Spectacles of Horror: Western Characterizations of *Sati* in India

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Introduction

On the morning of November 17, 2001, about two months after the terrorist attacks of September 11, First Lady Laura Bush delivered a politically charged Thanksgiving radio address that targeted the Taliban regime for the "brutality" they inflicted upon the people of Afghanistan.[1] In particular, she criticized the Taliban and their "terrorist allies" for "repressing" women and depriving them of the right to live freely. To illustrate the degree of "brutal oppression" that the Taliban exercised, Bush presented an extensive list of the ill treatment that women in Afghanistan endured: confinement within the home, severe beatings for laughing aloud, and denial of a formal education. These stories of grievous suffering, according to Bush, had caused "civilized people throughout the world [to speak] out in horror" against the misogynistic culture of the Taliban and terrorist threats of imposing a similar regime upon the West. Bush reasoned that, as members of the civilized world and because of the "acceptance of *our common humanity*," Americans had a moral responsibility to protest such brutality.[2]

The noteworthy issues raised in this speech are not necessarily Bush's justifications for American military presence in Afghanistan but the rhetorical tactics she uses to frame the issue of female oppression under the Taliban government. At its surface, her discussion of the plight of females in Afghanistan appears to be an appeal to citizens of the West to defend women's "rights and dignity." However, a closer reading reveals that Bush employs emotionally charged language to shock the audience and incite repugnance toward the Taliban's practices. Each charge that Bush levels against the Taliban advances two goals: it casts the terrorists and the Taliban as the only perpetrators of female oppression and it rouses the audience to assert a "common" humanity by empathizing with the women of Afghanistan. By appealing to her audience's sympathy through descriptions of female suffering, the speech effectively transforms the capacity to sympathize into a standard for determining a society's level of civility. In turn, the speech's emotive rhetoric and "us versus them" mentality converge to formulate an underlying message of Western civility that is diametrically opposed to Taliban brutality.

Even though the issue of Taliban treatment toward females is a fairly recent development, the affective language used in the radio address closely resembles the rhetoric that nineteenth-century British observers to the Indian ritual of *sati* used to distinguish the civilized European from the uncultured East Indian. Literally translated, *sati* means "virtuous woman," and usually designates a Hindu wife who

has cultivated *sat* (goodness) through steadfast devotion to her spouse.[3] To demonstrate such virtue, some newly-widowed Hindu wives self-immolated along with the bodies of their dead husbands, either because they succumbed to mounting pressure from their families or because they decided voluntarily to do so. According to certain interpretations of the Hindu scriptures, the power of *sat* that is generated from the act of widow burning was so strong that the spirits of both wife and husband were assured of reaching heaven: "She who follows her husband to another world shall dwell in a region of joy for so many years as there are hairs in the human body, or thirty-five millions."[4] As an Indian advocate of the practice suggests here, becoming a *sati* would guarantee a widow's salvation in the afterlife.

While numerous Hindu communities agreed that *sati* manifested female virtue, religious texts did not explain definitively whether widows could be considered virtuous *only* after self-immolation.[5] The earliest known mention of *sati* in the Hindu scriptures appeared in the *Vedas*, ("the word of God"), which dates from roughly 4000 BCE – 1000 BCE.[6] This text explains that a widow is not obligated to burn herself in order to express loyalty to her husband; however, a later Hindu text, the *Anigirasa* (700 ACE), described *sati* as the moment when the widow "follow[ed] her husband into death" through self-immolation.[7]

The contradictory messages conveyed in the scriptures did not necessarily give rise to conflict among Hindus but did become the locus of debates between Britain and India over the abolition of the practice. That the custom was not performed uniformly among Hindus in India complicated the picture even more. Several of the latter religious texts extolled the virtues of *sati* for all widows, but the custom largely remained a practice of the upper caste, which constituted only a small proportion of the Indian population. Even within upper caste culture, communities in which widow burning was practiced were rare and generally located in pockets throughout the Indian landscape, although the copious amount of Western literature dedicated to *sati* suggested otherwise.

The oldest known Western accounts of *sati*, which date back to the fourth century BCE, generally mention instances of *sati* in passing and barely discuss the significance of the practice in relation to Hindu culture. However, that changes beginning around the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with an increase in the number of Westerners traveling to India.[8] As Europeans living at home began to show an insatiable hunger for stories of the Far East, travelers responded by describing and documenting the culture and practices of foreign societies. Moreover, the political shift of that time, with India going from Britain's trading partner to its occupied colony, stimulated a change in British attitudes toward *sati*. Accounts dating from the medieval period to the early nineteenth century generally describe the author's dismay at the "barbarity" of the practice. Yet as the West began to develop a more paternalistic relationship with India, the need for Western intervention to save lives by preventing the practice increased. For those reasons, an extensive body of literature on *sati* circulated throughout Europe, aided by the emergence of print media.

Most of the European narratives on *sati* (especially those dating from the nineteenth century) unfold in a distinct, perhaps even formulaic, manner. Although Western spectators of *sati* from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries came from different social and cultural backgrounds, their accounts express a common sentiment of shock and horror prompted by the spectacle of the widow's self-immolation. The ubiquity of the theme of horror within the accounts suggests its importance to Western literature on *sati*. For example, in an eyewitness account printed in *The Times* of London in 1810, the writer's reaction to widow burning demonstrates the centrality of the language of horror:

> I scarcely know how to paint in colours that will not *disgust* and *shock* our readers, the *horrible* close of that scene…A kind of incredulous *horror* of what was passing had till now riveted us to the spot; but the scene became too *shocking* and we quickly retired.[9]

Like Bush's radio address, this spectator's testimony demonstrates the tendency to rely on a vocabulary of horror and disgust to communicate a moral judgment at the scene of the widow's suffering. This type of rhetoric was not employed in only one or two disjointed accounts of *sati* but persistently reappears in the entire corpus of Western literature about *sati*— even when written by different people living in different times. Though the narratives differ, the recurrence of the notion of the horrific is more than mere coincidence and raises the question of why the language of horror dominated Western accounts about *sati*.

Just as Bush's speech focused on ideas of female suffering, Taliban oppression, and Western civility to demarcate Western and Taliban culture, European narratives about *sati* similarly emphasized the brutality and cruelty of the practice, contrasting what eyewitnesses believed to be a more refined Western culture to the barbaric indigenous society. Both the radio address and discourse on *sati* also use sympathy for female victims as a springboard to illustrate the justification for needing to reform particular non-Western cultures. Bush and the European observers assess practices of the other culture according to a Western "interpretive grid" and highlight the "problems" of the Other based on deviations from Western norms.[10] In the context of British India, European spectators' expression of horror to the indigenous culture marked the exclusion of the Other from Western notions of civilization and progress. The space between Western civility and non-Western barbarity enabled the British to construct a social hierarchy in India that placed themselves over Indians.

In order to examine the connection between the discourse of horror in Western accounts of *sati* (primarily from the British perspective) and British colonial interests in India, I will examine eighteenth-century theories of aesthetic judgment and taste.[11] In *Pious Flames*, Andrea Major argues that the perceptions of widow immolation shifted in response to contemporaneous intellectual and social movements in Europe.[12] In keeping with Major's observation that accounts of *sati* reflected contemporary popular trends in Europe, I suggest that Western accounts relied on emerging theories of aesthetic judgment, moral sentiment and shifting perceptions of pain and torture beginning in the eighteenth century.

In her essay, "Suttee Revisited: From the Iconography of Martyrdom to the Burkean Sublime," Monika Fludernik traces the language of horror in British depictions of *sati* to the "Burkean analysis of the sublime." [13] In addition, she argues that the emotional response from Western bystanders "reflect[s] attitudes borrowed from the Gothic novel."[14] Expanding on this analysis, I adopt Immanuel Kant's ideas on aesthetic judgment and show that Western writers employed aesthetic theories of other European philosophers besides Burke. My analysis focuses on two core philosophical texts: Edmund Burke's essay *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* and Immanuel Kant's *The Critique of Judgment*. I also examine different Western accounts of *sati* (travel, missionary, and government) and highlight key themes within these accounts that echo important characteristics of the sublime. An examination of the role of horror in seventeenth and eighteenth century texts and in Gothic literature helps to connect the experience of spectators to the notion of sympathy, which in turn aided British efforts to establish colonial authority in India. Juxtaposing standards of the Western aesthetics of beauty and of its antithesis, the horrific, shows that over time, aversion to *sati* was incorporated into a mode of colonial discourse that posited Western superiority over and above Indian culture.

Eighteenth-Century Theories on Aesthetic Judgment

At first glance, it seems that eighteenth-century ideas of aesthetic judgment hardly relate to Western rhetoric on *sati*. Eighteenth-century European philosophers who engaged in the discourse about taste and aesthetics explored abstract concepts such as appropriate standards of beauty. However, Western accounts of *sati* from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries documented in minute detail every

aspect of the Hindu custom, from the moment the widow arrived at the scene to the point when flames engulfed her. How does one reconcile the tension between rhetoric that describes concrete events with a mode of discourse that describes the intangible?

A closer reading of the Western eyewitness testimonies reveals that aesthetic judgment was embedded within the language of the accounts. Many (though not all) observers commented on the beauty of the *sati*—the widow—as she approached the pyre. In some narratives, writers expressed sympathy with the *sati* due to the impending waste of all her beauty and youthful essence, which "rendered the tragic spectacle very imposing."[15] The aesthetic judgment would typically yield to an emotional response, the fire transforming the *sati* from youthful beauty to "wretched woman."[16] The ubiquity of like words and phrases used to describe the women, including "miserable wretch," "suffering wretch," and "beautiful," suggest that the accounts were not merely detailed descriptions of the different stages and procedures of the rite but rather aesthetic judgments on the waste of the *sati's* beauty.

As Monika Fludernik notes, aside from the brief mention of the widow's physical appearance, writers often described the "horror" of a particular scene by evoking core themes and assumptions central to Western ideas of the sublime—terror and pain. For instance, writers generally classified *sati* as a "terrible custom" and attempted to illustrate with their words the pain that the widow suffered as she burned. Such descriptions of the observer's sense of horror borrowed language that eighteenth-century philosophers used to portray the sublime or the sublime state of mind. This point can be seen in both Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* and Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*.[17]

EDMUND BURKE AND HIS *PHILOSOPHICAL ENQUIRY ON THE SUBLIME*

Published in 1757, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* was Edmund Burke's (1729-1797) first attempt at describing the abstract principles that shape one's aesthetic judgment.[18] Central to the Burkean sublime and ideas of beauty is the way that a person's senses react to external stimuli. According to Burke, the sublime is produced through the "unnatural tension and certain violent emotions of the nerves" that bring about reactions of pain and terror.[19] Thus, he argues, "whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror" is the sublime.[20] For Burke, feelings of pain and terror that an individual senses during the sublime experience are the strongest emotions "that the human mind is capable of feeling."[21] He notes that death would be the strongest source of pain and would therefore elicit from the observer the most profound emotional reaction.

The onslaught of emotions that the beholder experiences in the sublime state of mind, Burke explains, is inspired by astonishment and wonder—"that state of the soul, in which all its [emotions] are suspended, with some degree of horror."[22] This particular emotion arises when a person becomes so moved by an object that it consumes his mind, and nothing can provoke him to think of anything else. Because of the heightened intensity of emotions that the person experiences at this moment, astonishment is the "effect of the sublime in the highest degree."[23] The sublime could thus be understood as the moment in which all feelings of pain, terror, and awe intersect in an individual's experience. This moment is clearly visible in accounts of *sati* penned by Western observers.

Although Burke's tract focused more on delineating aspects of the sublime, he also devoted an entire section of his *Enquiry* to determining the characteristics that constitute beauty. Beauty, he writes, are qualities of the body that "cause love, or some passion similar to it."[24] He argues that, in general, beautiful objects are striking to an observer because such objects are rare. Even more uncommon are beautiful objects that elicit an emotional response. The type of beauty that is most "affecting," Burke declares, is "beauty in distress." [25] In Western accounts of *sati*, the "beauty in distress" was the Hindu widow who immolated along with her husband. The qualities of beauty, as Burke outlined them, are important for

understanding why Western observers of *sati* focus so much attention on the physical attributes of the widow.

ENLIGHTENMENT RATIONALITY AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF TASTE

Burke's theories rely heavily on liberal ideas of rationality and universality, which stretch back into the seventeenth century and Enlightenment tradition. Core assumptions were that human beings are naturally free, equal, and rational and that such qualities were inherent among all human beings.[26] However, as Uday Mehta notes, the "inclusionary pretensions of liberal theory" necessarily have "exclusionary effects" or an "exclusionary impulse."[27] This meant that anyone who did not conform to these Western liberal ideas was necessarily excluded from being considered as human being.

In the "Introduction on Taste" in his *Enquiry*, Burke links Enlightenment notions of rationality and universality to the idea of taste. Burke's operating definition of taste is the "human faculty" of the mind "which [is] affected with, or which form[s] a judgment of the works of imagination and the elegant arts" and which comes from the "primary pleasures of sense…of the imagination, and of the conclusions of the *reasoning* faculty."[28] Burke argues that, while nuances of personal preference might exist among individual tastes, "all human creatures" subscribe to basically the same overall standards of reason and taste.[29] Certainly, each individual may have different preferences for a certain object, but such preferences do not impede the general consensus of how one judges other objects. According to Burke, universality concerning standards of taste exists because, if human judgment were not bounded by a set of principles that all can agree to, then there would be "no hold [on man's] reason or [his] passions, sufficient to maintain the ordinary correspondence of life."[30] In other words, for society to operate in an orderly manner, these principles must be common to all mankind. If every person uses the same organs to analyze stimuli, then an object should excite a similar reaction among different people.

However, Burke's claims for the universality of taste fall apart when he must account for those who do not subscribe to the criteria of judgment that he outlined. To account for the group of people who possess different aesthetic standards, Burke claims not only are they wrong in their judgment for deviating from the standards of taste, but they are also "absolutely mad."[31] They *must* be mad, in Burke's view, because the very existence of a group of rational human beings who do not conform to the principles he has outlined suggests an alterity or "otherness" that undercuts the foundation of his argument.

KANT AND THE THIRD CRITIQUE

In *The Critique of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) extends Burke's ideas on the universality of aesthetic judgment by introducing the concept of the "ought."[32] Kant felt that the empirical approach to aesthetic taste promulgated by Burke and other empiricists explained only general trends but did little to elaborate on *why* people react to an object in a particular way. Unlike the empiricists (such as Burke), who focused on one's *reaction* to external objects, Kant explains that aesthetic judgment is based on *a priori* principles of beauty and taste, which are "pure…independent from experience…[and] *universal and necessary*,"[33] and which influence the mind of every human being. For example, Kant contends that everyone agrees that objects such as roses are beautiful because of an *a priori* knowledge that the rose is beautiful. The ability for every person to make that kind of judgment without much contemplation confirms that such assessment is neither based on personal experience nor another's response to the rose.[34] Rather, people's instinctual admiration of a rose is the result of principles of taste and aesthetics that inhere among all human beings.

The Kantian definition of beauty is "that which, apart from a concept, pleases universally"; taste is "the faculty of forming an *a priori* estimate of the communicability of the feelings that, without the mediation of a concept, are connected with a given representation."[35] In accordance with the intellectual

tradition of his time, Kant believed that the "judgment of taste" was universal and that when one person declares an object beautiful, he also asserts that everyone else *ought* to declare that same object beautiful as well.[36] But in making the statement that others *ought* to react to the object in a similar manner, the individual not only seeks approval from others but also asserts that others should hold the agreed-upon standard as well. Kant sees in humans the tendency to seek approval from others in order to reaffirm their own judgment.

Kant also notes that even though everyone will not agree with the universal judgment, "every one *ought* to agree with it," because divergent opinions should not be tolerated.[37] In the end, every person could judge an object in whichever way he or she pleased, making taste a subjective and not an objective judgment. But because human beings seek to find agreement with others, this opinion is "subjectively universal."[38] The universal validity of these judgments, for Kant, is the foundation of *a common sense*—a judgment by concepts.[39]

Kant's presumption that universal validity is the basis of common sense, then, necessarily excludes those who do not adopt these principles as unworthy of making judgments, as they are, by definition, without common sense. Further, if being human means the acceptance of these universal principles, then those who do not agree with these standards of taste, by Kant's definition, are not fully human. Thus, Kant's argument that everyone *ought* to share similar standards of taste demonstrates the influence and the limitations of Enlightenment ideas of universality, bringing to mind Mehta's argument that theories founded on liberal thought have a tendency to exclude those who do not conform to Western standards.

Contingent upon the concept of universality and the notion that everyone should conform to these principles to be considered rational, eighteenth-century theories of the aesthetic, as exemplified in Burke and Kant, imply that those who live according to a different set of principles should be considered "irrational," or even "non-human." This set of assumptions helps to explain, in part, why Hindu culture was so commonly denigrated in Western accounts as "barbaric."

Accounts of Sati and the "Indian Sublime"

> The horror and the torments of the death they court, we cannot resist viewing such an act, and such a victim, with tears of commiseration, awe, and reverence.[40]
>
> —John Zephaniah Holwell, "On the Religious Tenets of the Gentoos"

As increasing exploration starting in the sixteenth century put Europeans into closer contact with Indians, the western audience developed an appetite for stories about the "exotic" cultures of the East. It became incumbent upon individuals traveling to the East to provide their compatriots with narratives detailing sights that only adventurous travelers were fortunate enough to witness first-hand. The explorers became the eyes and ears of the people living in the metropole, and the descriptions of eastern societies that these travelers provided became the source of knowledge about societies of the "Orient." The eyewitness literature formed the foundation of an elaborate body of knowledge available to Europeans about the East. Over time, writers formulated a discourse about the Orient that shaped western perceptions and prejudices about Indian customs such as *sati*.

Eyewitness reports about *sati* available in the West came from a variety of sources: missionaries, travelers, and British officials.[41] Because the writers of the accounts came from different social backgrounds with divergent customs and norms, their motivations for documenting *sati* varied. In comparing these accounts, one can see that the writer's motives dramatically influenced the type of information conveyed. For example, accounts written by British officials focused on the way that *sati* was presented in Hindu scriptures, while missionaries devoted more time to explaining why support for *sati* was morally wrong. The way that *sati* was portrayed also shifted from the pre-colonial period to the nineteenth century. Andrea

Major notes that despite the variance among the different accounts, characterizations of *sati* became increasingly "homogenized" in the nineteenth century.[42] The common thread tying the accounts together was the language of the sublime and aesthetic taste used to describe *sati*.

The similarities among European characterizations of *sati* reflect the type of orientalist discourse in the Middle East that Edward Said describes in *Orientalism*. The objectification of non-Western societies became the basis of a mode of discourse that reified Western superiority over the "Orient." As scholars such as anthropologist Nicholas Dirks and Lata Mani have argued, the body of Western literature on *sati* was integral to British constructions of their supremacy over Indians. Beyond satisfying the insatiable curiosity of the western audience, *sati* accounts proved that Indians were not as civilized as those of the West because they continued to practice such "horrific" customs as widow burning. The want of modernity and progress within Indian society as demonstrated in these eyewitness testimonies eventually justified and compelled British intervention in the practice.

TRAVELERS' ACCOUNTS

Travelers' accounts play a critical role in understanding how Europeans interpreted the patterns and practices of other cultures—and especially those aspects of the culture that most interested the European observer. In many accounts of European travels in India, it appears that the writers found particular interest in "exotic" Indian customs such as hookswinging and *sati*. [43] As literary scholar Percy Adams describes, travel literature not only satisfied the curiosity of the travelers, but also revealed facts that became important "building blocks" for understanding non-Western cultures and formulating a conception of the Other.[44] Accounts of *sati* operated in a similar way, providing pertinent information about India that became building blocks for British perceptual constructions of Indian culture.

Eighteenth-century ideas of aesthetic taste figured prominently in these descriptions. As noted earlier, one of the central themes of the accounts about *sati* is the idea of "horror." In an 1810 correspondent's report to *The Times*, the author described his reaction to the rite by saying, "I scarcely know how to paint in colours that will not disgust and shock our readers, the *horrible* close of that scene."[45] The specific use of the word *horrible* castigates the practice with a negative value judgment. Similarly, in an eighteenth-century account written by surgeon John Zephaniah Holwell, Holwell castigates *sati* as a "cruel custom."[46] In the rest of the account, Holwell consistently uses words such as "torment" to remind readers of the terror and pain the *sati* had endured. Using *horror* and *terror* to describe *sati* parallels the emphasis on pain and terror central to the idea of the sublime.

Graphic descriptions of the burning widow's body conveyed the writers' aesthetic judgments. In the *Bombay Courier*, a British observer named John Poynder wrote in 1827, "I cannot describe to you the horror I felt on seeing the mangled condition she was in."[47] The image of a tortured body evokes the idea of terror, a theme that Poynder emphasizes by focusing on the appearance of the widow *after* she burned and stating that her "mangled condition" incited his repugnance and prevented him from describing the widow in much detail. Likewise, in an 1810 account, the spectator described the disturbing condition of the widow as a means to captivate the audience's interest:

> In a minute or two more the scorched and mutilated limb was again thrust out, and slowly consumed before our outraged eyes, while the tremendous and convulsive motion which it exhibited to the last (for many minutes), plainly showed that sensation and life existed in the miserable wretch within.[48]

As in Holwell's account, descriptions of the disfigured woman and the pain she felt illustrate the centrality of the aesthetic experience for writers—one in which the spectator observes pain and torture at a distance.

The writers also exercise aesthetic judgment as they evaluate the physical appearance and age of the

sati approaching the pyre. Generally, the witnesses comment on the widow's appearance by judging her beauty. This assessment of beauty is what Mani calls the "masculinist gaze." Mani notes striking language shifts in the accounts depending on the degree of the widow's physical beauty. In some accounts, if the writer judges that the widow is beautiful, then he goes on to describe "tenderly" the woman's elegance and beauty.[49] However, if the writer finds the woman less attractive, he is more likely to call her a "miserable wretch," "suffering wretch," or "unfortunate woman"—a system of classification that reinforces the text's aesthetic judgment.[50]

Such accounts were printed and circulated among the British audience in the metropole and in India, allowing the reader to be immersed in the experience of the sublime.

MISSIONARY DISCOURSE

Lata Mani and Andrea Major both focus in their analyses on the idea of horror as described in missionary representations of Hindu customs during the early colonial period, with Mani focusing on the accounts of Protestant missionaries. These missionaries traveled to India to gain more converts, so they began documenting information about Indian culture in an attempt to be more familiar with the local population. Among the most visible group of missionaries were the members of the London-based Baptist Missionary Society (BMS).

Missionaries in India, however, faced a large obstacle: missionary activity was not only unfunded by the state during the late eighteenth century, but also considered illegal according to British colonial policy. Thus, the missionaries needed to find ways to proselytize to Indians without British authorities noticing. Ultimately, Baptist missionaries needed the British government to sanction their activities officially in order for their society to survive in India. Because of the challenges that faced the BMS, the missionaries held an "insecure position" in India.[51] To receive official sanction from the British government for these activities and to ensure that they received support from British citizens, the missionaries needed to convince the British that their activities were necessary in order to help Indians achieve Western notions of civility and to bolster the vitality of the British Empire.

One of the missionaries' key rhetorical strategies was to portray Indian culture as degenerate. Accordingly, the missionaries argued that important cultural features such as Indian "character," the caste system, polygamy, infanticide, idolatry, and *sati* demonstrated the "degradation" of Indian society.[52] Mani contends that this characterization of Indian culture influenced later descriptions of *sati*.[53]

Using "the discourse of horror" to describe *sati,* missionaries focused on detailing the "atrocities" about the act itself rather than, like British officials, explaining the Hindu scriptures that were used as the basis to justify the practice.[54] For example, in an account written in 1800, the BMS missionary William Ward described himself as "struck with horror to behold these infernal rites."[55] In an 1813 account, Moore described a *sati* that he witnessed as a scene that "was calculated to strike the mind with inconceivable horror."[56] Such characterizations, according to Mani, allowed *sati* to be interpreted on different levels:

> One could be horrified at the society and culture that sanctioned such a practice while pitying the women who were especially its victims. One could also be horrified at women for deserting their offspring, while pitying the children so abandoned. Finally, one could be horrified at those "unfeeling officiators" of such incidents, Brahmin pundits, while pitying society for being, as it were, under their spell.[57]

All of the accounts helped to build the image that India was a place that was "stalked by 'superstition,'" where the people were "deluded and engaged for most of their waking hours in various forms of self-abuse, sacrifice, or murder."[58] These images, which adopted the discourse of the sublime, helped to reinforce reasons for supporting missionary activity in India and proved to be "good . . . fundraising material."[59]

Many of the missionary accounts also invoked ideas of beauty in their reports of *sati*. They highlighted the age of the *sati* to inform the audience of the wasted youthful essence of the widow as she sacrifices her life in order to save her husband's soul after death. In *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain*, Charles Grant (1746-1823) pays careful attention to the discrepancy between a typical *sati's* age and the age of her dead husband.[60] The Reverend William Ward, likewise focusing on the age discrepancy between the *sati* and the deceased, expresses outrage that a typical *sati* is only fifteen years old.[61] The focus on age is part of the assessment of a widow's physical attributes—an element that was an important part of helping the missionaries convey their aesthetic and moral judgment at the scene of the widow's suffering.

ACCOUNTS BY BRITISH OFFICIALS

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the morality of *sati* had become a widely debated topic within India. By that time, the British had solidified their control over India, yet the colonial officials still hesitated to intervene in Hindu customs for fear that their actions would incite insurrection among the indigenous population. Thus, the British allowed Indians to continue to observe their religious practices, even *sati*. As accounts of *sati* circulated more widely among the British audience, however, many began to express outrage over official sanction of such practices and questioned the colonial governing strategy. Increasing pressure from missionaries, the British public, and the governor-general Lord William Cavendish Bentinck convinced the Parliament to finally ban *sati* in 1829.

Prior to abolishing *sati*, however, British officials felt the need to find justifications for its abolition. A key strategy was to find evidence within Hindu texts, specifically Vedic scripture, that proved that widows did not need to be burned in order to demonstrate their devotion. The problem with relying on the Vedas as a basis of scriptural evidence, however, is that there were many different versions of the religious text. Europeans treated Hinduism as they would Christianity and Islam—that is, as religions that have a single authoritative text that governs all followers. However, Vedic scripture proved not to be as univocal as Europeans expected or hoped. The Hindu scriptures were a collection of various religious documents written over 4000 years and the texts themselves were subject to "an ongoing process of codification and evolution."[62] Moreover, the interpretation of and practices derived from these texts varied among different regions and even locales within a given region. Therefore, British authorities found it difficult to construct a definitive history of the evolution of *sati* through Vedic texts.[63]

To reconcile the inconsistencies that they found, officials relied on the expertise of Hindu pundits—learned men of the Hindu scriptures—to determine reasons for abolishing *sati*. The colonial magistrates asked pundits to appear before them in court and produce written explanations about *sati* as it appeared in the Vedic texts. These written explanations, or *vyawasthas*, centered on inquiries about *sati* that the colonial officials posed to the pundits.[64] The most important question that pundits needed to address in their written responses was whether the scriptures required Hindu widows to burn themselves with their husband's corpse. British officials also wanted to know whether widows must enter the pyre in order to observe *sati* or whether ascetic widowhood was sufficient. The British authorities hoped that pundits would produce unequivocal answers to these questions based solely on information gathered from the Vedas. These *vyawasthas* could then serve as the basis for the British abolishment of the practice.

Like the British study of Vedic scripture, this strategy produced contradictions and inconsistencies among the *vyawasthas*. The British soon discovered that pundits used different sections of the Vedic text as scriptural bases for their understanding of *sati*, generating a variety of interpretations of the importance of the practice in Indian culture. The heterogeneous responses that British officials received from Indian pundits appeared to be a "random and indiscriminate use of scriptural fragments."[65] At the same time, colonial officials had to rely upon the writings produced by the pundits because this was their basis of

a “legitimate” interpretation of *sati* within Vedic script. Therefore, new strategies had to be created for arriving at an “Indian” interpretation of *sati* that was not only more cohesive but also consistent with colonial interests.

This effort was complicated by the fact that the British favored interpretations that cited older texts, such as the *srutis* or *smritis*.[66] Although colonial officials sometimes recognized the diversity of the interpretations of Vedic scripture, most of the time they chose to disregard the opinions expressed in the *vyawasthas* that favored widow burning and uphold those that agreed with their own beliefs about the practice. Over time, the British tended to favor the Brahmanic interpretation of *sati*, which essentially stated that widows did not need to burn themselves in order to prove their devotion to the deceased. Their recognition of the *vyawasthas* was an attempt, then, to reshape Indian understanding of *sati* without intervening with a heavy hand in Hindu culture; the British could claim that they were simply “enforcing [Hindu] tradition” and not “transforming” it.[67] The contradiction in this contention is clear: by sanctioning a particular interpretation of *sati*, the British had already overstepped the role they claimed as upholders of Hindu custom.

To strengthen their case for abolishing *sati*, British officials produced eyewitness accounts on *sati* that also adopted the language of horror. For example, in an account printed in *The Times* in 1823, an anonymous colonial officer characterized *sati* as a “horrid sacrifice.” [68] His description of the “frightful vision” of the spectacle focused on the physical suffering that the widow endured in the pyre—the “horrible death” that she suffered and the “protracted course of torture” as she burned within the great flames.

Similarly, Lord Bentinck’s “Minute on Sati,” written in 1829, was also suffused with the language of horror and terror: “To consent to the consignment, year after year, of hundreds of innocent victims to a cruel and untimely end, when the power exists of preventing it, it is a predicament which no conscience can contemplate without horror.”[69] Although this document was not written for public consumption, it nevertheless demonstrates that the language of horror penetrated even into the writing of British officials. Descriptions of the “horrible” scenes coupled with the scriptural “evidence” from Vedic script provided enough justification for Lord Bentinck to abolish *sati* in 1829.

Although accounts by European travelers, missionaries, and British officials served different purposes, they portrayed *sati* in similar ways, appealing to readers by invoking themes of the sublime and aesthetic judgment. The *horror* and *terror* of *sati* effectively energized the British populace to demand the formal abolition of the practice.

From the Gaze to Sympathy

> The practice of suttee, or of burning or burying alive the widows of Hindus, is *revolting to the feelings of human nature*….[70]
>
> —Sati: Regulation XVII, A.D. 1829 of the Bengal code

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, popular theories about aesthetics did not merely describe the emotions associated with the sublime and with beauty but also dictated one’s reaction to it. While the “predominance of the gaze” characterized eighteenth-century aesthetic theories, the spectator’s emotional reaction to the spectacle was also important.[71] For instance, under the Burkean theory of aesthetics, the sublime was premised both on the observer’s *feelings* of pain, terror, and awe experienced upon witnessing a riveting spectacle and on the change in his mental state. This emotional change was deemed necessary in order for one to feel sympathy for another. Burke defined sympathy as the ability for the spectator to “enter into the concerns of others, [to] put [himself] into the place of another man, and [be] *affected* in many respects as he is *affected*.”[72] The operative word in this statement is *affect*, which according to the

Oxford English Dictionary means "to have an effect on the mind or feelings of (a person)" or "to impress or influence emotionally."[73] The Burkean conception of sympathy, then, rests on the spectator's capacity to comprehend another person's suffering and be moved emotionally so as to feel sympathy for the person who suffers. In many accounts of *sati*, writers claimed that the spectacle of widows self-immolating was the primary cause for the change in their emotion. Just as European travelers were affected emotionally by the horror of scenes of *sati*, the language of horror used to describe such scenes similarly elicited an affective response from the Western audience at home. The coalescing of the language of horror and of sympathy in descriptions of the Hindu rite would provide yet another way for the British to profess their superiority over Indians.

ON HORROR: A MODERN-DAY ANALYSIS

Before elaborating on the connection between horror and sympathy, it is important to examine more thoroughly the concept and cultural meaning of horror. To aid in this exploration, I refer to Talal Asad's discussion of modern-day usages of horror in *On Suicide Bombing*. Asad's treatment of horror in the context of suicide bombing (and subsequently horror in Gothic literature) illuminates the interconnection between Western perceptions of cruelty and unnecessary suffering on the one hand, and the distance between the human and the non-human worlds on the other, a gap that widened around the turn of the nineteenth century. This examination in turn provides insight into the relationship between *sati* and the theme of the horrific.

According to Asad, horror is a "state of being" that is "intransitive," or not directly connected to any particular object.[74] The person who expresses horror does not initiate the emotion toward an object for the purpose of advancing a specific goal; instead, horror is a type of *reaction* that an individual experiences or *feels* in light of other events.[75] Horror can be evoked by the mere sight of disturbing images, such as deteriorating or disfigured human bodies.[76]

Aside from the aesthetic qualities of the spectacle, the audience's "visceral sense of horror" to such descriptions, according to Asad, is another critical element.[77] As Cavell contends, horror is a response that is unique to humans, and the capacity to feel horror is a mark of the progress of human beings in evolving from forms of "lower life."[78] Expanding on this logic further, those who lack the faculty to conceive horror would be considered not fully human. In this sense, the reaction of horror is used to distinguish humans from "the outsiders" who do not conform to this "social order."[79] Similarly, in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century India, the ability to experience such a visceral reaction to the horrific spectacle of *sati* became the touchstone for Western superiority over Indians.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY REPRESENTATIONS OF HORROR

Many eighteenth-century theorists on aesthetic taste and judgment, like Burke, emphasized the importance of shifting away from indifference because the capacity to feel emotion is the only way for a person to be able to express joy from a beautiful object or disgust from a horrible one. The prevalence of Enlightenment thought starting in the late eighteenth century also challenged the West to reshape the standards for assessing modernity and progress. This propitious moment in Western history allowed emerging ideas of moral sensibility and aesthetic taste to take hold in the discourse over the meaning of *civilization*. Consequently, the ability to feel sympathy for another's suffering came to be considered as an "inherent" quality of human beings and a necessary characteristic of the modern person.[80] One method for accessing such feelings of sympathy was reading descriptions of violence and the horrific in literature.

Starting in the late eighteenth century, Gothic literature pervaded Europe (and America). Influenced by a greater emphasis on ideas of human nature and sentiment in Western intellectual thought, Gothic

fiction aimed to "arouse" the readers' feelings and to "nurture" their moral sensibilities by evoking readers' sympathy.[81] To do so, writers relied heavily on developing characters that encouraged the audience to react emotionally to their stories. For example, an archetypical character was the murderous villain whose absolute depravity and despicable conduct was worthy of the audience's scorn. Gothic writers often portrayed the murderer as a morally bereft character who represented an aberration from "normal" human beings because his decision to deprive the life of another evinced a "monstrous distortion" of human nature.[82] Beyond character development, graphic descriptions of the horrible and "unnatural" violence inflicted upon murder victims were intended to shock the audience and to demonstrate how the villain embodied that which was inhuman.[83] Explicit attention to the process of killers slaughtering and dismembering their victims' bodies heightened the emotional impact of such murder scenes for the audience.

The stories did not attempt to pinpoint specific reasons why murders induced horror, but they reiterated the liberal idea of the "meaninglessness" of evil in Western culture, which was thought generally to be supportive of the goodness of mankind.[84] Shifting perceptions of cruelty and torture during the Enlightenment influenced assessments of whether particular instances of violence were productive or gratuitous. During the Enlightenment, acceptance of tolerable uses of cruelty, which according to Asad was considered the "deliberate infliction *in this world* of pain to the living body of others," significantly decreased.[85] Violence against another person should only occur when necessary (such as during times of war). The shift toward a more scrupulous assessment of the different types of violence ushered in the view that inflicting pain for no functional purpose was inhuman. In some instances, exercising aggression in *excess* of that which was necessary was considered inhuman and could be punishable. Thus, many Western observers began to voice the opinion that *sati* was not human because the practice was unnecessary for Hindu widows to prove their devotion to their husbands.

As perceptions of cruelty shifted, the language on horror became intimately connected to not only the careful calibration between violence and moral sensibility but also the effort to establish standards for determining a society's degree of progress and modernity.[86] The rhetoric in accounts of *sati* illustrates this transformation. As scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, beginning in the late eighteenth century the ability to respond to descriptions of the suffering of Hindu widows with sympathy became a primary touchstone of one's civility.[87] Moreover, the key characteristic of the civilized and modern self was the ability to "notice and document suffering…[as a] disembodied observer."[88] This meant that a modern spectator had to be able to empathize with others with whom he or she has no social connection. Being a "secondary sufferer" by sympathizing with the *sati*'s lot, and moreover, *documenting* this suffering, marked one as a modern because the ability to do so implied a comprehension of what her suffering entailed.[89]

The extent to which disgust was an instinctual response to descriptions of horrific scenes was also a standard for determining one's humanity. Many eyewitnesses to *sati* emphasized that the ability to react to the spectacle with a sense of aversion classified them as civilized, while support for such cruelty was savage or barbarous. Through Gothic literature and *sati* narratives, the "cult of horror" became a "mechanism" for establishing "distance between the murderous [non-West] and the morally normal [West]."[90]

DOCUMENTING *SATI* AND FEELING SYMPATHY

In accounts of widow burning, observers referred to *sati* either as murder or as a form of suicide (self-murder). For example, in William Ward's documentation of Hindu customs published in 1817, he describes *sati* as the murder of "helpless" widows.[91] According to Ward's interviews with several Brahmins, a group of Indians had physically tied the widow to the pyre despite her protests.[92] Evidence of widows forcibly fastened to the pyre before the flames were lit indicated that the *sati* was a victim of murder.

Superintendent of the police Walter Ewer also declared *sati* as a form of murder. Ewer's role in British efforts to abolish *sati* was to gather eyewitness evidence for demonstrating to the Parliament reasons why the practice ought to be abolished. After collecting the requisite data, Ewer was thoroughly convinced that *sati* ought to be considered homicide and represented the custom as such to the British government. He suggested to superior officers that the British government must stop this form of murder by enacting a statute that declared those "abiding and abetting" widow burning to be "guilty of murder."[93] Similarly, in a document dating from 1829 authored by missionaries petitioning to the colonial government for the abolition of *sati*, the writers described *sati* as a form of "self-murder" or murder perpetrated by all those who participated in the execution of the custom.[94] That these accounts described *sati* as "murder" and "suicide" indicates that they were highly correlated to the intellectual currents and prevalence of Gothic literature at that time.

As with Gothic literature, the language of horror in *sati* accounts demonstrated that the writers' depictions of the scene exacted an emotional response and induced sympathy for widows. Witnesses who felt the widow's suffering through the medium of the gaze were seen as modern. The corollary to this assumption, then, would be that those who did not feel the *sati's* pain were primitive. Such sentiments of sympathy to the widow were well documented in the eyewitnesses' writing. An example is an account written in 1826 by Reverend J. England: "On my right, sat the poor deluded widow, who was to be the victim of this heart-rending display of Hindoo *purity and gentleness*."[95] Here, England criticizes the practice by using sarcasm when he describes the scene as an example of Hindu "purity and gentleness." Then, to emphasize his sense of civility, England compares the reaction of a native officer to his own. Though England could do little to stop the act, the *Fousdar* (chief Indian military officer of that area) "heartily… engage[d] in this murderous work [and] gave the poor widow twenty pagodas, *to confirm her resolution to be burned!*"[96] Unlike the European observer who responded emotionally to the widow's sacrifice, the Indian officer, in stark contrast, reacted with apathy. Furthermore, the officer did nothing to prevent the *sati* from occurring and instead "heartily" abetted the act.

Later in the narrative, England provides another example that illustrates the indifference of the indigenous population. When England heard "shrieks of misery" from the *sati* as the flames engulfed her, he felt an "agony of feeling" and was moved to inform a Brahmin priest of the pain that the widow was suffering. As the *sati* continued to scream, England informs his audience that the Brahmin priest did not persuade others to halt the rite, but instead "comforted" the widow that she had made the right decision to self-immolate. To the observer's dismay, the indigenous spectators sang a hymn after the widow died, while other Western observers felt awestruck by the scene that unfolded before them. England notes that he was so affected by the scene that he believed he could still hear the "shrieks and groans of the agonized sufferer" even after she had died; the widow's shrill cries "pierced their ears, and almost rent our hearts."[97]

This account outlines the gradual progression from the initial reaction of "horror" that a British spectator felt at the sight of the widow's pain and terror to feelings of sympathy initiated by the spectacle. Moreover, England's comparison between the Western and indigenous response to the scene served to demonstrate his own sense of humanity and moral superiority over the Indian observers.

The type of discussion that England adopted to compare responses to *sati* was not unique to his account. In fact, it seemed that the European eyewitnesses expected Indians to react emotionally to the scene like Western observers. A significant number of the accounts show that European spectators often expressed their shock and dismay at what appeared to be Indian indifference to the widow's pain. Three examples, from different accounts, follow:

> I ought to observe that the utmost indifference, without any symptom of the remotest compassion, prevailed among the whole of the spectators....[98]
>
> But instead of this the agonies of the dying victim are completely concealed, while

> her shrieks are drowned in the noise and shouts of the ignorant multitude and the unfeeling ministers of death….[99]

> It was a horrible sight;--the most shocking indifference and levity appeared among those who were present. I never saw any thing more brutal than their behavior.[100]

Compared with the European observers, Indians generally did not reveal any semblance of sympathy for the widow—with the exception of occasional emotional outbursts from the widow's young children or her mother. In another example, Indian spectators even chased after a woman who escaped the fire after she changed her mind at the last minute. According to Fanny Parks (the European traveler present at the scene), the crowd and the family of the deceased ordered onlookers to "cut her down, knock her on the head with a bamboo; tie her hands and feet and throw her back again" when the widow attempted to escape.[101] The Indians' enthusiastic support for *sati*, in sharp contrast to the Europeans' shock and horror, reaffirmed to the Western audience that the indigenous population was "inhuman."

Interestingly, as Chakrabarty points out, European descriptions of *sati* did more to validate European moral sensibility than they did to express genuine sympathy for the suffering widows.[102] Most of the accounts discuss the topic of female suffering during the rite, but the rhetorical tactics used to compare Western and Indian reaction are more effective in confirming the European observer's humanity than to document the widow's suffering. As Mani describes, colonial discourse involved *both* the "production of the colonized Other [*and*] the simultaneous construction of the Western Self."[103] Thus, by suggesting that the indigenous observers ought not to be indifferent to the spectacle of widow burning, observers reaffirmed the construction of European superiority over Indians through the language of horror, emotion, and sensibility.

Evidence of the dearth of genuine sympathy for widows is also evidenced by the condescending tone that some observers adopt when describing the widow as she approached the pyre. For example, many accounts refer to the widow as an "infatuated woman," which implies her faulty reasoning; if she had been able to think clearly, she ought not to have sacrificed her life.[104] The female's lack of agency as an infatuated follower of Hindu custom also hinted at her weakness to control her own destiny against her kin's will. Other times, observers classify the woman as a "wretch."[105] Using the word "wretch" to describe the widow also suggests that the widow could do nothing to improve her lot—that she was without agency. Although both terms—"infatuated woman" and "wretch"—suggest a degree of sympathy from the observer, these words undeniably evinced a condescending tone.

Europeans writers professed in their accounts that their ability to feel sympathy upon observing scenes of *sati* demonstrated their "humanity," but one also has to question whether they truly were able to conform to their own standards. If nearly all the Western spectators believed *sati* to be a horrible custom, why did they continue to attend and watch the scene unfold? Why did nearly all of the traveler's stories about *sati* begin with the author's "curiosity" to observe *sati*? For example, many travelers recounted their experience with *sati* much the same way that the traveler Thomas Twining did in 1792: "Though feeling a great repugnance for painful sights, I determined to avail myself of an opportunity which so seldom offers itself to a native of Europe of *seeing* one of the most remarkable customs of the East."[106]

Twining clearly states that in spite of his feelings, he nevertheless decided to observe the widow burning because of its novelty, its *otherness*. Such ambivalent sentiments toward *sati* raise doubts as to whether European sentiment truly opposed such spectacles of horror. Perhaps the travelers' and readers' simultaneous fascination with and repugnance to widow burning bared the contradictions inherent within using *sati* to advance a Western discourse on civilization. As Homi Bhabha argues, the "doubleness" of Western colonial discourse emerges from the "mode of contradictory utterance" that reveals the ambivalence of colonial rhetoric.[107] The paradox of European writers using accounts of *sati* to establish

their sense of humanity yet also being transfixed by such descriptions raises questions about whether the writers and readers of these accounts were just as "guilty" as they depict the Indian population to be.

Conclusion

My discussion of the "horrific" in this essay began with Laura Bush's radio address on female oppression under the Taliban regime and the similarities between the rhetorical tactics used in accounts of *sati* and Bush's speech. It strikes me as interesting that even after two centuries, such exclusionary discourse continues to be used to highlight the differences between First and Third World countries. Certainly, I do not suggest that one should not sympathize with those who suffer from political repression. However, when reading or hearing stories similar to those about women in Afghanistan, we need to question the underlying messages of such accounts. We need to determine whether these stories simply elicit empathy from the audience, or do they inherently convey that we, as citizens of the West, are more "civilized" because of our self-professed capacity to feel sympathy for others.

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the guidance and encouragement of my thesis advisor, Professor Omnia El Shakry, who is truly my inspiration for wanting to pursue and excel in the field of History. I would like to thank Professor Katie Harris for the countless hours that she has devoted to helping me improve the quality of my research. I am also grateful to the University of California, Davis and the UC Davis History Department for their research grants. Finally, I want to give a special thanks to all my friends and family who were there to listen to me talk for hours about my research and supported me along the way.

Notes

1. Laura Bush, "Radio Address by Mrs. Bush," 17 November 2001, Office of the First Lady, The White House, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011117.html.
2. Emphasis added.
3. Andrea Major, ed., *Sati: A Historical Anthology* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), xix; hereafter referred to as *sati*. Today, the term *sati* has been used to refer to the rite and the widow. Many British observers also labeled the practice as *suttee* which first appeared in an account from 1787. *Suttee* the Anglicized version of *sati,* referred only to the rite. Arvind Sharma, Ajit Ray, Alaka Hejib, Katherine K. Young, eds., *Sati: Historical and Phenomenological Essays* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 1.
4. Mulk Raj Anand, ed., *Sati: A Writeup of Raja Ram Mohan Roy About Burning of Widows Alive* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1989), 21.
5. Major, *Sati*, xx.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid, xxi.
8. Ibid, xxxi.
9. "Interesting Account of A Suttee," *The Times*, 10 June, 1810, in Major, *Sati*, 64; emphasis added.
10. I borrow the term "interpretive grid" from Lata Mani's evaluation of *sati* debates in *Contentious Traditions*.
11. I examine primarily eighteenth and early nineteenth century accounts of *sati* because that was the period when such literature was the most abundant.
12. Major, *Sati*, xx.
13. Monika Fludernik, "Suttee Revisited: From the Iconography of Martyrdom to the Burkean Sublime," *New Literary History* 30, no. 2 (1999), 412.
14. Ibid.
15. *Calcutta Journal*, August 14, 1821, in Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions*, 173; emphasis added.
16. James Peggs, *India's Cries to British Humanity*, (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1832), 217.
17. *The Critique of Judgment* is sometimes called the "Third Critique."
18. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); hereafter referred to as *Enquiry*.
19. Ibid, 121.
20. Ibid, 36.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid, 53.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid, 83.
25. Ibid, 100.
26. Uday Mehta, "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 63.
27. Ibid, 59.
28. Ibid, 13 and 22; emphasis added.
29. Ibid, 11.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid, 14.
32. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).
33. Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 35; emphasis added.
34. Ibid.
35. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 60; 154.
36. Ibid, 82.
37. Ibid, 84; emphasis his.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid, 82; emphasis added.
40. John Zephaniah Holwell, "On the Religious Tenets of the Gentoos," (1767) in Major, *Sati*, 46.
41. Because few accounts written by Indians have been translated into English, my examination is limited to a handful of rare, translated accounts included in Andrea Major's Anthology.
42. Major, *Sati*, xxxi.

43. Hookswinging was a religious custom performed as an invocation to the Goddess of Rain. Generally, males volunteered to have hot iron hooks pierced through the flesh on their backs, whereupon a strong rope would be fitted through the hoops. Then, the rope would be fastened atop a pole and the male volunteer would remain suspended in midair for a duration of time. Nicholas B. Dirks, "The Policing of Tradition: Colonialism and Anthropology in Southern India" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, no. 1 (1997): 182-212.
44. Percy Adams, "Perception and the Eighteenth-Century Traveler," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 26, no. 2 (1986), 141.
45. Charles Grant, "Observation on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain," 1813, in Major, *Sati*, 73.
46. John Zephaniah Holwell, "On the Religious Tenets of the Gentoos," in Major, *Sati*, 44.
47. Major, *Pious Flames*, 134.
48. "Interesting Account of A Suttee," in Major, *Sati*, 64-65.
49. Mani, *Contentious Traditions*, 173.
50. Ibid, 174.
51. Ibid, 87.
52. Ibid, 137.
53. Ibid, 139.
54. Ibid, 142.
55. Ibid, 145.
56. Ibid, 147.
57. Ibid, 150. A pundit is a learned person in a particular field.
58. Ibid, 145.
59. Ibid, 156.
60. Charles Grant, "Observation on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain," in Major, *Sati*, 76.. Charles Grant was a member of the Clapham Sect who arrived in India to pursue missionary work.
61. Reverend William Ward, "Farewell Letters," in Major, *Sati*, 78-85.
62. Andrea Major, *Sati*, xx.
63. Ibid.
64. Mani, *Contentious Traditions*, 29.
65. Ibid, 37.
66. Ibid. *Sruti* are the texts that are divine revelations that were written down by the sages; *smrti* are the divine revelations that are remembered.
67. Ibid, 40.
68. Fanny Parks, "Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque," in Major, *Sati*, 64.
69. William Cavendish Bentinck, *The Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck*, ed. C.H. Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 335.
70. Great Britain, Sati: Regulation, 1829, c. xvii, in Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing* (London: Verso, 1993), 10.
71. Fludernik, "Suttee Revisited," 422.
72. Burke, *Enquiry*, 41; emphasis added.
73. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "affect," OED Online, http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/5000374.
74. Talal, Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 68.
75. Ibid; emphasis added.
76. Ibid, 69-70.
77. Ibid, 71.
78. Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 419.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid, 52.
81. Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1998), 47.
82. Ibid.
83. *Trial of Mason*, quoted in Halttunen, *Murder*, 47.
84. Ibid, 56.
85. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).
86. Asad, *Formations*, 117.

87. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Witness to Suffering: Domestic Cruelty and the Birth of the Modern Subject in Bengal," in *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 51.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid, 52.
90. Halttunen, 57.
91. William Ward, *History, literature, and mythology of the Hindoos: including a minute description of their manners and customs, and translations from their principal works* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corp, 1985), 101.
92. Ibid, 104.
93. Great Britain, Walter Ewer to Captain Benson, 21 March 1829, in *Correspondence of Lord Bentinck*, ed. Philips, 178.
94. "Petition of the missionaries to Bentinck," May 1829, in *Correspondence of Lord Bentinck*, ed. Philips, 191.
95. Reverend J. England in James Peggs, *India's Cries*, 218; emphasis in the original.
96. J. England, in James Peggs, *India's Cries*, 218. Twenty pagodas, according to the source is roughly the amount of six to seven pounds sterling—not an insubstantial sum at that time.
97. Reverend England in James Peggs, *India's Cries,* 219.
98. "Interesting Account of A Suttee," in Major, *Sati*, 65.
99. "On the Burning of Widows," in Major, *Sati*, 87.
100. Fludernik, "Suttee Revisited," 425.
101. Parks, "Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque," in Major, *Sati*, 68.
102. Lata Mani advances a similar argument. She contends that "the women who burned were neither subjects nor even the primary objects of concern in the debate on its prohibition. They were, rather, the ground for a complex and competing set of struggles over Indian society and definitions of Hindu tradition." Mani, *Contentious Traditions*, 2.
103. Ibid, 3.
104. Examples of references to "infatuated woman" can be found in Reverend W. Brampton's account and another account printed in a newspaper called *Friend of India*, which was published in 1824. The *Friend of India* was one of the newspapers printed by missionary societies stationed in India.
105. Examples of references to "wretched woman" can be found in the account entitled "Interesting Account of A Suttee" in Andrea Major's anthology.
106. Thomas Twining, "The Hindoo Widow," in *Travellers' India: An Anthology*, ed. H.K. Kaul, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 92.
107. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 95-96.

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