exhibition,” 144.
115 Kendall, “India’s Part in the British Empire Exhibition,” 217.
self-government. The *Outlook* recognized the exhibitionary goals of promoting the economic and political integration of empire at a time when in “at least two Dominions separate nationalism is a live issue, and when in other parts of the Empire the heady wine of self-determination has gone to the heads of the natives.”

The 1924 Empire Exhibition could no longer purport to represent India authentically without incorporating its industrial development and political devolution. Displays of India affirmed its political advancements and industrial growth, albeit within the context of a visible, integrated colonial hierarchy.

---

117 Scarborough, “An Empire in Miniature. Special Correspondence from Harold E. Scarborough,” 280.
CHAPTER THREE: ARTISANAL BAZAARS AND PEASANT VILLAGES

The public display of India’s political and industrial advancements alongside its ostensibly pre-modern markets and village societies emerged as a visible tension in the economic renditions of the 1924 Empire Exhibition. India’s “primitive” economic conditions—depicted through simulated bazaars, model village societies, and handicrafts and agricultural products at the exhibitions—legitimized British rule there and obfuscated its economic exploitations. As evidence of Indian economic success, industrialization, and political resistance to Britain’s “totalizing” rule became increasingly visible to the inter-war Raj, imperial displays failed to preserve the concept of an unchanging Indian economy. The 1924 Empire Exhibition displayed Indian industry, merchant entrepreneurship, and expanding markets as well as the familiar exhibits of India’s pre-industrial economy. The objects of India’s provinces and states included industrial products and models of urbanization schemes. The commercially-focused reconstructions of bazaars, run by Indian merchants, focused less on fixed local markets and more on securing India’s international trade relationships. The 1924 Empire Exhibition, in a sense, demonstrated India’s entry into modernity. Its bazaars illustrated India’s changing economy, but paradoxically appealed to the metropolitan preference for “traditional” Indian wares and ethnographic displays of “native” artisans in order to sell Indian products. The 1924 Empire Exhibition thus continued to reconstruct the pre-modern scenery of bazaars and villages even as it projected a “modernizing” Indian economy.
Depictions of artisanal bazaar markets and peasant village communities predominantly represented India’s identity from the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition through the 1924 Empire Exhibition. The “realism” of the exhibitions’ colonial bazaars and villages elided imperial interventions in India’s economy by presenting their pre-industry as an authentic representation of Indian “difference.” They thus repressed Indian narratives and selectively infused India’s socio-economic scenes with ideological meanings.\textsuperscript{118} The “tradition” of India’s connection to the land and exporting of raw materials, as depicted through model Indian bazaars and villages in pre-war exhibitions and alongside “modern” Indian exhibits by the inter-war period, materialized the British narrative of Indian history. According to this narrative, India’s economic system stagnated with the decline of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century Mughal Empire and thereafter remained pre-industrial. Simulated bazaars elaborated the narrative of India’s pre-industrial economy. Representations of villages characterized colonial India as rural rather than urban, agricultural rather than industrial, and local rather than national. These simplified dichotomies constructed under British rule affirmed Indian landed “difference,” rather than industrial similarity with the British, and thus their hierarchical incorporation into the Empire rather than their assimilation.

The exhibitionary display of India’s landed economy, though depicting a pre-industrial India, represented Britain’s implementation of commercial agriculture in India and discouragement of indigenous industrialization. The colonial presence in India actually entrenched and consolidated India’s “pre-industrial” economy. India’s relative lack of “modern” economic development throughout the nineteenth century largely

resulted from the shifting of India’s economy towards British industrial and commercial interests. Until the 1920s, Britain’s favorable balance of trade with India counteracted its trading deficit with other countries, and relied upon India’s importing of British manufacture and exporting of raw materials.\textsuperscript{119} India exported cotton, indigo, jute, rice, and tea, and imported British industrial goods, such as textiles, iron and steel goods, and machinery. To varying degrees, the artisanal culture and village handcrafts of India could not compete with imported British manufactured goods, especially textiles, and thus were stifled by India’s connection to the world market.\textsuperscript{120} This contributed to the decline of India’s artisanal production and village crafts. The strategic and selective process of imperial displays, nevertheless, depicted India’s “traditional” market through “living displays” of Indian artisans who produced their handmade products within village bazaars.

\textit{The Colonial Space of Bazaars and Villages in India}

Exhibitions represented Indian “difference” by distinguishing the urban, industrial metropole from the rural, agricultural colony. The travel accounts of Europeans in India from the late-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century also demonstrated what Paul Greenhalgh calls the “core-periphery phenomenon” of imperial exhibitions, which juxtaposed the “rurality, backwardness and nature” of colonized areas against the “city, industry and culture” of colonizing countries.\textsuperscript{121} Travelers observed and preferred a stringent differentiation between the “native quarters” of India and modern European


\textsuperscript{120} Metcalf and Metcalf, \textit{A Concise History of India}, 75-76; Sumit Sarkar, \textit{Modern India}, 28.
districts there, viewing the former sectors through India’s perpetual princely past, degenerate village communities, and endless bazaar markets. As one early twentieth-century traveler put it, the spatial mapping of Indian difference represented India as part of “the Unchanging East,” a phrase “given by the Western world to the Eastern lands.”

The imagining of Indian locales predominantly within the persistence of India’s pre-industrial, princely history represented India’s inherent stagnation. In the late nineteenth century, Henry Lucy, a prominent British journalist, compared Bombay’s urban development upon his arrival with the degradation of the “native streets” of the city. He asserted a “full contrast of a modern and magnificent European quarter with the narrow alleys flanked by lofty buildings in which the natives live. Here one may stroll for hours as far remote from a sign of Western life as if India were still under her native princes or her Mogul conquerors.” While visiting Benares, Lucy explained that, “Benares preserves its old-time aspect, and is … much as it was when Akbar reigned.” Lucy’s account associated each “native” locale of India, spatially separate from European modernity, with India’s princely-led past.

Non-colonial travelers also viewed the “native” spaces of Indian cities through the unchanging social conditions of “traditional” village bazaars. The mixing of residential (village) and commercial (bazaar) areas distinguished “native” sectors and their marks of urban degradation from “European” sectors in India. Late nineteenth-century travelers perceived that the daily life of Indian societies blurred the Victorian bourgeois boundaries

---

124 Lucy, *East by West,* 203.
of private and public and reinforced imperial discourses about the degradation of Indian
women. According to Henry Lucy, Rajput women “sit on the pavement, weaving
cloth with a simple wheel and a little basket aglow.” In Benares, as well, “business is
carried on by the customer standing outside in the street.” W.S. Caine, a temperance
advocate and Liberal Member of Parliament, viewed these pre-industrial Indian trades as
“vested in guilds, composed of all the freemen of the trade caste,” and governed by
hereditary chiefs. Travelers in India therefore homogenized bazaar scenes across the
subcontinent and presented them as indicators of Indian difference from British social
and cultural conditions.

Colonial cities had long segregated the “native” and “European” residential areas. This spatial and material reconstruction of Indian difference and lack of assimilation
continued into the twentieth century. While in Calcutta, the “city of contrasts,” French
colonial traveler Eugène Brieux noted the growing industry but also distinguished English
sections from the “native” sectors. In Delhi, early twentieth-century urban
development mirrored the general inequalities of the Raj, distinguishing “Old Delhi,”
previous to British rule, from New Delhi. The latter had markers of urban renewal, such
as wide streets and divisions between commercial and residential areas. As travel
writer Frank Carpenter remarked, although British officials in Delhi began reconstructing

---

127 Lucy, *East by West*, 311.
128 Ibid., 215-6.
the city as the new capital of the Raj, in the meantime, “life in the native quarters is that of centuries past.”132 Travelers in India asserted that the “proper” political hierarchies of empire separated the “native” spaces of pre-modernity from imperial spaces of modernity.

The “Tradition” of Indian Artisans and Peasants

From the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition to the 1924 Empire Exhibition, travelers in India, as well as visitors to the exhibitions, associated the “native” spaces of bazaars and villages with India’s unchanging social and economic conditions. The 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition’s model artisanal and agricultural bazaars, depicted within village and princely settings, represented Indian “difference” by linking India to a Mughal past and landed economy. It added models of agricultural bazaars and model village societies in the Economic Court and featured an artisanal bazaar in the Indian palace (see Figure 2.1). The section devoted to private exhibits, called the North Court, simulated a bazaar in that Indian objects were sold there, but without the ethnographic focus of the Economic Court and Indian Palace.133 The bamboo “native shops” of the Economic Court, divided into booths and depicting an agricultural bazaar, were “similar to those found in the average Indian village.”134 Life-sized models depicted local sellers of agricultural products within these scenes, including a grain merchant, fruit seller, dried fruits and nuts dealer, and spice seller and druggist (see Figure 2.2).135 In his official

---

132 Frank Carpenter, *From Bangkok to Bombay* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1924), 214.
account of the 1886 Exhibition, J.R. Royle explained that the idea of interweaving ethnological and agricultural displays enhanced the “attractiveness of the Economic Court.”

Figure 2.1. Woodcarvers and Gold Brocade Weavers (Courtyard of Indian Palace) at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition. *The Illustrated London News* (17 July 1886): 81.

Figure 2.2. Model of Native Fruit Shop, 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition. *The Illustrated London News* (17 July 1886).

Non-colonial observers of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition characterized these agricultural and artisanal images as part of India’s inherent tradition. The display of bazaar artisans and village peasants aligned contemporary India with the purportedly

---

landed and pre-industrial conditions of the Mughal Empire, such as the guild and caste systems of domestic and agricultural markets. The 1886 Indian palace forecourt, where “natives pl[ied] their trades,” represented contemporary India as if in a feudal state. The artisanal bazaar of the Indian palace contained booths that held forty workmen, including weavers of carpets and tapestries, a goldsmith, stone carvers, a potter, and wood carvers (Figure 2.1).\textsuperscript{137} It gave the “British public an idea of the manner in which the native artisans performed their daily work in India in former times as dependents of the various princes and minor chieftains.”\textsuperscript{138}

Imperial re-creations of domestic Indian markets—depicted through simulated villages, bazaars, and palaces—did not always denigrate the differences of Indian “tradition.” Visitors to British exhibitions perceived the displays of Indian crafts and architecture, untouched by British intervention, as picturesque features of India’s admirable sights and scenes. Thomas Cook’s 1926 tour in India, for example, included “the narrow streets lined with the bazaars of the silversmiths and embroiderers, famous for the excellence of their workmanship.”\textsuperscript{139} These formed what Nicholas Thomas calls “the elision rather than denigration” of the complexity of Indian society and its economy.\textsuperscript{140}

The simplification of Indian conditions into a series of artisanal markets and village societies in the exhibitions also conveyed positive connotations of Indian “difference.” The village bazaars of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, though


\textsuperscript{139} Thomas Cook Ltd., \textit{Around the World: A Cruise} (New York: Thomas Cook Ltd., 1925), 38 and 41.

often relegated to a pre-modern temporality, separated Indian artisans and peasants from the anxieties and disillusionments associated with British industrialization. Scholars have argued, for example, that the increased and concentrated population within industrial areas, as well as the intensification of economic exploitation across various industries, deteriorated the living and working circumstances of laborers in England. Industrial capitalism also led to the “casual” employment or un-employment of skilled artisans and field laborers. In her analysis of the contradictory images of nineteenth-century peasants in France, Shanny Peer describes that “one set of negative images portrayed peasants as the uncivilized counter-model for the bourgeoisie, another positive set of images praised the peasant and the countryside in order to vilify the worker and the city.”

The exhibitionary “cult of the craftsman” idealized village and bazaar environments as representations of a pre-industrial past that Britain had long since left behind. It also denoted the potential similarity of India and Britain because, just as the landed economy of Britain’s past had progressed into “modern” industrialization, the Indian economy could also advance to this next stage of modernization under the guidance of British civilization.

This tension between imperial notions about Indian economic difference and similarity endured through late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century exhibitions, reaching its apogee at the 1924 Empire Exhibition and its inclusion of Indian industry. In the 1886 Colonial and Indian and the 1908 Franco-British Exhibitions, for example, the...

---


metropolitan separation of India from industrial “modernity” simultaneously relegated Indians to an orientalist pre-industrial past and respected their artistic capabilities. Frank Cundall remarked upon one of the “feudal” Indian dyers from Agra in the 1886 Indian palace whose “shades produced by Vilayat with his crude dye-stuffs and primitive implements are surprisingly good.”144 T.N. Mukharji, a comprador Indian administrator of the 1886 Exhibition, discussed the popularity of the unchanging Indian bazaar. Indian men produced goods “with the hand,” and English viewers “were as much astonished to see the Indian produce works of art with the aid of rude apparatus they themselves had discarded long ago.”145 The Indian Pavilion of the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition similarly typified “the life of the East” in its displays of skillful art and craftsmanship. One observer of the Exhibition noted India’s “delicate workers in wood, the men of the East [who] displayed their skill to make envious the onlookers of the West” as well as “the native art of India: of its own kind, aloof and strange, owing nothing to the West.”146 The wood carvings of the Indian Palace demonstrated the “incalculable” wealth of India, as did Indian jewels, “superb ivory and other Oriental work, rich in colour and craftsmanship.”147

The commercial exchanges of the bazaar atmosphere at the exhibitions also blurred the spatial and ideological division of the colonized on display and the non-colonial observer. Indian producers and sellers demonstrated their specialized skill and education as they explained their particular crafts. At the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition, for example, the Times advertised that, “you may have the amazing products of the

---

144 Cundall, Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 29.
coconut explained by an eloquent gentleman from Travancore; or the utilities of Mysore timbers by an expert from Bangalore.” Like previous exhibitions, visitors bought Indian silks and cottons from craftsmen in the simulated 1924 Empire Exhibition bazaars. One official report asserted that, by purchasing Indian goods at these exhibitionary bazaars, visitors partook in the illusion that exhibits served as portals into a pre-modern India. These interactions of artisans and visitors transgressed the imperial boundaries that separated the economically “different” colonized on display from the non-colonial spectator who observed them. At the same time, they continued to reify imperial hierarchies that contrasted the “tradition” of Indian societies against the “modernity” of metropolitan observers.

**Handmade Objects and Indian Industry**

The exhibitions therefore created a paradoxical set of images about India’s “traditional” markets. Signs of Indian “difference” did not always denote Indian inferiority. In addition, the exhibitions depicted both India’s difference, as exhibited in its “traditional” economy of artisanal and agricultural villages, and India’s similarity with Britain, as exhibited in its industrial growth and commercial expansion. The 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition most clearly marked the contrast of India’s handmade crafts and agricultural products with the industrialization and urbanization of the imperial metropole. The Exhibition displayed handmade and agricultural objects in the Imperial Economic Court and the Artware Courts. The Artware Courts exhibited the specialized woodcarvings, jewelry, glass, fabrics, embroideries, and other handmade products of

---

Indian provinces and states. The objects of Indian locales at the Economic Court displayed agricultural foods, dyes and tans, drugs, fibers, cotton, jute, oils and seeds, and indigo. The Economic Court, as well, displayed bamboo objects of India upon a bamboo arch. Cundall associated these bamboo reconstructions with India’s rural villages and the “native.” He explained that the Nagas of Manipur used “crude” bamboo weapons to defend their villages. Each of the semi-independent states presented a carved screen encompassing the jewelry, gold and silver work, carpets, artwork, and pottery of their respective territories. Frank Cundall’s report noted the absence of machinery at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, with the exception of the exhibits of Canada, the Cape, and Queensland.

The 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition emphasized that the “traditional” handmade objects of the provincial and state sections demonstrated colonial authenticity in order to assert India’s inherent “difference” from British modernity. Each local exhibit of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, for example, had a “distinctive screen” carved in wood or stone by “native workmen” in India. Durbar Hall, constructed in pine wood, was “carved in the Punjab style by two natives of Bhera in the Punjab.” Frank Cundall’s account of the 1886 Exhibition, under the sanction of the Royal Commission, explained that “native workmen” carved the Jeypore Gateway, which preserved “old traditional designs” without “unnecessary European interference.”

---

153 Cundall, Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 4.
154 Ibid., 21.
155 Ibid., 27.
156 Ibid., 21-22.
classification of Indians on display also signaled the “realism” of contemporary India’s artisanal societies and its ties to “traditional” social categories. Cundall described eight Indian artisans on display, for example, including a “Mulsalman [sic] of the Sunni sect, a native of Agra, . . . a dyer by profession.” Frank Cundall asserted that the Indian artisans at the 1886 Indian Palace “are genuine artisans, such as may be seen at work within the precincts of the palaces of the Indian Princes.”

Although such handmade objects in the imperial metropole represented to observers the inexorable artisanal culture of a pre-industrial India, in actuality they illustrated the (re)production of this image by and within imperial Britain. The 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition manifested this tension of the stringent separation of Indian objects from European modern influence and indications of European intervention in India and of Indian acculturation. One observer both criticized the lack of “realism” of “native” work displayed at the Exhibition and applauded its authenticity. The carved screen of Bombay, for example, was “admirably representative of that province, from which the finest wood carvings [came] … though an English-man superintended the natives who did it.” Some of the handicrafts on display, according to the visitor, were “crude, unpleasing without local character” because of their incorporation of European tastes and “modern influences.” The exhibitionary display of Indian economic difference relied upon and demonstrated the authenticity of India’s “traditional” exhibits.

In contrast to the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, early twentieth-century exhibitions displayed Indian industrialization alongside India’s handicrafts and

---

157 Ibid., 28-29.
agriculture. The 1908 Franco-British Exhibition demonstrated impositions of British modernization in India alongside signs of India’s enduring tradition. It showed the introduction of industrialization in India, such as the use of weaving machinery that would “contribute materially to the preservation of Indian village industries threatened with continued decay by the extension of factory enterprise in the dependency.” The exhibition’s observers recognized this entrance of industrial production in India. The 1908 Exhibition, nevertheless, framed its limited display of this industry around the preservation of India’s village crafts, and exhibited industry alongside agricultural and handmade objects. The Indian building of the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition, for example, continued to exclude economic development in princely states and primarily displayed the pre-industrial objects of Indian provinces. The Mysore Durbar enclosed the arts and crafts of India’s semi-independent, “feudatory” states, such as wood and ivory carvings, the silk fabrics of Kashmir, the silver of Jaipur, the fabrics of Gwalior, and the carpets of Khaipur. The provincial and state exhibits in the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition included the “products of the simple hand looms” such as carpets, rugs, and silks. The agricultural objects of British-Indian displays and private exhibits centered on Indian “industries,” such as “tea-planting, jute growing, cotton cultivation and manufacture … ruby mining in Burma,” and timber.

The 1908 Franco-British Exhibition embodied the persistence of the Raj’s nineteenth-century economic policy in which Britain discouraged Indian industrial competition with the metropole and therefore made sectors of India more rural and

---

agrarian.\textsuperscript{164} The provincial courts of the 1924 Empire Exhibition’s Indian Pavilion manifested the post-war shift in the economic relationship between Britain and India. The inter-war period brought Indian interests to a higher status in the imperial economy. The Government of India Act in 1919 granted Indians a limited degree of autonomous control over India’s fiscal policy, including their trade with Britain.\textsuperscript{165} During the First World War and the inter-war years, India’s connection to the world market impaired its agricultural sectors, which suffered as a result of the higher price of essential imported goods and the lowered price of India’s exported raw materials. At the same time, Indian industry benefited. India’s textile imports fell as the indigenous industries of steel, iron, and textiles grew. The Council of the League of Nations even recognized India as one of the eight chief industrial states worldwide.\textsuperscript{166} The economies of Britain and India thus became less complementary with India’s industrialization in textiles (especially cotton) and with shifts in the international economy.\textsuperscript{167}

The 1924 Empire Exhibition evinced the tension between images of India’s “primitive” economy and India’s modern economic changes. The Indian commissioner of the 1924 Empire Exhibition, Dewan Bahadur T. Vijayarghavcharya, charged that at the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition and the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, “the large bulk of Indian exhibits belonged to the Art and Handicrafts Section.” He asserted

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{163}“The Franco-British Exhibition. Their Majesties' Visit,” \textit{Times}, 28 May 1908, p. 5.  \\
\textsuperscript{164}Levine, \textit{The British Empire}, 73.  \\
\textsuperscript{165}R.J. Moore, \textit{The Crisis of Indian Unity, 1917-1940} (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1974), 7.  \\
\textsuperscript{166}Austin Kendall, “The Participation of India and Burma in the British Empire Exhibition, 1924,” \textit{Royal Society of Arts} 71 (Aug., 1923): 648.  \\
\end{flushright}

61
that this gave the false impression that India had nothing to offer in industry.\(^{168}\) Madras, Bombay, and Bengal comprised the larger exhibits at the 1924 Empire Exhibition and visitors could view their artisanal productions alongside their industrial expansions. As the 1924 *Official Guide* put it, the “kaleidoscopic” array of images ranged from harbors to jungles and villages.\(^{169}\) Bengal, “a region devoted to the minuter arts and crafts,” exhibited its “ivory, brass, and copper work, embroideries and specimens of tanned leather.” As a “Bazaar Surprise,” it also displayed “harbour activities and … the jute mills, textile factories, and canneries of Calcutta.”\(^{170}\) The 1924 Empire Exhibition demonstrated the industrial products and commercial success of central Indian cities alongside the still dominant handcrafted objects and their metropolitan consumption.

Foreign travelers in inter-war India also chronicled depictions of the colonial economy that included both signs of Indian difference from and similarity to the British economy. They simultaneously noted India’s changing trade relations after the First World War and its continued ties to landed systems. Frank Carpenter, a cosmopolitan American traveler and journalist, discussed the post-war industrialization in India and included a section on “Indian Captains of Industry.” He observed that “India appears to be at the beginning of a great industrial expansion.”\(^{171}\) Instead of solely importing English manufactures, Carpenter remarked that “the Indian mills are quite able to compete with those of England, Germany, and Japan.”\(^{172}\) Despite Carpenter’s


\(^{171}\) Carpenter, *From Bangkok to Bombay*, 281.

\(^{172}\) Ibid., 262.
observations of the economic advancements of Indian entrepreneurs, he depicted Indian factory labor as a racially degenerate rank within the working class. The “native factory hand” wanted to remain connected to village lands, and “seem[ed] unable to manipulate anything except the simpler machinery.”173 An Englishman in inter-war India also linked village life to a traditional image of the subcontinent: “in India the people in the villages still live the life that has been the lot of the ryot for thousands of years.”174

This view of India’s enduring artisanal and village markets, as represented at the 1924 Empire Exhibition, drew upon broader exhibitionary trends that persistently localized, ruralized, and agriculturalized colonial societies. Displays of a pre-industrial India dominated the provincial courts of the 1924 Empire Exhibition despite its inclusion of Indian modernization. These courts included “the hereditary village crafts of the Western Ghats” and the handicrafts of the bazaars.175 The provincial and state displays at the Empire Exhibition also depicted rural India, “the background to the bazaars,” such as the hill stations in India or the plains of the North-west frontier.176 The specialized “arts and crafts” of India, the “main object of the [1924] Exhibition,” included such popular features as Agra carpets, Bombay silks, and Benares brassware.177 In contrast to Indian and other colonial exhibits, the 1924 Palace of Industry exhibited Britain’s economic modernity. It displayed, among many other things, the metropole’s industrial machinery and its conversion of “raw fibers” into “the finished article of commerce.”178 The raw materials that facilitated this extension of British industry, as well as the handicrafts of

173 Ibid., 260.
174 John Finnemore, India, 88.
the “endless exhibition of silks, embroideries, carvings in wood and ivory, and Indian art,” figured prominently in Indian displays in inter-war London, and thus in India’s colonial identity as imagined within the exhibitions.\footnote{Lawrence, \textit{British Empire Exhibition: Official Guide}, 46-52.}

The “official mind” of the 1924 Empire Exhibition therefore attempted to mediate displays of India’s modernization by primarily imagining India through its perpetual landed and artisanal economies and by attributing its economic progress to British intervention. The 1924 \textit{Official Guide} framed exhibitionary models of Indian irrigation and jute mills around \textit{British} progress in India, explaining “how ceaselessly Great Britain has wrought for India, how much has been accomplished, how much yet remains to do.”\footnote{Lawrence, \textit{British Empire Exhibition: Official Guide}, 63.} The 1924 \textit{Survey}, as the intellectual supplement to the Empire Exhibition, explained that the land was and “ever has been, the backbone of the Indian economy.” One \textit{Survey} writer recognized India’s desire to move “towards a policy of rapid industrialisation,” but also that “until quite a late stage in the British occupation” Indian manufactures “were confined to cottage industries and the village artisan.”\footnote{Rt. Hon. Lord Meston, \textit{The Dominions and Dependencies of the Empire}, vol. 5, in \textit{The British Empire: A Survey}, ed. Hugh Gunn (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1924), 191.} The South Indian Railway exhibit, one of the most popular features of the 1924 Indian sections, demonstrated the modern development of transportation in Southern India.\footnote{“British Empire Exhibition,” \textit{New India} (Madras), 25 April 1924, p. 7.} Its displays contrasted contemporary railway transport in India with, as the 1924 \textit{Official Guide} put it, “models of men and animals illustrating how transport was carried out in the early days.”\footnote{“British Empire Exhibition,” \textit{New India}, 25 April 1924, p. 7.} Its glass cases contrasted the “modern civilization” brought to India by Britain with models of hills, “barren, scorched, and primitive,” and mud settlements that
represented pre-colonial Indian conditions. Exhibitionary rhetoric continued the official narrative of hierarchy that aligned India’s identity with its economic backwardness and its modern progress with British intervention.

Simulated Bazaars in the Early Twentieth Century

The exhibitionary division of pre-industrial India and industrial Britain persisted into the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition and the 1924 Empire Exhibition. These exhibitions, however, created more spectacular versions of colonial marketplaces, combining entertainment and education in order to sell products and stimulate the imperial economy. They focused less on the instructive scenes of Indian social and cultural conditions, as seen at the categorized and contained model bazaars and villages of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition. Their integration of Indian ethnography and economic scenes aligned India’s purported economic and historical stagnation with its cultural and racial degeneracy. The 1924 Empire Exhibition, in particular, resorted to the popular appeal of the exotic—represented through “traditional” Indian wares and ethnographic displays of “native” peasants and artisans—at the same time that it fashioned commercialized bazaars with industrial products.

Twentieth-century bazaar exhibits digressed from their alleged depictions of contemporary, realistic colonial conditions, even as they recognized India’s industrial and commercial development. The 1908 Franco-British Exhibition and 1924 Empire Exhibition purported to display colonies authentically, but resorted to typical versions of unchanging colonial marketplaces that would clearly project imperial hierarchies. At the

---

1908 Franco-British Exhibition, for example, visitors were drawn to the “Souks” of Algero-Tunisiens, a bazaar in the form of “a little street of shops or booths in which the wares of the Algerian and Tunisian handicrafts are on sale.” Like the bazaar simulations in Indian sections, the “tradition” of the objects of these French colonial bazaars signaled the enduring exotic of the colonies. The handicrafts of these French colonies, for example, included “indigenous articles which tempt[ed] the traveller in the native quarters of Algiers or Tunis.” Paul Lafage, who wrote about the French colonies at the 1908 Exhibition, discussed the economic and political progress of the French Empire as represented at the Exhibition. He remarked, though, that the “Palace of the Colonies,” which was transformed into a bazaar with Parisian, “Oriental,” and “Far-Eastern” articles, constituted the least important of the colonial buildings. Within this marketplace, visitors had missed the “messages of instructive objects,” as exemplified in the Indo-Chinese section and the building devoted to Algeria, Tunisia, and West Africa. These latter sections, in contrast to the marketplace, aimed to educate visitors on the development of economic resources, expansion of markets, and other evidence of the progress brought to these colonies by France.

Indian displays of the 1924 Empire Exhibition continued to center around the social and cultural differences of the bazaar, and the “natives” on display. British metropolitan and dominion exhibits of the 1924 Empire Exhibition differed from the ethnographically-focused colonial exhibitions, in which “natives” produced and sold traditional handicrafts. Instead, they reproduced instructive depictions of imperial economies. As one visitor remarked, the “Canadian Pavilion exhibits are purely

educational, no one tries to sell you a lumber camp or a grain elevator.”187 Similarly, “for the practical business man,” the twin palaces of Industry and Engineering solely displayed the *products* of the British Isles.188 These buildings promoted British modernity in their displays of the metropole’s industrial progress. The Palace of Industry devoted sections to industrial machinery. Its other exhibits depicted how gas generated electricity and how developments in heating, lighting, concrete, and cement modernized buildings. The Palace of Engineering represented the expansion of British civilization into the colonies, including the construction of bridges and railroads that “unlock[ed] the doors of progress.”189

The inter-war display of British economic modernity within the Palaces of Industry and Engineering contrasted with the models and objects of India’s pre-industrial economic conditions. The edification of British exhibits also differed from the ethnographic spectacles of colonial marketplaces at the 1924 Empire Exhibition. The exotic features of colonial bazaars in the 1924 Empire Exhibition included “living displays” and traditional wares. A visitor to the 1924 Exhibition, for example, noted that “the many shops and native attendants will give the Westerner some idea of what bazaars are like—which over here are nearly always so camouflaged as to be utterly different from the genuine article of the East.”190 An advertisement for the Empire Exhibition described that “when one has watched the making of Indian carpets by native experts, he may witness an Indian play performed by Indian actors in an Indian theatre, or—

---

188 Harold E. Scarborough, “An Empire in Miniature. Special Correspondence from Harold E. Scarborough,” *Outlook* 137, no. 7 (June 18, 1924): 279-280.
190 Maxwell, *Wembley in Colour: Being both an Impression and a Memento of the British Empire Exhibition of 1924*, 58.
spellbound, gaze upon an Indian snake charmer.”191 Indian exhibits of the inter-war period thus aligned the display of “traditional” Indian trades with renditions of “different” Indian cultures.

The 1924 Empire Exhibition continued the metropolitan consumption of Indian exotic cultures and their products, but with the British and Indian intent to promote India’s industrial and commercial expansion. This differed from the pre-war exhibitions that limited the active participation of Indians in shaping economic exhibits and that excluded the display of Indian industry to a large extent. The Empire Exhibition’s paradoxical focus on bolstering imperial economies through representations of a “traditional India” embodied the post-war urgency for Britain to demonstrate colonial integration and economic utility. Austin Kendall made several reports to the Royal Society on the development of the Empire Exhibition. He stated that India’s participation in the Exhibition particularly stemmed from the desire to promote its international trade and its industrialization. Administrators reconstructed and reopened the Empire Exhibition in 1925 with the intent to educate more Britons on the Empire and to further stimulate the imperial economy. The Indian Government decided not to officially participate. Instead, Indian merchants operated the Indian Pavilion in 1925 as a private exhibition. They expanded the spectacular bazaars of the 1924 Indian exhibits because of the profitable popularity of Indian bazaars and their “traditional” crafts. Indian entrepreneurs used the image of the bazaar in order to expand markets on their own terms, rather than doing so through British intervention or to secure British economic interests. A correspondent in India, for example, explained a report on the results of Indian participation in 1924 from the Director of Industries of the United Provinces

Government. Exhibits opened new markets, secured increasing trade, and “spread a wider knowledge of industrial possibilities and enabled Indian manufacturers and dealers to acquire first-hand knowledge of the tastes of foreign consumers.”

The claims of economic success from Indian participation in 1924 differed from the political and social critiques of Indian exhibits. Although commercial elites in India favored participation, a correspondent in Delhi noted a general apathy in India towards the Exhibition based on its lack of authenticity. A journalist in India explained the “architectural atrocity” of the Indian Pavilion and declared that “the display of Indian wares had been unworthy of a third-rate bazaar.” The Delhi correspondent explained that “non-official and non-commercial opinion … is now decidedly estranged, for most of the visitors to Wembley with real knowledge of India are unanimous in condemning the appropriateness of the India exhibition.” In a response to these criticisms of the Exhibition’s appeal to the exotic and “traditional,” and its lack of realistic depictions of contemporary Indian conditions, an editorial in the *Times* maintained that “the object of India’s participation was to sell her products” and that “the Exhibition would not have been Indian without bazaar features.”

Metropolitan visitors to the 1924 Empire Exhibition, therefore, primarily viewed India through the “native” conditions of bazaars. Travel books of the inter-war period, as well, continued to identify the bazaar as a space dedicated to the “native” artisan, who “works to catch the fancy of European and American tourists.” Thomas Cook’s world tour in 1926 illustrated the popularity of Indian bazaars. His tour took visitors to Delhi, a

---

192 “India at Wembley: Some Trading Results,” *Times*, 13 December 1924, p. 11.
former capital of the Mughal Empire and the new capital of the Raj, but advertised that the “life of India,” as demonstrated in bazaars, interested the traveler more than India’s history. 197 The 1925 Indian Pavilion therefore promoted the commercial aims both of Indian entrepreneurs and British officials by paradoxically selling Indian products through “traditional” bazaars and the “living displays” of Indian “natives.” This bazaar setting reified the social divisions within Indian society, such as the rise of Indian commercial elites and the simultaneous entrenchment of “traditional” Indian “natives” in their village crafts: “The merchant or shopkeeper squats beside his goods; the artisan does his work in sight of the passers-by.”198

The 1924 Empire Exhibition exhibited the modernization of Indian elites alongside images of a “traditional” India. In addition, India’s commercialized bazaar displays were less racialized than the simulated markets of Africa. For example, ‘native thatched huts” surrounded the “Eastern bazaar” of the 1925 East African Pavilion. 199 As the Times explained, the Indian section did not “contain a representative collection of exhibits illustrating the life and government of the races and provinces of the Indian Empire” but rather took “the form of a bazaar, run by Indian merchants.” Visitors could buy objects that attracted “the attention of visitors in the bazaars of Agra, Delhi, Lahore and other cities.”200 One of the dominant markers of an unchanging Indian economy included the Chandni Chauk in “native Delhi,” “one of the famous bazaar streets in India.”201 The 1925 Empire Exhibition reformulated the bazaar of the United Provinces and Madras from 1924 into an elaborate commercial bazaar with Indian participants—

196 Carpenter, From Bangkok to Bombay, 216.
197 Cook, Around the World, 38-41.
198 John Finnemore, India, 1.
making and selling their goods—similar to the Chandni Chauk. The Indian Pavilion also retained its live performances in the southern section and its Indian restaurant.

The economic incentives of savvy Indian purveyors of “traditional” commodities, crafted by “natives,” continued to display India through unchanged “native” bazaars and villages, and therefore suppressed depictions of a “modern” India. The reopening of the Empire Exhibition in 1925 did not reconcile the contradictions of affirming India’s transformed political status through the depiction of India’s socio-cultural “difference.” Both the 1924 and 1925 Empire Exhibitions demonstrated changes in the colonial economy through industrial products and exhibits of Indian commercialization. The economic aims of Indian merchants who reconstructed bazaars, nevertheless, resorted to the selling of “traditional” crafts by Indian artisans for profit. From the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition to the 1925 Empire Exhibition, the social conditions of bazaar markets and rural villages were central to the demonstration of Indian difference, and thus to the visibility of the Empire’s hierarchies.

200 “Indian Bazaar At Wembley,” *Times*, 1 April 1925, p. 13.
201 Carpenter, *From Bangkok to Bombay*, 215.
203 Ibid., p. 13.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE NATIVE ON DISPLAY AND COLONIAL HIERARCHIES

The assertion of British imperial power in the cultural arena of exhibitions necessitated clear depictions of colonial hierarchies. As seen in chapter one, the spatial layout of exhibitions and the architecture of colonial pavilions conveyed the hierarchical relationship of colonies to the metropole. Chapter two argued that exhibits of Indian socio-economic conditions situated India within an unchanging pre-industrial history, unable to progress to “modernity” without British intervention. Indian merchants challenged this notion of India’s perpetual difference at the 1924 Empire Exhibition. They demonstrated their independent participation in industrial and international markets, rather than their need for Britain to introduce these aspects of “modernity” into India. This chapter examines how the selective display of cultural knowledge about India obfuscated indications of Indian modernity and included ethnographic evidence of Indian “difference.” The exhibitions depicted this difference in racial terms, rendering India as fundamentally primitive and inexorably traditional through the model and living ethnography of simulated villages and cultural performances. At the same time, they exhibited the nuances of this difference when compared to the ethnography of other colonies and when examined alongside the images of Indian princes and narratives of comprador elites. The exhibitions displayed the ostensibly unchanging ethnography of Indian “natives,” but also reified the incorporation of “westernized” middle-class Indians and “traditional” princes into the state and economic structures of modern Britain.

The 1924 Empire Exhibition most visibly evinced the nuances and tensions of imperial assertions that India’s cultural difference denoted its racial degeneracy, just as it displayed alternative images to India’s “traditional” economy. With the changes in the
Raj’s political structure in 1919, and their recognition of Indian modernization, imperial ideas about Indian racial inferiority became less justified and therefore less evident within ethnographic display. The colonial ethnography of the Empire Exhibition, for example, racially denigrated African cultures more than Indian cultures. The Exhibition also granted comprador Indian elites administrative power to shape provincial exhibits at the same time that it reduced overt displays of “feudal” Indian princes and their juxtaposition with the “enlightened” government of a modernizing British India. The lower-class Indian “native” of the local village continued to be confined within cultural renditions at the same time that elite Indians attained political power both in the Raj and in the Exhibition.

The 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition and the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition also nascently illustrated alternative visions to cultural displays of Indian difference. While the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition overtly ascribed model and “living” “natives” to the “traditional” categories of village cultures and “feudal” systems, comprador Indians who observed and helped construct the Exhibition offered other meanings to its ethnological displays. The 1908 Franco-British Exhibition enlarged Indian model villages and added more live performances of Indians, but observers viewed African cultures as racially subordinate to those of India. Both of the pre-war exhibitions displayed the objects, architecture, and durbars of India’s semi-independent princely states rather than the “living” ethnography of princes, denoting the enduring “feudal” leadership of Indian princes but also their political collaboration with the officials of modern Britain.
Despite these changes over time, the pre-war and inter-war depiction of “different” Indian cultures, within village settings and through live renditions of Indian performances, indicated their racial inability to progress towards British modernity, rather than their ability to become more similar to British cultures and attain self-rule. The display of model and “living” Indian “natives” applied a generic framework for depicting non-European societies in imperial metropoles, but also represented the specific strategies for British rule over India. The hierarchical assimilation of “different” colonized peoples, a priority of the French and the American colonial regimes, was less important to British imperialism. While traveling in India, for instance, Sir Henry Craik preferred the separation of imperial British from colonial Indian cultures. He attributed the “picturesqueness” of Bombay to the sights of “native costume” because “the ugliest sight one can see … is the native clad in European dress.”

This differentiation between colonial and British cultures emerged in more racial and stringent terms after the 1857-8 “Indian Mutiny” and after the emergence of nationalist appeals by educated Indians for self-rule in the mid-1880s. The British construction of India’s history, combined with European notions of scientific racism, promoted an evolutionary trope in which the Indian race, though Aryan in origin, had inter-mixed with “degenerate” races and declined thereafter.

British officials demonstrated this ostensible racial difference and inferiority of Indian civilization through their appropriation of imperial knowledge about India’s unchanging ties to “feudal” systems, “traditional” villages, and socio-cultural categories.

The preservation of Indian difference by official Britons thus not only relied on the continuation of India’s pre-industrial markets, but also on the rigidification of social divisions within “native” cultures and the political entrenchment of the “feudal” leaders of princes and zamindar landlords. With the establishment of the Raj government in 1858, British officials institutionalized social and racial classifications in India in order to bolster the political fabric of British rule. The politicization of Indian “custom” by official anthropologists had, for example, rigidified and entrenched the caste system, ascribing caste groups with specific economic, social, and cultural positions and characteristics. Imperial displays of India’s socio-cultural conditions, such as its “feudal” structures, “traditional” village societies, and unchanging hierarchies, therefore denoted India’s purportedly fundamental difference. The classification of the model and “living” local societies within the economic settings of colonial villages objectified them as images of an enduring evolutionary past and inexorably linked them to their unchanging caste, religious, and tribal affiliations. Outside village settings, the cultural differences of colonial ethnography viewed them not only within the preservation of their traditional systems, but also through exotic evidence of their supposed primitivism.

---

The Economic Ethnography of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition

The social and racial categorization of “natives” in the exhibitions represented Britain’s appropriation and re-organization of knowledge about Indian cultures so that they implied India’s enduring difference and legitimized British long-term political hegemony. The 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, constructed shortly after the Raj’s consolidation of imperial hegemony, embodied the specific strategies of British rule in India. While it drew upon the representational modes of late nineteenth-century exhibitions that depicted colonial economies through an anthropological and historical lens, its ethnographic exhibits entrenched the “unchanging” colonial categories of India and represented them as divisive signs of India’s racial inability for nationhood and political progress.

The state and provincial sections of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition located ethnographic displays of colonial cultures primarily within the economic exhibits of model villages, instructing visitors on the “traditional” social hierarchies and racial differences of colonial India. The “objects of ethnological interest,” as one contemporary put it, included “dressed figures of natives, models, and agricultural scenes.”207 Rather than demonstrating the reform of Indian societies under British governance, the Colonial and Indian Exhibition entrenched the racial and social structures of colonial India. The display of agricultural products alongside full-size figures of “natives” served as “life-size ethnological specimens” of the various races in India.208 These “specimens” of the Economic Court at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, modeled after casts of

---

India’s “leading races,” were depicted within their respective village locales. The twelve ethnology sub-courts classified each province by its races, religions, and castes (Figure 3.1). Models ranged “from the tiny, but perfectly formed, Andaman Islander, as black as a Negro, up to the pure Hindoo.” Each figure exhibited its “appropriate clothing, ornaments and weapons” amongst the pre-industrial and rural objects of “peasant jewelry, domestic utensils, and rough arms used by each race.” The 1886 Special Catalogue described each sub-court according to the regions, religions, tribes, and physical traits of each races. The models of Andaman Islanders (such as the one pictured below), for example, represented the “primitive savages” of tribal India who spoke “unintelligible languages,” were physically “short in stature,” and had “intensely black” skin.

---

209 Ibid., p. 7.
Aside from the “native” or “primitive” races of India, the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition included models of India’s higher, though still ostensibly degenerate, strata of colonial society (see the princely Rajah, for example, in Figure 3.1). The bolstering of the hereditary powers of pre-colonial India—such as zamindar landlords and hereditary princes—facilitated Britain’s economic and political hegemony. These “feudal” leaders not only collaborated with British officials but they represented India’s immobility within a traditional past and its contrast with the “enlightened” governance of the British Raj. The ethnography of the Economic sub-courts exhibited models of the landed and Hindu elites of a village in north India. It had a zamindar of the village in his house “representing the class structure found in Oudh,” who was “unable himself probably to read or write in any but the roughest fashion.” The illiterate zamindar therefore had the village accountant read rent collections to him as he dispensed “his rude justice” to poor “native” villagers who could not make timely payments. Close by the “village landlord” of the Economic Court, the “Brahman or village priest” of the Hindu caste decorated the village idol. The British narrative of Indian history explained that the rigidity of the caste system represented India’s racial degeneracy during the Mughal Empire, an Islamic invasion which caused Hinduism to lose its “normal processes of evolution” and the “natural progress of a great society.” At the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, the commanding position of the zamindar landlord and the Hindu priesthood, in which “tradition asserts by divine ordinance, into castes and sub-castes,” manifested these cultural conceptions of India’s perpetual hierarchies.

---

The Native of the Early Twentieth-Century Village

The ethnological scenes of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition almost exclusively tied models and “living” displays of Indian “natives” to the settings of villages and bazaars. The cultural images of “native” village societies, though diminishing over time in their appeals to overt racism compared with the display of African ethnography, represented India’s colonial identity into the twentieth century. The 1908 Franco-British Exhibition and the 1924 Empire Exhibition continued the long-term British trend of displaying versions of rural and agricultural scenes. They also presented elaborate “living” spectacles of Indian “natives” that, though not depicted within village scenery, were linked to the perpetual “tradition” of India’s peasant cultures. The ethnography of the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition and the 1924 Empire Exhibition depicted Indian “natives” within model villages, but differed from the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition in their focus on the spectacular and exotic rather than the structured classification of colonial cultures. They nevertheless continued to represent Indian difference.

The 1908 Franco-British Exhibition expanded upon the villages of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, constructing entire sections of “living” colonial villages, including those of Africa, India, Ceylon, and Ireland. The Commissioner-General of the Franco-British Exhibition, Imre Kiralfy, implemented more elements of entertainment in British colonial exhibitions. Notably, he constructed native villages in exhibitions, bringing African and Asian peoples into Britain for display. 214 The colonial village scenes of the Exhibition, though depicting Indian cultures as fundamentally different

from British cultures in their “primitive” ties to “feudal” conditions, demonstrated the nuances of British views about colonial races. The ethnographic village scenes of the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition, for example, racially denigrated the primitivism of African peoples more than that of Indian peoples. Non-colonial observers noted the distinctions between the African village ethnography and the Indian village ethnography when comparing the various villages at the Franco-British Exhibition. An article in the *Times* explained that, “it is at once apparent to the visitor that the mental and artistic capacities of the Africans are far less highly developed than those of the Asiatics.” The African scenery of village huts exemplified how, when compared to Asian sections, Africa was on a “more primitive scale.” In contrast to the colonial ethnography of African and Asian villages in 1908, the Irish village displayed its economic and cultural “tradition” rather than Ireland’s racial “difference.” Like Indian villages, the Irish village included “ancient features” that took its visitors into the “past,” such as model cottages and the peasant industries of hand-loom weaving, lace making, and embroidery. Ireland’s ties to pre-industrial “tradition” rather than racialized ethnography, nevertheless, identified Ireland’s status as subordinate to that of Britain’s but not as a colonial dependency similar to Africa and India.

The 1908 Franco-British Exhibition also constructed renditions of colonial cultures that, though outside of village scenes, tied India to the “feudal” conditions of the Mughal Empire. The mixed receptions of metropolitan observers to these strictly ethnographic displays of the early twentieth century indicated at least some aversion to

---


their overtly exoticized and denigrative ethnography, notably because it obfuscated “authentic” colonial conditions such as the industrial and political progress of the colonies. An American observer of the 1908 Exhibition criticized this aspect of the colonial sections: “The colonies of England and France each have their pavilions, but few of them call for much notice, degenerating in most cases into side shows.”

The critical reception of a female nautch dance at the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition illustrated the tension of metropolitan preferences both for exoticized and “realistic” displays of Indian difference. This dance, popular with eighteenth-century Muslim rulers (nabobs), represented India’s enduring barbarity and the sexualized degradation of Indian women. The Times emphasized the authenticity of this cultural display of Indian conditions. The nauch dance, for example, was limited to the gyrations that Indian girls “are accustomed in real life,” instead of resorting to a dance that would “merely please onlookers who may not have seen an actual Indian nautch.” The 1908 Illustrated Review, however, criticized that, “the Indian Arena gave a somewhat dreary show under the high sounding titles of the programme. Nautch girls chanted monotonously in front of a third-rate Rajah; natives balanced on bamboo poles.” According to the latter review, British observers preferred demonstrations of India’s enduring feudal systems and ties to traditional cultural modes. The “third-rate Rajah”

---

219 Bernard Cohn, Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 125. Cohn refers to the nauch dance in this way when discussing the visit of the Prince of Wales to India in 1876.
who sat next to his Mexican wife and the tamed nautch dances transgressed notions of India’s unchanging socio-cultural systems.

The pre-modern ethnography of the 1924 Empire Exhibition also asserted the persistence of “traditional” Indian cultures both within and outside model villages, and thus India’s enduring racial difference. The village ethnography of India at the 1924 Empire Exhibition, though geographically restricted to Southern India, included “villages faithfully reproducing to the minutest detail (except, presumably, for dirt and smells) originals in Burma, the Deccan, Gambia, Nyasaland, Ungava, the South Sea Islands, etc.—inhabited, too, by the proper natives engaged in accustomed occupations (i.e., the innocent ones).” 222 The exhibitions’ village representations of the “nature,” rather than the culture, of India and other colonial territories designated the racial difference of India’s degenerate rank of a peasant class and their transgression of the socially acceptable boundaries of cleanliness, rationality, and industry. 223 The 1924 Empire Exhibition also evinced the racial inferiority of African cultures. The Times advertised that “the primitive life of the African villages, will be seen side by side with the latest scientific wonders that British skill and genius have devised.” 224 West Africa, as well, “sent its coal-black natives to live as they do in Kano, Nigeria, of which city the Wembley exhibit [was] a model.” 225 African exhibits primarily consisted of villages, the “accurate reproductions of native communal life.” 226

---

225 Harold E. Scarborough, “An Empire in Miniature. Special Correspondence from Harold E. Scarborough,” *Outlook* 137, no. 7 (June 18, 1924): 280.
The press coverage and official guides of the 1924 Empire Exhibition highlighted that the strictly “living” displays of Indians, outside of village scenery, continued to denote their enduring ties to the local and rural. The immobility of “natives” within their local villages and its traditional cultures signaled their immobility within an evolutionary past. Inter-war exhibits depicted lower-class Indian “representatives of their local inhabitants at work in local conditions.” 227 British visitors, for example, became “familiar with Hassain, the snake charmer, who sits with his little mongoose outside the Native Theatre” and who had not imagined “that 1924 would find him settle, turban, mongoose and all, in a London suburb.” 228 Displays of South India in the 1924 Madras Court included snake juggling and sword play. 229 A correspondent in London reported to the New India newspaper that the Madras Court, with its bazaar reproductions and “living” displays, was one of the most popular features of the Indian section. 230 The 1924 Official Guide advertised that “Southern India provides a Pageant in the Madras Court, and there is a theatre with dancers from the far hills, who never saw Europe until the spring of this year.” 231 The Empire Exhibition attributed the movement of lower-class Indians from colony to metropole to their appropriation for public display. Travel across colonial and national boundaries defined, and was defined by, the “bourgeois, cosmopolitan, worldly experience.” 232 This definition excluded the narratives of poor Indians whose public exhibition located them within the environment of local, rural villages rather than the modernity of the imperial metropole.

The British colonial regime relied on these signs of Indian difference, rather than acculturation, from British cultures in order to justify long-term rule in India. The exhibitions therefore strictly demarcated between the spaces of colony and metropole—between those of the colonized subjects on display and those of the citizens observing them—and avoided displaying colonial acculturation. By the inter-war period it was, nevertheless, difficult to reaffirm India’s static socio-cultural systems. The 1924 Empire Exhibition continued to emphasize the racial fixity of African peoples. It also selectively displayed the supposedly exotic and primitive Indian cultures, rather than presenting a museum-like display of India’s ties to castes, tribes, and religions. At the 1924 Empire Exhibition, Malays, Burmans, Hong Kong Chinese, West Africans, and Palestinians both lived and worked within the Exhibition. Indians, Singhalese, West Indians, and the “natives” of British Guiana, however, lived outside the Exhibition and could transgress the boundaries of the exhibitionary space. Indians in the inter-war Empire Exhibition, therefore, crossed into the modern, industrial, and urban arena of the metropole.

The Tradition of Indian Princes

---

The “living” displays of Indian “natives” and their association with local village societies reified imperial discourses about India’s inability for evolutionary progress and political autonomy. At the same time, however, they elucidated social divisions within India that challenged images of India’s monolithic racial difference. For the lower-class and peasant-like status of Indians on display separated them not only from British observers, but also from administrative Indian middle-class elites and hereditary princes. As the “natural” leaders of semi-independent states, princes represented India’s enduring difference in its ties to the traditional leadership of a “despotic” government, as well as their high social and political status.\(^{235}\) The post-1858 Raj government collaborated with princely rulers who were loyal to British rule in exchange for their semi-independent control over inherited territory.

The 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition and 1908 Franco-British Exhibition represented the “feudal” autocracy of “traditional” Indian princes, as well as their official importance to “enlightened” British rule, through reconstructions of Indian palaces and durbars. They also denoted the “tradition” of princely states through the display of pre-industrial handicrafts and agricultural products. The 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition dedicated spaces to a Durbar Hall and an Indian Palace.\(^{236}\) The Indian Palace displayed portraits of Indian princes, as well as articles of bamboo, carved wood screens, and handmade objects. The princely Indian Pavilion of the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition included a Mysore Durbar that displayed the arts and crafts of India’s semi-independent “feudatory” states, such as wood and ivory carvings, silk fabrics, and carpets. The

---


exhibitions displayed these objects, simulated durbars and palaces, and princely architecture rather than the ethnography of princes, separating them from the racialized and categorized “native” on display.

The material representations of imperial Durbars at the pre-war exhibitions demonstrated the affinity of Indian princes to British officials and the importance of Indian institutions to the legitimation and naturalization of imperial hierarchies. British officials stressed the Durbar as a longstanding Indian (Mughal) tradition. Durbars held within India during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries demonstrated the political power of princes, but also their “traditional” consent to British imperial rule. The Indian Palace of the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition most notably had a courtyard with Indian artisans, and a Durbar Carriage from Bhavnagar paraded the Upper Gardens of London daily, presenting “a gorgeous sight, giving an idea of the splendour of an Oriental court.” These princely spaces represented India’s inexorable link to a feudal empire and contrasted with the modern and industrial developments of Britain, but they were also associated with the Raj government. The Durbar Hall at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, for example, served as a reception room for the Prince of Wales.

Indian princes, ostensibly compliant with colonial rule, could transgress notions of their unchanging tradition and political despotism by demonstrating their modern and industrial accomplishments. The British traveler, W.E. Baxter, for example, favored the princely rulers of Jaipur as “enlightened, reforming men” because of their “modern”

---

Museum and Gardens, 2000), 71. An administrator of the Exhibition, J.R. Royle, was the Assistant Secretary for India and the Official Agent for the Government of India.

urbanization projects, such as “the beautiful Mayo hospital, the water-supply to the town, and the irrigation works in the vicinity.” At exhibitions, princes were required to appear in “traditional” Indian royal dress as a marker of their historically-rooted rule. They also, however, became exemplars of the “Western” and “modern” change that British-Indian collaboration brought to the subcontinent, as they facilitated the establishment of hospitals and schools in India. By the time of the 1924 Empire Exhibition, Frank Carpenter was contrasting the “extremely backward” princes with the “notably progressive” rulers who had been “educated abroad, at Paris, or in England.”

The “modern” implements of princely states demonstrated both their official dedication to the Raj government and their deviations from “feudal” and autocratic political systems. Late nineteenth-century travelers in India evidenced the fragility of displays that insisted upon a stringent demarcation between princely states and Britain’s modernity, as well as upper-class Indian princes and lower-class “natives.” During his visits to several palaces of Indian princes, Henry Lucy evinced his discomfort with signs of Indian acculturation to British cultures. While touring the Maharajah’s palace in Benares, Lucy recognized his own immense interest in the “Oriental” signifiers of Indian antiquity and exotism. Lucy, however, regarded his tour of the palace as “a very poor affair” because it did not represent a purely “authentic” image of India’s upper-

240 See, for example, Cohn, Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India, 128-129, about the 1911 Durbar.
242 Frank Carpenter, From Bangkok to Bombay (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1924), 253.
class, timeless princely past. The courtyard, for instance, did not distance itself spatially
from the lower-class Indians, as it was “flanked on either side by shabby huts.”244 In
addition, Lucy felt that “French musical boxes” and “the importation of glass chandeliers
with coloured globes and furniture from Tottenham Court Road” in London transgressed
the boundaries of Orient and Occident, antiquity and modernity, by associating European
consumption and decor with a native palace.245 The palace of the Maharajah at Jeypore
also disappointed Lucy because it was “apparently built in emulation of a modern hotel at
Margate-of-the-Sea.” Lucy concluded that “there is nothing in India more pitiful than
these ill-disciplined endeavours of historical princes to graft European furniture upon
oriental life.”246 Lucy’s insistent assertion of the perpetual “tradition” of princes
illuminated the contradictions of imperial constructs based on dichotomies, such as
“tradition” and “modernity.”

As the governance of the Raj evolved into the early twentieth century, the rule of
the hereditary, “feudal” prince became less compatible with constitutional political
reform. The declaration of gradual self-governance in India by Edwin Montagu in 1917,
and the adoption of a constitutional model by 1919, rejected the old “durbar” model of
governance, which was based on the continuation of India’s fixed social order, separate
provinces, and “natural” leaders.247 Since the establishment of the 1858 Raj government,
the “feudal” governance of princely autocracy, at the apogee of India’s unchanging
hierarchies, contrasted with the supposedly enlightened Raj government in British-Indian
territories and its promise of eventual constitutional development. Even as Indian princes

244 Lucy, East by West, 237.
245 Ibid., 238-239.
246 Ibid., 311.
247 Metcalf and Metcalf, A Concise History of India, 133 and 165.
endured as the collaborative bulwark for British rule in India, the 1919 constitutional reforms excluded the constitutional development of princely states and thus contrasted them even more from British-administered provinces. As the British Empire *Survey* supplement to the 1924 Empire Exhibition explained, “The [1919] Constitutional changes affect British India only, and the creation of a Chamber of Princes recognises but in no way impairs the status of the ruling princes of India.”

The administration of and princely exhibits in the 1924 Empire Exhibition mirrored these changes in the elite leadership of the Raj government and their acknowledgement of Indian “similarity.” The 1919 reforms incorporated middle-class Indians into government structures. The 1924 Empire Exhibition gave these middle-class Indians administrative power over provincial exhibits, deviating from the administration of previous exhibitions by British officials of the Indian Office and Government of India. It also reduced princely displays. The 1924 Empire Exhibition abandoned the reconstructed durbar of previous exhibitions and rather represented the semi-independent states through their display of handmade objects. The representation of princely states solely through objects and the architecture of the Indian Pavilion de-emphasized the enduring tradition of India’s semi-independent states and their political alliances with the British government. The *Times* described the administrative power of princes, as well as their travels across imperial boundaries and spectatorship at exhibitions. One article remarked upon the extensive contribution of Indian states to the exhibition, as well as one prince who came from Paris to observe, rather than be observed in, the opening of Indian

---

exhibits. However, the decline of the imperial durbar, both within India and in British Exhibitions, mirrored the political rise of educated, middle-class Indians.

Class Divisions

The rise of western-educated Indian elites within the Indian National Congress and even within the ranks of the Raj’s provincial governments by the inter-war period contributed to the decline of the princely “durbar model” of government. It also segregated them further from lower-class Indian “natives.” The spatial segregation of Indian “natives” within simulated bazaars, villages, and cultural performances in the exhibitions therefore reinforced their racial and social difference from princely elites as well as Indian administrators. In India, the divide between middle-class Indians and lower-class Indians evolved in the early twentieth century with the growth of the Indian National Congress, its emphasis on the ‘nation’ rather than separate communities, and elite Indian participation in Raj governance. After the economic devastation of the First World War, for example, class-based protests occurred from 1920-1922, specific to peasant grievances rather than nationalist concerns. Indian elites of the Indian National Congress, however, did not support such lower class-based and communal movements, favoring the identity of the nation in order to attain self-rule.

In the exhibitions, elite Indians increasingly gained administrative power, separating them from the local “natives” on display. Comprador elite Indians consulted on the exhibitions, but by the 1924 Empire Exhibition they administered provincial exhibits. Upper-status Indians such as T.N. Mukharji and M.M. Bhownaggree, who

---

helped to construct and oversee the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, differentiated their status from the Indians on display. Although these Indians supported empire, British officials did not officially put them on display because of their elite status as western-educated and reforming Indians. Their colonial acculturation problematized representations of Indian “difference” as depicted through lower-class Indian “natives” and upper-status Indian princes. One of the 1886 Colonial and Indian administrators who collected economic products for display, T.N. Mukharji, challenged the homogeneity of the racialized “Othering” of colonial subjects within London, for example, by distinguishing himself from lower-class Indian colonial subjects and black Africans of the Exhibition. Mukharji referred to the models of the Indian Economic Court as part of an “aboriginal race” because they represented a lesser racial status. In addition, Mukharji criticized the arbitrary labeling of “coloured” colonial peoples as “natives” believing that “We were never ‘natives before’” but “We are all ‘natives’ now—We poor Indians.” Representations of India within monolithic racialized depictions in exhibitions and travel books presented an imperial illusion that could be complicated and challenged by colonial narratives of contestation and competing identities, such as class, within Indian society.

Indian administrators, though not officially part of the exhibitions, also became subject to the gaze of non-colonial spectators, who viewed these elite Indians as part of the exhibitionary space. In 1908, the Times noted that in the Agricultural Hall of colonial village environments, “Many of the [colonial] stewards in charge of various courts of the

251 Metcalf and Metcalf, A Concise History of India, 183-185.
252 Mukharji, A Visit to Europe, 76.
253 Mukharji, A Visit to Europe, 132.
exhibition are also attired in appropriate costumes.”

T.N. Mukharji contrasted his upper-class status with that of the lower classes of India. But at the same time, he recognized that Europeans viewed him as part of the imperial spectacle and, as such, just another one of the “natives:” “We were very interesting beings no doubt.” When he discussed the Indian bazaar scenes, Mukharji identified with the Indians on display, as he felt that he had become part of the colonial spectacle: “we were pierced through and through by stares from eyes of all colours.”

T.N. Mukharji’s simultaneous identification with the “natives” on display and his attempts to distinguish himself from these lower-class Indians demonstrates the broader tensions of British representations of colonial India. The imperial exhibitions depicted Indian “difference” but also increasingly included the similarity of elite Indians who helped construct and who observed the exhibitions. Indians not only shaped the construction of each exhibition, they observed and offered alternative meanings to the official narrative of colonial displays. All the exhibitions, nonetheless, displayed Indian “natives” within village and bazaars settings and through exotic performances that signified India’s social and cultural difference.

---

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to illustrate that although the historiography of exhibitions has demonstrated the various political meanings of cultural displays, comparative studies of exhibitions elucidate the particularities of colonial relationships over time. With the available sources, this study has also attempted to problematize the hierarchies depicted within exhibitions, while also recognizing that they were constructed by and for imperial powers. At all three exhibitions, colonial displays primarily depicted India’s “difference” from Britain in terms of its enduring “tradition” and racial degeneracy, but this paradoxically co-existed with at least some display of Indian “modernity,” especially by the 1924 Empire Exhibition.

The administrators of the exhibitions attempted to manage indications of India’s modernization through simultaneous displays of India’s enduring ties to “traditional” socio-cultural systems. They, nevertheless, could not wholly control the reception of Indian displays, the alternative meanings they signified, or the ways that Indians shaped exhibits on their own terms. As Chapter One argues, the exhibitions simulated travel through space and time through their architecture and spatial landscapes, projecting the subordinate political status of colonies within the empire and their distance from British modernity. India’s link to a feudal past in its princely architecture and its ties to pre-industrial villages and bazaars separated India from the modernity of the metropole, but at the same time the exhibitions increasingly positioned India close to the Dominion buildings and granted Indians administration over exhibits. As discussed in Chapter Two, the image of the Indian village represented India’s unchanging rural and
agricultural socio-economic systems of a British past at the same time that it contrasted with the problems of British industrialization. The Indian bazaar, as well, conveyed the commercial entrepreneurship of Indian merchant administrators as well as India’s pre-industrial economy. Chapter Three examined the cultural entrenchment of Indian “natives” into the “primitive” conditions of villages and the racial degeneracy of cultural performances, but it also elucidated the nuances of such ethnographic displays. The material representations of Indian princes linked India to a “feudal” past of the Mughal Empire but also demonstrated the official power of Indian princes within the Raj. Indian elites who helped administer the exhibits problematized the racial “Othering” of Indians as constructed in the exhibitions.

The visible signs of Indian modernity and the importance of middle class Indians to the Raj government in the inter-war period also challenged the supposed racial difference of Indians and engendered visible changes in cultural representations of India at the 1924 Empire Exhibition. By the 1924 Empire Exhibition, British administrators could no longer exclude India’s economic and political progress whilst emphasizing its unchanging ethnography and pre-industrial economy. The Exhibition acknowledged India’s new political status and path towards modernity. It also retained markers for visitors to easily identify the hierarchies of empire and position India as an integral colony. Although the 1924 British Empire Exhibition displayed Indian industry and recognized India’s transformed political status, it also offered a spectacle of “authentic” Indian bazaars, trading staples, and local societies. These displays constructed the Exhibition as a simulated tour through the Empire, distinguishing colonial India from the exhibits of British modernity. The Exhibition thus recognized India’s modern progress,
but also continued to depict imperial hierarchies that would establish India’s necessary attachment to the Empire. Exhibitions did not resolve the contradictions of imperial rule. The persistence of Indian nationalism during and after the 1924 Empire Exhibition demonstrated that the 1919 Government of India Act did not manage or repress the demands of Indian nationalists. Indian nationalists of the inter-war period reimagined the Indian “village.” Rather than associating it with India’s necessary colonization, they used it as a reason for Indian independence. Mohandas Gandhi and his followers altered the image of the craftsman and the peasant to symbolize that Indian “difference” necessitated the rejection of British modernity and industry.\footnote{Mathur, \textit{India by Design}, 50.} Gandhian nationalists put forth the notion of an ideal life based on a simple society centered on the traditional Indian village. Such nationalist strategies embraced positive notions of Indian “tradition” and illuminated the exploitive processes of British imperialism.

The Gandhian imaginings of Indian “difference,” like the exhibitions, co-existed and contrasted with promotions of India’s similarity to modern Britain. While Gandhi rejected British modernity in its entirety, “westernized” Indian nationalists proclaimed India’s ability to adopt and identify with the material elements of British modernity, such as its state formation and economic growth, and thus resisted colonial ideology that defined India as the different “Other.” As Partha Chatterjee explains, these Indian nationalists demonstrated India’s “material” modernity at the same time that they displayed “the marks of ‘essential’ cultural difference so as the keep out the colonizer from that inner domain of national life and to proclaim its sovereignty over it.”\footnote{Ibid., 26.}
The tensions between imperial notions of India’s fundamental “difference” and potential “similarity” to modern Britain became manifest in the Indian nationalist movement as well as in British exhibitions of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. With the First World War, ideas of Indian “difference” became even more difficult to evince as justifications for British rule in India. Although ideologies about Indian “difference” became more stringent and racialized after the 1858 establishment of the Raj, they continued to co-exist with Indian “similarity” both within British India and in the exhibitions.
Bibliography

Primary Sources:


London: William Clowes and Sons, 1887.

Scarborough, Harold E. “An Empire in Miniature. Special Correspondence from Harold E. Scarborough.” *Outlook* 137, no. 7 (June 18, 1924): 278-280.


Newspapers and Periodicals:


*New India* (Madras). April, 1924.


Secondary Works:


Levell, Nicky. Oriental Visions: Exhibitions, Travel, and Collecting in the Victorian


Ramusack, Barbara. “The Indian Princes as Fantasy: Palace Hotels, Palace Museums,


VITA

Alayna Wilburn

Date and Place of Birth:

Educational Institutions Attended and Degrees Awarded:
Western Kentucky University (2002-2006), B.A.
University of Kentucky (Fall, 2006-present), M.A. in progress

Professional Positions Held:
Tutor for Western Kentucky University History Department (2005-2006).
Notetaker for a Western Civilization Course at Western Kentucky University (2005).
University of Kentucky Teaching Assistantship (2007-2008).
University of Kentucky History Graduate Student Association Secretary (2007-2008).

Scholastic and Professional Honors:
A.M. Stickles Memorial Scholarship Award, Western Kentucky University History Department (2005-2006).
Western Kentucky University Honors Program Research Grant (2005-2006).
Western Kentucky University Arndt M. Stickles History Award for Graduating Senior (2006).
Western Kentucky University WorldTopper Study Abroad Scholarship (2006).
University of Kentucky Graduate School Academic Year Fellowship (2006-2007).