Title: Enlightenment and Empire, Mughals and Marathas: The Religious History of Indian in the Work of East India Company Servant, Alexander Dow.

Abstract: *This article situates the work of East India Company servant Alexander Dow (1735-1779), principally his writings on the history and future state of India, in contemporary debates about empire, religion and enlightened government. To do so it offers a sustained analysis of his 1772 essay "A Dissertation Concerning the Origin and Nature of Despotism in Hindostan", as well as his proposals for the restoration of Bengal, both of which played an influential part in shaping the preoccupations with Mughal history that dominated the contemporary crisis in the Company's legitimacy. By linking these texts to his earlier work on 'Hindoo' religion, it will argue that Dow's analysis of the relationship between certain religious cultures and their civic qualities was rooted in a deist perspective. It doing so it restores the enlightenment components of Dow's thought, and their impact on the ideology of empire, in a crucial period of British expansion in India.*

Keywords: Empire, Enlightenment, India, Eighteenth Century, East India Company, Religion

Historians are increasingly concerned with the Enlightenment's extra-European context.[1] In particular, recognising that international commerce and exchange were its material context, scholars have turned their attention to Enlightenment attitudes to empire. For Sankar Muthu this has meant tracing anti-imperialist strands of enlightenment thought.[2] This turn necessarily grapples with Edward Said's critique that the Enlightenment, expressed as Orientalism, was inextricably connected to the practices of European colonialism.[3] And yet, while scholars have pointed to the lack of historical analysis underlying Said's theory, the historical study of the ideological formation of empire in the eighteenth century is a relatively new field in intellectual history.[4] David Armitage's suggestion that we understand the various conceptions of British Empire as emerging from 'the competitive context of political argument', has steadily become reflected in studies like Robert Travers' account of the ideology of empire in eighteenth-century India.[5] This article will build on this approach, exploring the intersection of enlightenment thought and empire in the work of Alexander Dow, an East India Company servant and orientalist, whose work was utilised by both defenders and critics of empire.[6] Demonstrating that his particular approach to India's history was rooted in religious heterodoxy, it argues that Dow's account of empire was neither simply an ideological expression of coercive power, nor a benign cultural encounter, but rather the product of a complex intellectual engagement with enlightenment thought, Indian history and Company policy.

Dow is a neglected, but central figure in the intellectual history of British rule in India. His loose translation of Firishta's history of Muslim India was published in 1768 under the title *The History of Hindostan*. The different editions of the *History* appeared at prescient moments in the expansion of British rule in India, affixed to which were several dissertations containing research on 'the religion of the Hindoos', as well as Dow's assessments of Company politics. In the 1772 second edition, writing in the aftermath of the Bengal famine,

[1] See for example, Charles W. J. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
[2] Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire,* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).
[3] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism,* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 78.
[4] Edmund Burke III & David Prochaska (eds.), *Genealogies of Orientalism: History, Theory, Politics,* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 6-9.
[5] David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5; Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[6] Dow was used by the defence in the impeachment trial of Warren Hasting, a fact admonished by Burke here, A. Bond (ed) *Speeches of the Managers and Counsel in the Trial of Warren Hastings*, Vol. 4, (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1861), 787; Kate Marsh, *India in the French Imagination: Peripheral Voices, 1754-1815,* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 127.

Dow joined 'the current of public opinion' writing to criticize the Company's mismanagement of the region.[7] Warren Hastings was sent a copy of Dow's text 'reeking from the press' by John Macpherson, who assumed that it would be the first copy in India.[8] Finally, in 1792 a third edition was published posthumously, anticipating the Cornwallis Code of 1793, otherwise known as the Permanent Settlement of Bengal.

While Dow remains generally understudied, Ranajit Guha offers the most thorough engagement with his 1772 writings. Noting that Dow's plan for restoring Bengal emphasized property as a means towards establishing a favorable balance of trade and ready supply of specie, Guha describes Dow as a 'philosopher mercantilist'.[9] Shifting focus, Travers extends these insights towards recognizing Dow's contribution to contemporary disputes on the nature of the Mughal constitution, against which arguments about legal precedent could be attached and contested.[10] This article will enrich our knowledge of Dow further, noting that despite being a consistent theme in all of the editions of the *History*, Dow's religious perspective has been overlooked. This, it will argue, was firmly rooted in enlightenment thought and fundamental to his understanding of India. This rests on a refinement of the idea, suggested by some Indological scholarship, that Dow wrote about Hinduism from a 'deist' perspective. Proposed only briefly in Wilhelm Halbfass's 'philosophical essay' on India and Europe, and P.J. Marshall's introduction to an anthology of extracts from eighteenth-century accounts of Hinduism, Dow's deism requires further explanation.[11] This essay will set out to establish more clearly Dow's particular approach to religious matters, demonstrating how his interpretation of Indian philosophy and history were interwoven with enlightenment concepts regarding religious development and the state. It therefore aims to look at Dow's though across the spectrum of his work, seeing his reflections of Mughal empire and British rule as connected to his work on 'Hindoo' religion.

By recasting Dow's proposals as a product of religious heterodoxy, this essay offers a fuller picture of the eighteenth-century intellectual context in which the ideology of empire was formulated, contested and utilized. Like Muthu, this proceeds from an attempt to

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[7] Alexander Dow *The History of Hindostan,* vol.3, (London, 1772), xl.
[8] John Macpherson to Hastings, Madras, 12th October 1772, BL Add. MSS 29133 fo.262.
[9] Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement,* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1982 [1963]); 21.
[10] Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire*, vii, 62-65.
[11] Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), 56; P.J. Marshall, *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century,* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1970).

overcome the reduction of the Enlightenment to a ‘project’, which ought to be extolled, or condemned as exposing its oppressive impulses in empire.[12] Rather than the homogenous ‘Enlightenment rationality’ implied in critiques of Orientalism, it points to the ad hoc nature of Dow’s thought, which drew on a range of intellectual sources, central to which was religious heterodoxy.[13] Dow, who was no great thinker, but certainly aspired to be included in the world of letters, turns our attention from the central enlightenment figures who form the basis of Muthu’s inquiries, to the operations of this intellectual culture in a different field of eighteenth-century society, and in the more immediate context of empire.[14] It therefore argues that this intellectual environment is obscured by the a structural analysis, which while useful for assessing the developing relationship between Oriental knowledge and power in the formation of British colonialism, distorts the attempts of writers like Dow to comprehend their immediate political context.

The following will begin with an account of Dow as a writer, and his particular interpretation of ‘Hindoo religion’, turning then to an interpretation of his religious thought as it pertains to his reflections of the Mughal Empire and the history of Muslim India. This is followed by an interpretation of what Dow saw as the political manifestation of the ‘Hindoo religion’, in the form of the Marathas. Lastly, the article will turn to a consideration of the association between these aspects of Dow’s approach and the policies of the East India Company in the remainder of the eighteenth century.

## I Deism and Hinduism

Alexander Dow’s biographical trajectory is divided between the pursuit of literary fame and frustrated career in the East India Company. In 1757, leaving an apprenticeship in Eyemouth with the notorious smuggling family, the Nesbits, Dow joined the *King of Prussia*, a private ship of war, as a midshipman.[15] Dow entered the Company’s military service in Bengal in 1760 and in 1764 was appointed captain. After participating in the officers' association to

[12] Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire,* 338.
[13] For a discussion of homogenising terminology in critiques of Orientalism see Sumit Sarkar, “Orientalism Revisted: Saidian Frameworks in Modern Indian History”, in Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed.), *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial,* (London: Verso, 2012), 239-255, 240.
[14] Muthu’s considers Kant, Diderot and Hegel.
[15] Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee (eds.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol.5. (London: Oxford University Press, [1949-50]), 1287; Dow’s will on departure names the Nesbit brothers as the sole beneficiaries, TNA: PRO, PROB 11/1091, no. 277.

protest against Clive's measure to abolish the double field allowance (1766), Dow found himself stripped of his position.[16] His military career frustrated, Dow wrote to the Company's Board of Directors requesting a new position on account of 'the progress he has made in the oriental tongues, and his knowledge of the political state of Hindostan'.[17] Unsuccessful in these appeals, he turned his attention to literary fame.

Dow's literary turn occurred during the period in which he was sharing London lodgings with James Macpherson, between 1768-69. This was included in the period when the authenticity of Macpherson's collection of translated Gaelic poems, supposedly found in texts dating to Scotland's early dark ages, was still the subject of a heated debate. As well as Macpherson, Dow certainly had connections in Enlightenment world of 'Letters'. David Hume's surviving letters reveal that he and Dow were correspondents, for whom 'a discussion over an evening fire' was not unfamiliar.[18] Indeed, it appears that Dow and Macpherson were frequent visitors to Hume's lodgings in Brewer Street, London.[19] While in London, as well as a collection of Oriental tales, Dow published the first edition of *The History of Hindostan* in 1768.[20] It included an essay, titled 'A Dissertation Concerning the Customs, Manners, Language, Religion and Philosophy of the Hindoos'.[21] This account of what Dow termed the *Hindoo* or Brahmin religion caught the imagination of the public. The *Monthly Review* remarked that Dow had 'gained a more accurate knowledge of the religion and philosophy of the Brahmins, than any who have preceded him'.[22] The dissertation was translated into French and published in Paris the following year (1769), as was a partial translation of the *History*, which was what won Dow the attention of Voltaire.[23]

Indeed, it was the dearth of material relating to India's religions that Dow capitalised on when making his own claims to authority. He dismissed existing literature as 'fiction'

[16] Willem G. J. Kuiters, 'Dow, Alexander (1735/6–1779)' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* (Oxford University Press, January 03, 2008). Dow appeared as a witness for plaintiff Captain John Neville Parker in 1769, who brought the charge against Clive that he had illegally detained him to await court-martial following the protest: BL Mss Eur F128/117.
[17] Dow's Letter to the Court of Directors, Nov18th, 1768, IOR/E/I/51, 232-232v.
[18] Hume to Alexander Dow. 1772. In *The Letters of David Hume,* ed. J.Y.T. Greig, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932) vol.ii, Letter 480, p.267.
[19] Detailed in the memoirs of Dow's footman, John Macdonald, *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-century Footman 1745-1779,* (London: George Routledge and sons, 1927), p.38. The book was originally titled *Travels* and first published in 1790, but did not receive much attention, pp.38-39.
[20] Alexander Dow, *Tales, Translated from the Persian of Inatulla of Delhi*, (London, 1768), iii. A loose translation of The *Bahar-i Danish* by 17th century Persian writer Shaikh Inayat-Allah Kamboh (1608–1671).
[21] Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindostan,* vol.1, (London, 1768), xxi-lxix, lv.
[22] *The Monthly Review, or Literary Journal,* July, 39 (London, 1768), 377-387, 377.
[23] Alexander Dow, *Dissertation sur les Moeurs, les Usages, le Langage, la Religion et la Philosophie des Hindous,* trans. Claude-François Bergier, (Paris, 1769); Alexander Dow *Fragment de l'histoire de l'Indostan,* s.n. (Paris, 1769); Kate Marsh, *India in the French Imagination,* (Oxford, 2016), 116-118.

composed by travellers with a 'talent for fable', limited to observation of 'external ceremonies' only.[24] By contrast, Dow claimed unique insight due to his mastery of Persian and Bengali. Lacking a knowledge of Sanskrit, however, Dow claimed that he had gained knowledge of the religion via 'a Pundit, from the University of Benaris', as well as important *Hindoo* manuscripts.[25] The account itself features translations of what are supposed to be excerpts from religious scriptures, the original language or location of which is left ambiguous. In fact, the manuscript deposited by the Dow in the British Museum, which he labelled an important religious text, is actually a collection of different fragmentary texts in Sanskrit and Bengali.[26] It seems more likely that the accurate features of Dow's discussion are a product of unnamed Persian sources and uncredited conversations with Brahmin scholars. The resulting description is a deliberate construction of 'Hindoo' religion, assembled from a mixture of genuine Indian philosophical concepts and a large dose of Dow's own religious preoccupation with eighteenth-century natural religion.

Dow's account is often cited as evidence of a general trend towards more sympathetic accounts of Hinduism, typified by the work of more well-known eighteenth-century Orientalists like William Jones.[27] In contrast to earlier accounts, which tended to paint Indian religion as idolatrous and polytheistic, these later writers argued for the sophistication of Brahmin scriptures and concepts. Dow had indeed concluded that 'the Brahmins, contrary to the ideas formed of them in the west, invariably believe in the unity, eternity, omniscience and omnipotence of God' and 'that the polytheism of which they have been accused, is no more than a symbolical worship of the divine attributes'. In fact, for Dow, 'common sense on the affairs of religion is pretty much equally divided among all nations'.[28] Against the backdrop of enlightenment thinkers' increasing interest in non-European religions as a counter-weight to Christian orthodoxy and biblical history, it is this defence of the reasonableness of 'the Brahmin religion' that has led scholars like Marshall and Halbfass to suggest that Dow was a deist.[29] And yet, more recent challenges to our understandings of

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[24] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* vol.1, (1768) xx.
[25] Ibid., xxi.
[26] C. Bendall, *Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the British Museum,* (London: British Museum, 1902), p.147. Catalogued in the British Museum as Add. 4830; now in the British Library's Oriental MSS collection as: Add 4830. The collection of Sanskrit fragments bears the title, written in English, "The Neadrisen Shaster" With 'Alex Dow' written next to it.
[27] Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
[28] Alexander Dow, *History of Hindostan,* vol.1 (1768) xxii, lxviil-xviii.
[29] Joan-Pau Rubiés, 'From Christian Apologetics to Deism Libertine Readings of Hinduism, 1650–1730', in William J. Bulman and Robert G. Ingram, (eds.), *God in the Enlightenment,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 107-135, at 108; Halbfass, *India and Europe,* 56.

what deism means has led historians to talk of ‘multiple deisms and diverse heterodoxies’, rather than designate deism a simple signifier.[30] Dow was certainly not a deist defined according to the terms of resulting studies, which have focused on the participation of notable English deists in discourses on theology and natural philosophy in the high intellectual culture of the seventeenth and early-eighteenth century.[31] Yet Dow, who was neither a philosopher nor a theologian, is evidence of the wider dissemination of deist ideas in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Comparative studies of religious concepts and histories was a central feature of English deism. Both Toland and Tindal, constructed historical narratives in which contemporary ‘religion’ appears the corrupt shadow of an original monotheistic faith already revealed to Confucius, Zoroaster, Socrates, and Plato.[32] Moreover their promotion of critical biblical hermeneutics is seen to have prompted an alternative history and anthropology of positive religion.[33] For many deist writers the descent from pure and reasonable religion to superstition occurred via the mechanism of priestcraft.[34] At the same time, European encounters with non-Christian religious beliefs in this period were always closely aligned with arguments about the status of Christianity. Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhardt’s study of Bernard’s *Religious Ceremonies of the World* (1723-1737) concludes that its comparative approach to world religions ‘sowed the radical idea that religions could be compared on equal terms’.[35] Building on this, Joan-Pau Rubiés has argued that Bernard’s ‘Deistic brand of religious libertinism’ represents an important evolution in European attitudes to eastern religion, described as a transition from ‘comparative antiquarian apologetics’ to a ‘comparative libertine anthropology of religion’.[36] In the eighteenth century, with the expansion of the European presence in South Asia, descriptions of sophisticated eastern religious philosophies began to seep into the intellectual culture of the Enlightenment and

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[30] Wayne Hudson, *Enlightenment and Modernity: The English Deists and Reform*, (London: Routledge, 2009), 7.
[31] Wayne Hudson, Diego Lucci, Jeffery R. Wigelsworth, eds., *Atheism and Deism Revalued: Heterodox Religious Identities in Britain, 1650-1800,* (Oxford: Ashgate, 2014); Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth, *Deism in Enlightenment England: Theology, Politics and Newtonian Public Science,* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2009).
[32] Halbfass, *India and Europe,* 56.
[33] Diego Lucci, *Scripture and Deism: The Biblical Criticism of the Eighteenth-Century British Deists,* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 260.
[34] What James A. Herrick labels ‘Primitive Religion and the Priestcraft Hypothesis’ in, *The Radical Rhetoric of the English Deists: The discourse of scepticism 1680-1750*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 32.
[35] Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, Wijnad Mijnhardt, *The Book that Changed Europe: Picard and Bernard’s Religious Ceremonies of the World*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1.
[36] Rubiés, ‘From Christian Apologetics’, 127, 108.

Voltaire, along with many others, turned his attention to India.[37] In common with the English deists, these accounts tended to make the distinction between an original pristine and natural religion, often preserved by learned elites, and the superstitious practices and beliefs of common people.[38]

This vision of the decline of original religion into superstition also appeared in the work of Dow's cohabitant. Macpherson's disputed *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland* (1760) explored natural religion, as well as expressing an equivocal approach to the Druids, whom it cast both as priestly manipulators, as well as symbols of the sophistication of Celtic culture.[39] In Macpherson's commentary on Ossian's poems he notes that the Druids were known for philosophising and living 'after the Pythagorean manner'.[40] This echoes one of Macpherson's sources, deist think John Toland's *History of the Druids* (1726), which condemns the Druid's general role as priests, but also highlights the importance of the Druid *Abaris,* implying the possibility that he had influenced Pythagoras.[41] This was a model emulated by Dow in his account of the Brahmins, the introduction to which begins with the lamentation that 'the writers of Greece and Rome did not extend their enquiries to the religion and philosophy of the Druids' as a justification of his explorations into the ancient knowledge held in India.[42] Dow is also firm that Pythagorean notions of transmigration were 'descended from the Druids of Europe, to the Greeks'.[43] And yet, despite decisively locating the source of Hindoo learning and wisdom with these pandits, Dow was also a firm critic of the influence of the Brahmins 'and their characters as priests', echoing Macpherson's summation of the Druids as 'cunning and ambitious priests'.[44] In the essays this results in a regular differentiation between the 'learned' Brahmins and the priestcraft practising 'unlearned part of the Brahmins', who encouraged the irrational customs of contemporary *Hindoos*.[45]

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[37] See Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 37.
[38] P.J. Marshall, Glyn Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: Perceptions of New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment,* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1982), 104.
[39] Burton Feldman & Robert D. Richardson Jr, *The Rise of Modern Mythology: 1680-1860,* (Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1972), 202.
[40] James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian,* (London, 1803), 90.
[41] John Toland, *History of the Celtic Religion and Learning Containing an Account of the Druids*, (Edinburgh: Finlay, 1815), 197. On Toland's approach to *Abaris,* see Justin Champion, "John Toland, the Druids, and the Politics of Celtic Scholarship" *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 32, no. 127, (2001), 321–342.
[42] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* vol.1, (1768), xxi.
[43] Dow, *The History of Hindostan,* vol.i, (1768), 1.
[44] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* vol.1, (1768), xxxv; James Macpherson, *An Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland,* (London, 1772), 6.
[45] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* vol.1 (1768), xxxvii.

This basic narrative of original purity and priestly corruption, is what framed Dow's account of Indian religion. His understanding of what he considered the core of *Hindoo* religion centred on a basic division between two principles 'sects' or Schools known as 'the *Bedang*' and 'the *Neadrisen*'. These refer to two of the recognised six orthodox schools of Brahmanical philosophy, Vedānta and Nyāya.[46] Vedānta is concerned with knowledge and insight and based its doctrines on interpretations of the final section of Vedic literature known as the *Upaniṣads*. Nyāya, on the other hand, means 'that by which one is led to a conclusion' or 'correct reasoning' and is often referred to as 'the science of reasoning' (*tarkaśātra*). [47] According to Dow's reading, the *Bendag,* the older and more orthodox school 'receive, as an article of their belief, every holy legend and allegory which have been transmitted down from antiquity'. In contrast, the *Neadrisen*, 'look up to the divinity, through the medium of reason and philosophy'. From the very beginning Dow views Indian religious history and development as analogous to Europe's division between received and rational religion, since according to Dow, this division occurs 'In India, as well as in many other countries'.[48]

Beyond this, more heterodox European religious concepts also shaped Dow's work, with deist understandings of the nature of belief and God providing a framework for his account of Nyāya philosophy. Dow suggests, for example, that the author of the *Neadirsin* religious text, in contrast to the authors of the *Bedang* texts*,* 'does not begin to reason, *a priori*', but rather 'considers the present state of nature, and the intellectual faculties, as far as they can be investigated by human reason; and from thence he draws all his conclusions'.[49] In the following description of the *Neadrisen,* Dow deals with the question of Providence, one of the central theological issues that occupied eighteenth century religious debate. Dow's account of the Nyāya position bears a remarkable resemblance to the religion of many of the English deists, who contrary to the popular view that they outright rejected it, maintained the possibility of God's intervention so as not to impede his omnipotence, but 'denied contemporary active providence'.[50] This is the same position Dow attributes to the *Neadrisen*: 'with respect to providence, though he cannot deny the possibility of its existence,

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[46] Richard King, *Indian Philosophy, an Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1988), 42.
[47] Sibajiban Bhattacharyya, *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization*: *Development of Nyaya Philosophy and its Social Context,* vol.3, part 3, (Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2004), 106.
[48] Alexander Dow, *History of Hindostan,* vol.1, (1768), lxviii.
[49] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* vol.1, (1768), lii.
[50] Wigelsworth, *Deism in Enlightenment England*, 207.

without divesting God of his omnipotence, he supposes that the deity never exerts that power, but that he remains in eternal rest, taking no concern, neither in human affairs, nor in the course of the operations of nature'.[51] These examples suggest that in interpreting Indian religion, Dow was deeply concerned with advocating a particular position in eighteenth-century British religious discourses, the outcomes of which were congruent with deist positions.

The most convincing case for considering Dow's thought as fundamentally connected to deism, however, is the fact that Dow himself used the category in his own analysis of India's religions. He refers to the Sikhs as 'followers of a certain philosopher of Thibet who taught the idea of a commonwealth, and the pure doctrine of Deism, without any mixture of the Mahommedan or Hindoo superstitions'.[52] Dow's confusion about the origins of Sikhism is not surprising, given there was very little knowledge of either religious tradition in Europe at the time. British interest in Sikhism intensified in the 1780s, when Sikhs were becoming a real threat to Mughal Imperial possessions, with the first published accounts in Britain not appearing until 1788.[53] Dow's designation of the Sikhs as followers of 'pure Deism' is not elaborated in his text, but it is a notion repeated in in later works. Nineteenth-century Orientalists like Quentin Crauford, for example, used Dow's phrase 'pure deism' to describe Sikhism as a system of belief in a single creator god, following basic moral precepts consistent with natural religion.[54] While in this instance Dow appears to link the Sikh's deism to their political commitment to a commonwealth, his other application of the term relates to an entirely different polity: the Mughal empire. That is, the third Mughal ruler in India, Akbar (Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar) who Dow judged to have been one of that empire's greatest stateman. According to Dow's description Akbar was 'totally divested of those prejudices for his own religion' as was his son, Jahangir, who was 'brought up a deist under the tuition of his father'.[55] In this case deism is a feature of tolerant government and a successful empire.

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[51] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* vol.1, (1768), lxv.
[52] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* vol.2, (1768), 82.
[53] Major James Browne, *India Tracts,* (London, 1788); Charles Wilkins, 'Observations on the Seeks and their College at Patna' [1781], *Asiatick Researches 1* (1788), 288-294; For more on early accounts see Ganda Singh, ed., *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, (Calcutta: Indian Studies: Past & Present, 1962), 53-69.
[54] Quintin Crauford, *Researches Concerning the Law, Theology, Learning, Commerce, etc. of Ancient and Modern India*, (London, 1817), 337.
[55] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), xxv, 103-104.

## II- Islam, India and Mughals

Just as Dow's interest in the religion of the *Hindoos* was shaped by eighteenth-century religious concepts and debates, so too was his interpretation of India's history and government. In *Spirit of the Laws* Montesquieu offers his sweeping survey of the world's different religions not as a theologian but as 'one who writes about politics'. Rather than their proximity to divine truth, each religious creed is assessed 'only in relation to the good to be drawn from them in the civil state'.[56] This is the approach adopted by Dow in 'A Dissertation Concerning the Origin and Nature of Despotism in Hindostan'. Designated by Guha a 'highly representative specimen' of orientalism, when understood through lens of his general preoccupation with the civic quality of religions, Dow's 1772 essays offer a richer and more complex problematic.[57] At its center was the question of the relationship between religion and government. Dow's notion of deism is thus central to his analysis of government, politics and civil society.

The text begins by rehearsing Montesquieu's contention that a country's climate and geography affects the temperament and customs of its inhabitants, noting that 'The languor occasioned by the hot climate of India, inclines the native to indolence and ease'.[58] Next, following Montesquieu's related proposition that all Asian governments are despotic, Dow offers his hypothesis that the 'faith of Mahommed is peculiarly calculated for despotism'.[59] Dow regarded the Qur'an, which had been translated from Arabic to English in 1734 by George Sale, a flawed legal document.[60]This was a pervasive idea, captured by the fact that in Sale's translation the Prophet Muhammad is frequently referred to as the 'legislator', which Dow repeated.[61] Thus, it was the legal precepts of Islam that Dow judged to have had a significant effect on the social and political mores of its followers. Of particular concern was 'The law of compensation for murder', since 'A religion which indulges individuals in crime, at which the rest of mankind shudder, leaves ample room for the cruelty of a prince'.[62] This dismissal of Islam as a corrupt legal code also rested on the widespread notion that the

[56] Charles Louis Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), ed. Anne Cohler, Basia Miller and Harold Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Part 5, Book 24, Chapter 1, 459.
[57] Guha, *A Rule of Property*, 26.
[58] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), vii.
[59] Ibid., xiii.
[60] Olive Classe, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Literary Translation into English: A-L*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 63.
[61] Ziad Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an: The Politics of Translation and the Construction of Islam,* (London: One World Publications, 2009), 24.
[62] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), xiii, xv-xvi.

prophet Mohammed was an imposter.[63] Voltaire's play, *Le Fanatisme ou Mahomet le prophète* (1742), which was later translated into English as *Mahomet, The Imposter* (1744) cast the prophet as a charlatan on a ruthless quest for dominion.[64] Dow similarly regarded 'Mahommed' a pretender whose politicking 'effected a revolution and change in the human mind, as well as in states and empires'. This 'enslavement of the mind' manifested itself in the customs established by the 'legislator', such as the 'unlimited power' conferred on the male head of each household, which habituated all to arbitrary rule.[65] As well as customs, Dow sees the theological precepts of Islam as having a direct effect on its followers' ability to resist tyranny. According to Dow it is 'the doctrine of rigid fate', which in his understanding 'forms one of the principal tenets of the Mahommedan religion', that has the most pernicious effect on the 'character and manners' of its followers. This 'absolute predestination' results in an apathy and indifference to despotism because the fatalist follower 'trusts the whole to Providence, and makes God the agent in his very crimes'.[66] In summary, for Dow, the entire construction of Islam and results in a cultural psychology that ensures despotism is the characteristic form of government, both in public and private.

A view of Islam as a concomitant with despotism was certainly not unique in the eighteenth century. It should be noted, however, that its invocation often served an ulterior polemical point. No doubt Dow's criticisms of Islam in relation to despotism were genuine, but they operate within a general polemic about the pernicious effects of religious inflexibility on political culture. In fact, prefiguring Gibbon's thesis, Dow argues elsewhere that it was 'the passive humility inculcated by Christianity' which lead to the fall of Rome, on the grounds that 'the spirit and power, and, we may say, even virtue of the Romans, declined with the introduction of a new religion among them'.[67] In the case of Islam, its promotion of public and private despotism meant, 'that undefined something, called Public Virtue, exists no more'.[68] Indeed, as scholars such as Ziad Elmarsafy have pointed out, caricatures of Asian despotism were often components of wider critiques the target of which was implicitly European Christendom.[69] In a dedicatory letter to Frederick the Great, Voltaire acknowledged

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[63] David Allen Harvey, *The French Enlightenment and its Others: The Mandarin, the Savage, and the Invention of the Human* Science, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2012), 18-19.
[64] Michael Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam: European Thinkers on Oriental Despotism in the Middle East and India*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 35.
[65] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), xiii- xiv.
[66] Ibid., xviii.
[67] Dow, *The History of Hindostan*, vol.1 (London, 1770), 17. Gibbon also read and cited Dow. See, Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (Dublin, 1788), Vol.4 of 6, Chapter 57, 280.
[68] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), xii.
[69] Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an*, 81.

that the play *Le Fanatisme ou Mahomet le prophète* was not an accurate historical representation of the prophet's life, but an artistic invention which allowed him to represent 'the most awful actions of fanaticism' on the stage.[70] For Dow too, religious hypocrisy was the 'great engine of political imposters'.[71] When we read Dow's 'Dissertation on Despotism' in relation to his general religious outlook, expressed in his work Hinduism, the full force of this becomes apparent. In praise of the principle of religious toleration among the *Hindoos,* for example, Dow boldly equates Christianity with one of the most negative aspects of Islam, fanaticism: 'The *Hindoos* chuse rather to make a mystery of their religion, than impose it upon the world, like the Mahommedans, with the sword, or by means of the stake, after the manner of some pious Christians'.[72]

This brazen equation of Christian zealots with 'Mahommedans' would have had a great deal of rhetorical power. In contrast, the tolerance of the *Hindoos*, juxtaposed with the violent irrationality displayed by the history of Christianity, completes the provocation. Following early eighteenth-century critics of religious fervour such as Shaftesbury and Hume, Dow is summoning a contemporary critique of religious excess as contrary to the spirit of reasonable thought.[73] Moreover, integral to this critique of religious enthusiasm was the contrasting concept of religious toleration. Shaftesbury's 1708 *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm,* for example, made an important distinction between piety and extravagance in religious expression which maintained that while piety, also termed 'serene' or 'reasonable enthusiasm', was not in contradiction with a tolerant attitude, extravagant enthusiasm was a form of irrationality that lead only to the kind of violent fanaticism invoked by Dow's reference to the stake.[74] While Dow did not develop the nuance of later discussions, such as Hume's distinction between enthusiasm and superstition, the critique of fanaticism and zealotry is consistently at work throughout his essays. In fact, the relationship between religious toleration and government was central to Dow's assessment of Indian history. According to his narrative, India had been ruled by two great foreign empires. The first were the Afghans (or 'Patans'), who in Dow's estimation were characterised by a despotism of violence, 'wild' and 'tyrannical from passion rather than from avarice'.[75] The Afghans were

[70] As quoted in Harvey, *The French Enlightenment,* 72.
[71] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), 260.
[72] Ibid., xxiii.
[73] Patrick Müller, *Latitudinarianism and Didacticism in Eighteenth- Century Literature: Moral theology in Fielding, Sterne and Goldsmith,* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), 31-32.
[74] Michael Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable: The critique of Enthusiasm in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries,* (Leiden: BRILL, 1995), 226.
[75] Ibid., xi.

eventually replaced by the 'Imperial house of Timur', wich 'rendered Hindostan the most flourishing empire in all the world'. This was despotism 'in its most engaging form'. Their success, Dow argued, was due to the 'mild and humane character' of the Mughal Empire, a vital feature of which was their disavowal of religious dogmatism.[76] For example, Dow notes with approval that the first Mughal conqueror, despite being a 'Hanifite' ('Hanafi', a branch of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam), put more faith in 'the evidence of reason, than to the marvellous legends of superstitious antiquity'.[77] Yet, it was Akbar (Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar) who had displayed the greatest wisdom in disavowing the distractions of religious zeal. According to Dow 'He regarded neither the religious opinions nor the countries of men', especially in the administration of justice'.[78] Elsewhere in the *History of Hindostan* Dow again stressed that Akbar 'tolerated every religion', and gave no particular credit to the 'old systems' of religious belief. His son 'Jehangire' (Jahangir) was similarly 'imbibed with his principles' and brought up 'deist'. Alluding to their syncretic approach, Dow mentions that both were tempted to found 'a new faith', but, to Dow's praise and approval, foreseeing the 'distractions which this arduous measure might occasion' they instead focused on the business of government.[79] As such, deism was at the core of the 'mild disposition' to which Dow credits the success of the 'house of Timur'. [80]

In contrast, in Dow's narrative it is the increasing influx of 'nobles from various kingdoms' into the courts of the Mughals, all of whom were 'followers of the Mahommedan religion', that resulted in the empire's ultimate decline. According to Dow, 'In the regulations and spirit of the Coran, they lost their primary and characteristical ideas upon government'.[81] Thus, when scholars like Franklin have proposed that Dow's admiration of the Mughal Empire destabilises Saidian analyses of Orientalism, since it effectively suggests that 'that the British should gain their enlightenment from Muslims', this is a misunderstanding of Dow's argument. For Dow, the example of Mughals was in fact the example of deism. [82]

[76] Ibid., xxiii.
[77] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* vol.2, (1770), 135.
[78] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772)*,* xxv.
[79] Ibid., 104.
[80] Ibid., xxvii, xii, xxii.
[81] Ibid., xiii.
[82] M.J. Franklin, ed., *Representing India: Indian Culture and Imperial Control in Eighteenth Century Orientalist British Discourse,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), vii.

**III- Hindoos and Marathas**

Dow's analysis of Indian polities according to their religious foundations also applied to *Hindoo* government, in the concluding section of the dissertation on despotism. It begins with a simplistic repetition of the idea of the passive Indian native.[83] The familiarity of this notion is confirmed by Dow's opening comments that 'the system of religion which they [the Hindoos] profess, is only perfectly known in the effect which it has upon the manners of the people'. They are, he avows 'Mild, humane, obedient, and industrious' and because of that 'easily conquered and governed'.[84] And yet, In the case of *Hindoo* government, as opposed to *Hindoo* subjects, Dow complicates the picture by providing an account of a stable, enduring and ancient polity.

Unlike the language of Indian effeminacy evoked in the contexts of Victorian sexual politics and racial theory, writers in the latter part of the eighteenth century were concerned, instead, with effeminacy as a moral and social concomitant of commerce, luxury, consumption, and corruption.[85] Dow's consideration of the 'mild' *Hindoos* begins with a consideration of luxury. Yet again, invoking a Montesquieuian analysis of the effects of India's particular geography on its history, Dow diagnoses that fertility of the country's soil, 'which in other kingdoms constitutes the great prosperity of the natives', was a source of misfortune in the case of 'Hindostan'. Combined with the industriousness of the *Hindoos* and their religious precepts encouraging moderation, India became 'opulent' and too tempting for 'the fierce nations of northern Asia' to resist invasion.[86] Dow's general approach to luxury is thus one of caution. Aware that it is both the source of wealth, necessary to the flourishing of states, he also shares the view of contemporary critics of its effects on political virtue.[87] Thus, of the Mughal ruler 'Jehangire' (Jahangir) he said that 'The empire flourished under his wise administration' and that 'No evil but luxury prevailed' which he describes as a 'weed' which 'takes root in prosperity' and, in the case of India, 'perhaps, can never be eradicated from so rich a soil'.[88] Dow elsewhere repeats the position that luxury can have corrosive effects on

[83] This trope became prevalent in the seventeenth century. See, Kate Teltscher, ''Maidenly and well nigh effeminate': Constructions of Hindu masculinity and religion in seventeenth-century English texts', *Postcolonial Studies*, 3/2 (2000), 159-170.
[84] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), xxxv-xxxvi.
[85] See, Jeng-Guo S. Chen, 'Gendering India: Effeminacy and the Scottish Enlightenment's Debates over Virtue and Luxury', *The Eighteenth Century*, vol.51, (2010), 193-210.
[86] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), viii-ix.
[87] Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 126-176.
[88] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), 55.

political virtue, stating that even ‘in the cool air’ of Britain it is still difficult ‘to retain, in the midst of luxury and wealth, the vigour of mind necessary to keep us free’.[89] In the case of the *Hindoo* people, though, the threat of luxury was tempered by religious principles that made them ‘industrious and frugal’.[90] In the case of the ‘Mahommoden’ religion, however, ‘voluptuousness’, the unmanly extreme of luxury, abounded. The despotism of their religion, Dow argued, caused men to turn inward and indulge ‘under the veil of secrecy’, retreating to the sanctuary of the hareem.[91] These observations, abounding with familiar eighteenth-century orientalist clichés, as well as with a broader eye to contemporary debates on luxury, were of course made through the lens of British interests. The same paragraph in which Dow’s remarks on the industriousness of the *Hindoo* appeared concludes that the Mughals wisely utilised these ‘peaceable and useful subjects’, laying the groundwork for his later suggestions that the British should do the same.

That said, Dow’s analysis also contains a robust caveat to this picture of the submissive *Hindoo*. At the end of the *Dissertation on Despotism* Dow turns to a consideration of *Hindoo* forms of government. Despite his awareness of the multiple powers existing in contemporary India, Dow treats *Hindoo* government as a singular entity, further entrenching the link between religious and civic identities in Dow’s vision of Indian history. Standing apart from the waning Mughal Empire was what Dow called the nation of the *Mahrattor*s (Marathas). In this example the despotism common to all Asian government is ‘tempered by the virtuous principles inculcated by their religion’ so that ‘it seems milder than the most limited monarchy in Europe’.[92] Predominantly associated with the region of Maharashtra in the West of India, the Marathas controlled great areas of Western India. Dow’s claim to have recently visited these regions, is corroborated by accounts of his time in and around Bombay in 1769-1770.[93] Dow’s description continues as follows:

> The nation of the Mahrattors, though chiefly composed of Rajaputs, or that tribe of Indians whose chief business is war, retain the mildness of their countrymen in their domestic government. When their armies carry destruction and death into the territories of Mahommedans, all is quiet, happy, and regular at home. No robbery is to

[89] Ibid., cxxi.
[90] Ibid., xxxvi.
[91] Ibid., xx.
[92] Ibid., xxxv.
[93] Macdonald, *Memoirs,* 45-49.

> be dreaded, no imposition or obstruction from the officers of government, no protection necessary but the shade. To be a stranger is a sufficient security.

This idyllic polity, Dow assures us, 'is no ideal picture of happiness' but based on 'the truth of his observations'.[94]

In fact, Dow's account of the *Hindoo* kingdoms was not the first to present such an ideal vision. Publishing an account of what he termed the *Gentoo* religion four years prior to Dow, another Company servant, John Zephaniah Holwell, drew a similar contrast between those *Gentoos* who had been governed by the Mughals and the *Gentoos* living under the Malla kings in the city of 'Bisnapore' (Bishnupur). Bishnupur had been for almost one thousand years the capital of the Hindu kingdom of Mallabhum and was relatively independent of the Mughal Empire in the time of Holwell's declared visit.[95] For Holwell, this region was untouched by Mughal influence and thus represented 'the only vestiges of the beauty, purity, piety, regularity, equity and strictness of the ancient *Indostan* government'. Like Dow's account of the 'Mahrattor' states, Holwell remarked that in Bishnupur 'the property, as well as the liberty of the people, are inviolate'.[96] In fact in a section of *Histoire des deux Indes* widely attributed to Dennis Diderot, Holwell's description is recounted with a regretful incredulity, admitting himself caught 'between two authorities'.[97] This other 'traveller of the same nation' was most likely Dow, since he and Holwell were considered the two foremost authorities on Brahmin religion.[98] Yet, Dow does not disavow 'Bisnapore', he simply does not mention it, and as we have seen, Dow does attribute similar qualities to an equally remarkable enclave of ancient Indian virtue, in his description of the 'Mahrattors'. The explanation for this similarity lies in their approach to what they consider India's native and original religion. Both authors consistently stressed the inherent reasonableness of Indian religious philosophy, and dismissed its modern corruptions as the inevitable consequence of superstition, common to all religions.[99] In Holwell's case, this belief in the original simplicity

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[94] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), xxxvii.
[95] Trudy Ring, Robert M. Salkin, Sharon La Boda, eds., *International Dictionary of Historic Places: Asia and Oceania,* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1996), 136-138.
[96] John Zephaniah Holwell, *Interesting Historical Events Relative to the Province of Bengal,* vol.i, (London, 1765), 198.
[97] Guillaume Thomas François Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History the Settlements and Trade of Europeans in the East and West Indies,* trans., J.O. Justamond, (London: Ashgate, 1783) Book III, 139.
[98] Luís Vaz de Camões, *The Lusiad: or Discovery of India. An Epic Poem. Translated from the Portuguese of Luis De Camoëns.* trans., William Julius Mickle (London, 1776). 294.
[99] John Zephaniah Holwell, *Interesting Historical Events, Relative to the Provinces of Bengal, and the Empire of Indostan,* vol.i, (London, 1765), 6-9; Holwell is also linked to deist interpretations of Hinduism in Halbfass's study *India and Europe*.

of the *Gentoo* religion explains why the untouched city of 'Bisnapore' exemplifies the purity, 'of the ancient *Indostan* government'. For Dow, too, it accounts for his separation of the vulgar *Hindoos* of Bengal as passive subjects, and the Marathas as retaining some of the essential principles and virtues of their ancient religion.

This account of *Hindoo* government concludes the entire dissertation, ending with the statement that the Maharajas are 'a great and rising people, subject to a regular government, the principles of which are founded on virtue'.[100] Here the relationship between original *Hindoo* principles and government is not one of mild passivity, but a robust and healthy polity. The despotism inspired by the Asian climate is, in the case of *Hindoo* government, tempered by 'virtuous principles, inculcated by their religion'.[101] In contrast, Islam embeds despotism throughout a polity in a myriad of ways, private and public. Furthermore, it is only through the rejection of their native religion that the 'mild and humane' government of the Mughals, exemplified by the deism of Akbar and his son, resulted in a flourishing society. Thus, in 'A Dissertation Concerning the Origin and Nature of Despotism in Hindostan' Dow forwards three models to describe the interaction between religion and government in India: the violent despotism of Islamic nations like the 'Patans', the enlightened deism of the Mughals, and the virtuous and regular government of the ancient *Hindoo* kingdoms.

For Dow religion was at the centre of how a polity should be understood. This aspect of his thought has been passed over by modern readers of Dow, interested in how his account of a Mughal empire and property impacted the ideological formation of empire. Restoring it reveals the extent to which his discussion was oriented towards a much broader enlightenment intellectual context, which included speculation on the nature of civic society, empire and religion. These concerns shaped his understanding of India as much as more immediate and pragmatic political concerns, his treatment of which we will turn to in the next section.

## IV- Religion, Empire and the East India Company

In the additional dissertations attached to the third volume of the *History,* published in 1772, Dow accused the public of having previously approached the Company's mismanaged transition to possessing many of the attributes of a sovereign and territorial power with a

[100] Dow, *History of Hindostan*, (1772), xxxvii.
[101] Ibid., xxxv.

'phlegmatic indifference', addressing his latest commentary to a newly roused interest in 'Indian affairs'.[102] This was indeed a crucial moment in the rising criticism of the East India Company's malpractice, in both government and commerce. In the same year William Bolts published *Considerations on Indian Affairs* which similarly sought to relay the Company's misdemeanors to a newly engaged domestic audience.[103] In 1765 Mughal Emperor Shah Allam II granted the East India Company *dwiani*, that is, the right to collect taxes from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, while paying a nominal tribute to his court. The resulting conflict and confusion surrounding the various bodies and jurisdictions of the Company led to a radical deterioration in the state of Bengal, which by the 1770s was becoming apparent.[104] Dow's account of Bengal's troubles thus stood against a backdrop of rising awareness of the Company's financial difficulties, accusations of corruption and accounts of famine.[105] Yet, rather than outrage at the abuses perpetrated by Company men on India's native inhabitants for its own sake, public opinion was principally concerned with the potential implications of this corruption for, as Dow put it, 'the welfare of the state'.[106] The suggestion that returning 'nabobs', steeped in the despotic practices and luxuries of the East, would have a pernicious effect on British politics did not reach the intensity it would in the public discourse surrounding the trail of Warren Hastings in 1788, but Dow's dissertations certainly addressed themselves to that anxiety, following his correct observation that 'the current of public opinion' was turning that way.[107]

For those aligned Company interests, the blame for Bengal's rapid decline lay at the feet of the *Nawabs.* The Indian officials were depicted as usurping the power of the Mughal emperor, carving up territories between their bitter rivalries.[108] Dow's vision of Mughal history partially supported the diagnosis that since the reign of Muhammed Shah (1719-1748) the political power of the Empire had been in steady deterioration, abandoned to factions of 'petty tyrants'.[109] In Dow's analysis it was, however, ultimately the fault of the Company,

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[102] Dow, *History of Hindostan*, (1772), xl.
[103] William Bolts, *Considerations on Indian Affairs, Particularly Respecting the Present State of Bengal and its Dependencies,* (London, 1772).
[104] As a result of the treaty Mughal Emperor Shah Allam II granted the East India Company *dwiani*, i.e. the right to collect taxes from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, while paying a nominal tribute to his court.
[105] An anonymous Company servant gave an account of the 'famished multitude' in Bengal in, *The Gentleman's Magazine,* 41 (London, 1771), 402-404.
[106] Dow *History of Hindostan,* (1772), xl.
[107] Ibid., xl.
[108] P.J. Marshall, 'Indian Officials under the East India Company in Eighteenth- Century Bengal,' *Bengal Past and Present*, 84 (1965), 95-120.
[109] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), c.

with decline dating from 'the day on which Bengal fell under the dominion of foreigners'.[110] Nevertheless, Dow still took the matter-of-fact position that current British presence in India represented 'an absolute conquest' which the 'thin veil' of *dwiani* could not disguise. This conquest complete, the British government had a duty to restore the region and secure its opportunities for the benefit of the nation. This it should achieve, argued Dow, by extending 'some part of their own fundamental jurisprudence' over the territory.[111] Thus the plans included an extension of 'the laws of England', in so far as they did not oppose the religious laws of Bengal's native inhabitants.[112] Rather than entrusting the East India Company to reassert the balance brought by the enlightened government of the house of Timur, Dow saw this as the duty of the king-in-parliament. In addition to legal reform, Dow's extensive vision was also propelled by the need to reestablish prosperity through the abolition of internal monopolies, the introduction of paper currency and, the 'establishment of property' by a general sale of land.[113] Both Guha and Travers have argued, these recommendations drew on mercantilist and bullionist economic thought.[114] Yet, while Dow's plan is certainly driven by a vision of how best to raise revenues, his overarching concern with 'the general laws of government' and for preservation of native religious law, demonstrate that his proposals were also firmly structured by the language of eighteenth-century political thought and the ideas explored in the preceding essay on despotism.[115]

In Dow's introduction to these proposals he argues that although some of the laws of the conquers must necessarily replace existing laws, the spirit of the 'ancient form of government' should ultimately be maintained in the lesser parts of the state. Thus, we see that at the same time as advocating for major innovations in the application of English law and a new system of property, Dow's vision is still guided by his assessment of Indian history and religion in attempt to maintain its original spirit, which was not only Mughal, but also made up of 'the regulations which Brahma transmitted, with his followers, from remote antiquity'.[116] Far from a lawless and arbitrary despotism, Dow's Mughal empire was governed by 'established rules and regulations' that had allowed the Hindu rajas to maintain their local systems of government.[117] This guided his proposals. To give the example of

[110] Ibid., lxxvii.
[111] Ibid., cxvi.
[112] Ibid., cxliii,
[113] Ibid., cxlviii,
[114] Guha, *A Rule of Property*, 33-37.
[115] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), cxxxi, cxxxix.
[116] Ibid., cxv-cxvi.
[117] Ibid., xlii, xliii-xliv.

property: while for Dow, ultimately all property belonged to the emperor and land could be returned by edict, this came with the caveat that in practice land rates were regulated and that where property was confiscated landowners were compensated with pensions.[118] Indeed, despite his comments on property being misused by the Hasting's defence as evidence of India's long history of arbitrary rule, Dow's practical proposals for property reform bore a closer resemblance to the later plans of Hastings's political rival, Philip Francis, whose camp Dow was compelled into in the later 1770s.[119] Dow's portrait of regulated land revenues and transferrable private property in towns, as well as his subsequent insistence that the British establish a system that fixed land revenues and ensure 'moveable property' be governed according to the 'laws of the Coran' and of the *Hindoos*, were all nuances overlooked in the spectacle of the trial.[120] The two sides were less polarised on this question than was portrayed by Burke's presentation of the trail as a struggle between those defending Indian and British law, and those who had attempted to assume arbitrary power against.[121] The claim, invoking Dow's *History* among others, that India's history was merely one of arbitrary power was hastily prepared by Hastings' defence and was in fact later anxiously disavowed in favour of an emphasis on Hasting's commitment to the codification of native laws.[122] Following texts like Dow's *History* and the proliferation of orientalist scholarship that would follow it, Hastings, Burke and Francis all saw Indian law as something that was intertwined with both the manners customs and the political history of the country.

For Dow, though, this was not merely a debate about property. The significance of religious toleration in Dow's scheme is often missed, read as an extension of the Company's pre-existing pragmatism that non-interference in native religions was the best means of sustaining tranquillity.[123] Travers, for example, suggests that Dow simply followed the rationale that India was firmly divided into two religious sects, 'Mahommedan' and 'Hindoo', which would not submit to the laws of the other.[124] Yet, given Dow's intense focus on the history of both, it seems reasonable to assume that Dow had meditated more deeply on

[118] Dow, *The History of Hindostan,* xxviii.
[119] A.Bond (ed) *Speeches*, Vol. 4, 787; Kuiters, 'Dow, Alexander (1735/6–1779)'; On Francis's proposals see Travers, *Ideology and Empire,* 141-180.
[120] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), xxvii-xxviii, xlvii, cxxii.
[121] Edmund Burke, "The Impeachment of Warren Hastings", *Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,* 12 vols, (New York, J.F. Taylor and Co., 1901), vol.11, p.219.
[122] Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain,* (London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 107-108.
[123] On EIC policy see Penelope Carson, *The East India Company and Religion, 1698-1858,* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), 4; Said, *Orientalism,* 4, 15.
[124] Travers, *Ideology and Empire,* 65.

the topic. In 1760 George III reasserted the vision of the constitution in Church and State which maintained the 'inviolable' principle of toleration, protecting political and religious liberties.[125] This was of course directed only at Christian dissent. The Jewish Naturalisation Act of 1753 had been repealed the next year due to widespread opposition. Moreover, in the context of India, from 1770 onwards, there was mounting pressure from influential Evangelicals for the Company to pursue a missionary policy.[126] Dow's commitment to protecting the legal institutes of India's religious groups must be seen as a more deeply rooted ideological choice, affirming a commitment to the principle of toleration, extending it towards his deistical outlook that 'common sense upon the affairs of religion' was equally divided among all nations. It was a product of his vision of Indian history, which allowed for the equal status of *Hindoo* and Christian religious precepts, as well as his assessment of the success of the Mughal Empire in entangling itself in *Hindoo* society, as contingent on the deism of its architects.

On certain points Dow's direct and at times cavalier attitude to the extension of British sovereignty was also undermined by this perspective. In 1770 Dow observed 'the immense regions of Hindostan might all be reduced by a handful of regular troops', which was justified according to the principle that 'The slavery and oppression, which Indian's suffer from their native princes, make the justice and regularity of a British government appeal to them in a most favourable light.'[127] By 1772, however, these proposals are dropped, in favour of the more limited restoration of Bengal and Bihar. The rationale for the extension of British government remains similar, supported by the observation in the dissertation on despotism that 'when people have long been subjected to arbitrary power, their return to liberty is arduous and almost impossible'.[128] At the same time, though, the example of the *Mahrattors* are explicitly constructed as the inverse of this, implying that there could be no justification for the conquest of these followers of the Brahmin religion, a 'great and rising people, subject to a regular government, the principles of which are founded on virtue'. Indeed, as discussed above, Dow chose to end the dissertation on despotism with this very sentence before turning to his denunciation of the Company on the next page. This was not an

[125] William Cobbett, ed., *The Parliamentary History of England from the Norman Conquest in 1066 to the Year 1803*, (London, 1775-180), XV, col. 982.
[126] Carson, *The East India Company and Religion,* 20-22.
[127] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* vol.2, (1770), 401-402.
[128] Dow, *History of Hindostan,* (1772), xxi.

unstudied comment. The parameters of Dow's proposals in 1772 were determined by his account of the different forms of government in India in the essay before.

The result is not an argument against empire, but a commitment to a particular vision of it. Tyranny for Dow was to be found in the dismantling of the Mughal Empire, initiated by the Company's intrigues and compounded by the petty factionalism of its competing powers. This was violent fact of history and conquest was complete. The restoration of these dominions was what the present moment demanded, but arbitrary power was not the precedent. The return to regular government was to be practically supported by a detailed economic plan, yes, but it was also necessarily ideologically embedded in a particular reading of Indian history. His interpretation of the Mughal constitution, through which arguments about property rights and legal precedent were claimed and contested, sat in the much wider context of Dow's work, which had the broader character of an enlightenment study of the historical relationship between religion, manners and government. An adaptation of Montesquieu's inquiry into religion and civic society, Dow's history of India was rooted in an analysis of the division between the traditional faith of the Vedānta and the rational religion of the Nyāya, his vision of the deist Akbar, as well as his bitter denunciation of Islamic, and by implication Christian, zealotry as the most complete despotism. The relationship between these religious categories and the state were central to his eventual vision of a restored Bengal, which retained the mildness of the Mughal Golden age, and the spirit of a system of laws that not only belonged to that empire but were also saturated with 'the regulations which Brahma transmitted' from India's ancient past. This was of course a pattern of intertwining Orientalist scholarship into rationale of empire that would become the integral to the ideological construction of the British Empire in South Asia. At this point, though, far from an instrumental reading of Indian history to support an existing framework, Dow's essays were leveraged as a critique and, as we have seen, developed out of a varied set of competing intellectual influences, at the centre of which was religion.

Nevertheless, Dow's work would certainly play a role in the developing logic of empire. To appreciate this, we turn now to the 1792 edition of *The History of Hindostan*, which was published by John Murray in London and Luke White in Dublin, thirteen years after Dow's death from ill health at Bhagalpur.[129] The publication of all three volumes so many years later relates to another shift in the Company's status in Bengal. Following the

[129] William Zachs, *The First John Murray: and the Late Eighteenth-Century London Book Trade*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 118.

conclusion of Hastings's trial and the appointment of Lord Cornwallis as Governor-General the question of administrative reform was raised once again. At the same time, a different conception of Britain's Asiatic empire was emerging, what P.J. Marshall describes as a more militaristic and absolute vision of imperial power, which harnessed the production of British knowledge about India's laws and customs to reduce the territory to a governable proposition.[130] Cornwallis's introduction of a 'new constitution' in 1793, which fixed land revenues and is otherwise known as the Cornwallis Code or Permanent Settlement, is widely regarded as having involved a significant and self-conscious rupture with earlier styles of governance.[131] The evidence for this has been found in the shift in the rhetorical framework surrounding property rights, with the kind of constitutional juridical language that located legitimacy in an interpretation of Indian religious and civic history, being replaced by a discourse centred on the proper exercise of authority in India.[132] Dow's comments on Mughal property are recognised as playing a role in this process.[133] This ideological and rhetorical shift is, however, less well documented in its relation to religion, despite its continued relevance to debates regarding the Company's legitimacy and the practicalities of colonial administration well into the nineteenth century. Dow's work offers a promising starting point from which to consider this transition.

Warren Hastings's commitment to the particularly secularised aspects of Akbar's government was no doubt influenced by Dow's portrait of the emperor, as well as Francis Gladwin's translation of Akbar's legal 'institutes', the *Ayeen Akbery* (1781) which he had commissioned.[134] Yet, the research producing this kind of knowledge was often still imbedded in other intellectual frameworks, outside of Company interests. Hastings also commissioned Nathaniel Halhed to produce a *Code of Gentoo Laws* in 1776. In its preface Halhed, who boasted of his irreligious reputation at Oxford, stressed the greater antiquity of Indian philosophy, as well as the similarities between the religious edicts of the Code and the laws of Moses, to conclude that the fallibility of both meant that faith of the *Gentoo* and the

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[130] P.J. Marshall, *'A Free Though Conquering People': Eighteenth-Century Britain and Its Empire*, (Aldershot, Hampshire, and Burlington, 2003).
[131] Jon E. Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers: Modern Governance in Eastern India, 1780-1835* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), 46.
[132] Mithi Mukerjee, 'Justice, War, and the Imperium: India and Britain in Edmund Burke's Prosecutorial Speeches in the Impeachment Trial of Warren Hastings', *Law and History Review,* 23/ 3 (2005), 589-630; Travers, 236.
[133] See Guha and Travers.
[134] J.S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India: The Assessments of British Historians* (Calcutta : Indian Branch, Oxford University Press, 1970), 25.

Christian was 'equally implicit'.[135] As the idea of separate legal codes became more firmly embedded in the emerging architecture of British administration in India, however, the intellectual framework of religious scepticism that ignited the work of writers like Dow and Halhed was replaced by a milder sympathetic approach to Indian religion. British jurist William Jones, whose work codifying Muslim and Hindu law would later provide the legal architecture for the Permanent Settlement, expressed a view of Hinduism which differed from Dow's account of Vedānta and Nyāya philosophy. Where Dow posited a universal tension between rational religion and superstition, Jones cultivated a Romantic vision of Hindu mysticism, describing Vedantic thought as a metaphysical system which 'human reason alone could…neither fully demonstrate, nor fully disprove'.[136] Jones's Hinduism was sublime, not rational, and arguably more readily lent itself to the image of the *Hindoo* as a passive subject, suffering under the yoke of Muslim tyranny, rather than Dow's politically virtuous Maratha states.

The 1793 Charter Act maintained toleration. Yet, while its language claimed that Britain would continue to govern India by Hindu and Muslim law, the reality was that much would be changed, both because the Company misunderstood these traditions and because they often proved to be inimical to its needs. Both Jones and Cornwallis were deeply preoccupied with the tension between the principle of native law codes, and the resulting reliance on Indian officials, who they suspected, in articulation of what would become a persistent colonial anxiety, could not be trusted to be properly impartial.[137] In another turn, the nineteenth century's first Chairman of the Company's Board was the evangelical Charles Grant. Written in 1792, to persuade the Company to facilitate a Christian mission in India, Grant's *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain* was a tirade against Indian religion.[138] Grant argued that the interpretation of *Hindoo* religion forwarded by writers like Dow was based on 'of so latitudinarian an opinion, an opinion which falls below even the creed of deism' that it had been erroneously formed.[139] While Grant's proposals were discounted by Company administrators like Cornwallis, who was the

[135] Halhed, to R.B Sheridan, (August, 1770), in Rosane Rocher, *Orientalism, Poetry and the Millennium: the Checkered Life of Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, 1751–1830* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), 262-263; N.B. Halhed, *A Code of Gentoo Laws; or Ordinations of the Pundits,* (London, 1776), xv.
[136] William Jones, *The Works of Sir William Jones, with The Life of the Author, by Lord Teignmouth.* eds., John Shore, Lord Teignmouth, vol.1, (London, 1807), 239.
[137] Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of Knowledge, the British in India,* (Princeton N.J Princeton University Press, 1996), 69; Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers*, 83.
[138] Charles Grant, *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic subjects of Great Britain,* (London, 1813).
[139] Ibid., 139.

target of the initial essay, toleration proceeded according to the internal logic of imperial power, determined by the demand for a new machinery of rule in Bengal, but nevertheless couched in the language of religious toleration as it was expressed by Dow, translated into policy by Hastings and codified by Jones.

In contrast, Dow's deist reading of Indian religion was often the source of the more critical aspects of his engagement with Company politics, as well as providing the source material for others intent on launching more radical attacks on the Company's imperialist exploits in India, such as Diderot and Raynal.[140] This is something that Christian apologist writer and Orientalist Thomas Maurice later recognised when writing his memoirs in the early part of the nineteenth century. Maurice indirectly attacked these 'infidel writers', like Holwell, Dow and their French readers, by declaring that their discussion of 'the uncounted ages during which the arts and sciences were asserted to have flourished amongst the Brahmins' became the conditions under which India became 'the *debateable ground* on which the fury of jacobin hostility had reared her most triumphant banner'.[141]

## Conclusion

The example of Dow, a literary opportunist and undisciplined thinker, but important interlocutor in contemporary discourse, raises important questions for those concerned with the broader history of ideology and empire in the eighteenth century. Said's conception of Orientalism sits alongside a plethora of critiques of the Enlightenment, expressing the idea that its internal contradictions were played out in the pursuit of empire.[142] These perspectives have provided a vital critique of colonialism as it developed on a structural level in the nineteenth century. And yet Dow, a Company servant and a writer firmly situated in the enlightenment world of literary discourse and heterodox religious thought, provides an insight according to the example of an individual thinker, rather than an abstract structure. By reinstating the religious aspects of Dow's thought, which were central to his understanding of the nature of India's existing polities, we have seen that Dow's interaction with the question of empire was rooted in concern with the relationship between religious mores and government. The intellectual framework that shaped his treatment of this question was thus

[140] Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed, European and British Writing on India 1600-1800,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 164; Marsh, *India in the French Imagination*, 128.
[141] Thomas Maurice, *Memoirs of the Author of Indian Antiquities,* vol.1, (London, 1821), 102.
[142] Said, *Orientalism,* 204; an intellectual origin being Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (London: Verso, 1997).

radically different from someone like Charles Grant, for whom Indian religion was merely an example of the region's general inferiority. Restoring complexity to enlightenment thought in relation to orientalist knowledge and empire is thus crucial to recognising the ideological breaks and tensions extant in the struggle to establish legitimacy as a more coherent colonial project took shape.

Thus, rather than denying the relationship between the intellectual work of Dow, a non-systematic but rich thinker, and the 'absolute conquest' of Bengal, which he judged to have already taken place, the dissertations which appeared in the 1772 edition of his translation of the region's own existing history of empire, are a testament to precisely how complex a relationship it is. Dow's orientalism was idiosyncratic, propelled by a religious perspective that saw Indian religion as equally comparative with Christianity. This coloured the application of this knowledge to more immediate political contexts, with the result that Dow's prioritisation of religious toleration was as ideological as it was practical. The argument for toleration, as it was expressed by Dow and later Jones, would come to facilitate later colonial machineries of domination. In general, though, the institutionalisation of Orientalism at the end of the eighteenth century has obscured its more ad hoc origins in work of writers like Dow, whose interpretation of India drew on a range of intellectual reference points outwith Company interests. The approach stemming from a focus on imperialism's eventual shape has often obscured the complicated relationship between the formation, the various uses of knowledge and their historical environment. Despite continuities in language and policy between Dow in 1772, the Orientalist policies of Warren Hastings and, later, the imperialist discourses of the nineteenth century, the meanings that Dow allocated to these ideas and terms were oriented towards different intellectual contexts which were contingent and specific. For Dow India's history, including the fragments of its waning empire and the foundations of a new one, was to be understood through the lens of religion, but from the perspective of one who writes about politics.

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