

Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles’ Discourse on the Malay World: A Revisionist Perspective

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This article attempts to provide a revisionist perspective of South-east Asia’s historical icon by examining in detail Sir Thomas Raffles’ discursive strategies that sought to justify the study and preservation of Hinduism and Buddhism in the Malay World. Foremost within such strategies was by way of portraying Hinduism and Buddhism as practised by the Malays as a binary opposite of Islam. Secondly, Raffles sought to demonstrate the affinities of Hinduism and Buddhism with European Traditions. Last but not least, he argued that the legacies of Hinduism and Buddhism in the Malay World were suffering from a climate of decline. Most importantly, the article demonstrates ways in which Raffles’ discourse is revealing of the influence of dominant methodologies and ideologies amongst Europeans during his milieu.

By any standard, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was a remarkable figure. Remembered as one of the most dedicated colonial administrator in the history of Southeast Asia, his fame has been memorialized through the world’s largest flower, the *Rafflesia*. Academic chairs and professorships have been attributed to his name and, in Singapore, “Raffles” is associated with all things prestigious, extravagant, and grand such as the Raffles Hotel, Raffles Country Club, Raffles Institution, Raffles City. Celebrated in our textbooks as the “Founder of Modern Singapore”, Raffles is a symbol of Singapore’s secular past, which was guided by the Enlightenment tenets of reason, capitalism, benevolent rule, and free trade. His influence is so pervasive that entire collections of writings have been devoted to him. In fact, he has recently been the subject of a comprehensive bibliography (Solomon 1997). Nevertheless, except for

brief yet critical writings on Raffles, none has made any extensive analysis of Raffles' discourse on the religions of what he perceived as the Malays,¹ which he developed throughout his 18 years of service in Southeast Asia.²

This article attempts to fill this gap by examining in detail Raffles' discursive strategies that sought to justify the study and preservation of Hinduism and Buddhism in the Malay World. The first section examines various currents of thought and preceding scholarship that Raffles inherited prior to his exposition of Hinduism and Buddhism in the Malay World. This is followed by Raffles' elusive definition of the two faiths. Next is a discussion of his discursive strategies which was manifested in different forms. Furthermore, I demonstrate the ways in which Raffles' discourse is revealing of the influence of dominant methodologies and ideologies during his milieu which shaped his representations of Hinduism and Buddhism in the Malay World. Most importantly, in the narratives that follow, I attempt to argue that Raffles' ideas of religions amongst Malays were filled with biases and prejudiced conceptions. Through this, I hope to further demystify the "virtuous" expositions of Raffles within the preceding and contemporary historiography as an extension of the critical undertaking pursued by Syed Hussein Alatas more than three decades ago (Alatas 1971).

But before engaging into the subject matter, I would like to stress that this article is primarily a study of Raffles' discourse on the religions he encountered and not on the superiority of one religion over another. Raffles' accounts are primarily fascinating because they reveal to us much of his own ideas, assumptions, and speculations, shaped by the various contexts in which he was an integral part. Although there will be attempts to provide critiques of the various methods he employed to represent Hinduism and Buddhism, I will not, however, provide definitive accounts on the two above-mentioned faiths as it was practised amongst the Malays. In other words, this article is not particularly concerned with the search for "truth", hence attempting to provide an accurate and absolute portrayal of Hinduism and Buddhism within the period and area of study. Rather, this research is focused on the invention and suppression of "truths" within Raffles'

discourse and how particular versions of “truth” reflect deeper concerns amongst Europeans then.

British Scholarship on Hinduism and Buddhism

The roots of British fascination with the religions of India could be traced from the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta. By 1785, the *Bhagavad Gita*, a text that is part of the Hindu epic, *Mahabharata*, had been translated by Charles Wilkins, who is often portrayed as the pioneer of Indological research at that time. This was followed by the rigorous scholarship of Sir William Jones and Henry Thomas Colebrooke, whose translations and philological study of Sanskrit texts highlighted a deep interest of the European public to rediscover the mysteries of Indian religions (Schwab 1984, pp. 51–81). Within the eyes of these British luminaries, “Hinduism” as practised in the everyday life of the Indians did not reflect the ideals that were portrayed in the texts. They were thus instrumental in the disciplining of the rapidly evolving Indic religions through the emphasis on determining religiosity as reflected in classical texts. In the early nineteenth century, there came a new fascination for what was to be termed “Buddhism” (King 1999, p. 130). Buddhism, which was regarded as a newfound “religion”, became prevalent in the writings of travellers as well as philosophers and it was soon established as an academic discipline within various universities and colleges towards the close of the century. For many Britons then, these religions, along with their rituals, texts, and architectural remains, provided Europeans with access to their own past; the primordial times. There was a growing nostalgia, manifested in what was often termed as “Romanticism” (McCalman 1999). Many amongst the Europeans were longing to relive the mystic sense and innocence that was perceived as lost in modernity.

European interest on the manifestations of Indian religions in Southeast Asia and the processes that gave rise to it came about as early as the eighteenth century. Nicholas Engelhard and Jacob Albert van Middlekoop, both of whom were from the Netherlands, had made extensive collections and translations of Malay texts as well as useful

notes of the traces of Indic culture in Malay literature and way of life. Such works, although notable, were soon forgotten upon the publication of Raffles' magnum opus, *The History of Java*, in 1817. This book, which was in essence a mixture of self-glorification as well as detailed descriptions of multiple aspects of society and environment in Java had within it, snippets of apology and hope. Most crucially, *The History of Java* became a standard text for the next hundred years and has remained a source often cited (Weatherbee 1978, pp. 63–93).

Raffles was, however, largely influenced by the pursuits of these early Dutch and British Orientalists as well as the currents of thoughts that drove them. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to assert that Raffles followed in the earlier Orientalists' footsteps almost religiously, borrowing many of their ideas without due acknowledgement (Weatherbee 1978, p. 64). Coupled by much information derived from the preceding, his contemporaries, such as Colin Mackenzie and John Crawfurd, who had obtained many texts from Java and Bali during their extensive stay there, Raffles was ready to publicize his zealous interest in that "mystic religions" to the British public. Indeed, he went a step further to provide his own interpretations of the legacy of Hinduism and Buddhism in the Malay Archipelago (Carey 1992, p. 190).

Raffles' Ambiguities towards Hinduism and Buddhism

As early as 1806, Raffles had already observed the legacy of "Hinduism" in Java. This, according to him, was manifested in the form of Sanskrit words that had become part of the Malay language (Raffles 1991, p. 11). Raffles had probably known this fact from reading the work of a renowned British scholar, William Marsden (1754–1836), whose book entitled *The History of Sumatra* (1783; second expanded edition in 1811) had become compulsory reading for British administrators assigned to Southeast Asia. Raffles' assumptions were further strengthened by his later correspondence with Marsden.³ However, unlike the Orientalists who preceded him, Raffles did not devote any philosophical nor theological discussions to what he meant by "Hinduism" or "Buddhism". The two different religions were often

conflated and cross-referred by him. In one instance, he theorized that Jains and Buddhists shared similar forms of beliefs before a split that occurred amongst them and the subsequent development of other differences (Raffles, vol. II, 1988, p. 63). Yet he did not further develop such differences. In another instance, he sought to describe what he understood as “Hindu” and “Buddhist”. Yet the differentiation between the two religions and its adherents throughout the entire two volumes of *The History of Java* was often vague.⁴ There are reasons to believe that Raffles was still unsure whether there was any clear difference between these two religions as practised by the Malays. He admitted to this lack of certainty by stating that much of his information on the Bali religion was based on secondary sources. John Crawfurd’s observations of Bali in 1814 were one of which he frequently cited. Such observations were, predictably, problematic as it was based on short-term trips and limited exposure to the Balinese society.

Hence, in many of Raffles’ letters, speeches, and writings, we find phrases such as “Hinduism”, “Hindu religion”, “Hindu images or traces of Hindu Mythology”, “Image of a Hindu Deity”, and “B’hudist religion” juxtaposed with one another without further elaboration. It is worthwhile to postulate that Raffles had perhaps discerned the synthesizing of the two religions in the context of the Malay World. Yet, at the same time, he assumed that the essential characteristics of these separate “religions” were “given” and “understood” by his readers in relation to earlier British Orientalists’ rendering of the faith. Thus, in the discussion that follows, the word “Hinduism/Buddhism” will be used to refer to what Raffles took to be a synthesis of the two different faiths.

It is important to make clear that Raffles also observed that Hinduism/Buddhism had been localized and greatly modified from its “original” form. Large portions of the preceding native institutions and customs had been incorporated into Hindu/Buddhist beliefs upon its spread in the Malay Archipelago. Such localization process has manifested itself in the form of mystical cults, as well as cultural expressions such as *wayang*,⁵ the *gamelan*,⁶ and religious architecture. Due to all of these modified features, Raffles thus concluded that

Hinduism/Buddhism in the Malay World was different from what was “understood to prevail on the continent of India” (Raffles 1991, p. 171).

This understanding of religious syncretism was just a minor part of Raffles’ discourse on Hinduism/Buddhism. Through his letters and writings, Raffles demonstrated much preoccupation with the pursuit of his Romanticist desires in recovering the lost greatness of the Hindu/Buddhist civilizations amongst the Malays. He was, however, aware that such idealistic desire was in conflict with the policies of the home authorities and the British East India Company that there should not be any intervention by the company’s administrators towards the native way of life (Bearce 1961, p. 48). How did Raffles overcome such inhibition? To Raffles, such constraints called for discursive strategies that would justify the study, preservation, and wherever necessary, reintroduction of the Hindu/Buddhist way of life among the majority Muslims.

This was manifested in his discourse in various forms. The first was by way of portraying Hinduism/Buddhism as practised by the Malays as a binary opposite of Islam. In doing this, Raffles devoted a considerable part of his argument to showing how Hinduism/Buddhism had brought forth an ideal social order — the caste system — and many other achievements in the arts and sciences. Such achievements were manifested in classical texts and monuments of which Islam had obliterated. This is followed by demonstrating how certain aspects of Hinduism/Buddhism were comparable, albeit to a limited extent, to European traditions and religions. To augment it all, Raffles stressed that the Hindu/Buddhist legacy was in a state of decline. The island of Bali was the only “living museum” of the lost Hindu societies with elements of Hinduism/Buddhism perfectly in place. He thus saw it as his duty to be the first and most dedicated proponent of the description, protection, and presentation of the island of Bali.

Islam as a Binary Opposite of Hinduism/Buddhism

Having read and stayed in the Malay Archipelago since 1805, Raffles was aware that a majority of the Malays were Muslims and saw Islam

as one of the vital elements of Malayness. This social fact was further reinforced by the works of his contemporary, who argued that the Malays often regarded non-Muslim tribes as un-Malay and that one of the prerequisites of *Masuk Melayu* (Becoming Malay) aside from customs and costumes, was the conversion to Islam (Anderson 1971, p. 264). Yet, Raffles argued that Hinduism/Buddhism was the first and “real” religion of the Malays, specifically the Javanese (Woodward 1996, p. 17).⁷ This “real” religion, which had brought forth many positive effects upon the Malays, was eroded by the advent of Islam causing a grave loss to the Malays. In his effort to propound Hinduism/Buddhism as a binary opposite to Islam and thus needing to be recovered, Raffles stressed on three features which he posited as absent in the latter: an “ideal” social order, texts, and monuments.

Raffles argued that unlike the Muslim societies he had encountered, Hinduism/Buddhism had brought about an ideal social order in line with British interests. Embedded within this social order was the caste system, which was often seen by British Orientalists in the nineteenth century as a pillar of all Hindu societies (Inden 2000, p. 4). Such a way of life, although perceived as oppressive, needed to be promoted to ensure an ordered, hierarchical society similar to that at home. As David Cannadine has observed, Britain was at that time a classed society (Cannadine 2002, pp. 3–10). Also, such structured society was necessary to maintain a self-policing system, which would ensure a degree of peace and harmony for the pursuit of the East India Company's economic ambitions. Raffles subscribed almost fully to such a paradigm. He thus propounded that an established caste system was still in place amongst the Malays who were Hindus/Buddhists. Although he acknowledged that the system was not as rigid as that was practised in India and that the Malays at all levels “mingle indiscriminately” partly due to the incorporation of Hindu/Buddhist ideas with that of the egalitarianism of Islam, he argued that the revival of such a rigid caste system was necessary for the promotion of agricultural development in Malay societies (Raffles 1819a, p. 28). Agriculturalists were, during the Hindu/Buddhist period, “first class in the state below the Sovereign; next to them shall follow the other classes; first, the artists; second, the warriors;

and, thirdly, the merchants” (Raffles 1814, p. 134). Such organization was, to Raffles, a desirable and beneficial feature both for the natives and British economic aspirations which Islam had displaced.

Following the importance of the caste system was the recognition of private property. To Raffles, the coming Islam brought about the subsequent removal of this aspect in Malay societies (Raffles, vol. I, 1988, p. 353). The oppressive rule of Muslim rulers had brought about state monopoly of the lands, which eliminated any independent property. Such inequitable social structure was, to him, absent in other Hindu/Buddhist societies in the Malay World where individuals’ ownership of land was recognized and protected.

Finally, Raffles believed that unlike their Muslim counterparts who were constantly at war, the Hindus/Buddhists lived in a state of peace and harmony. Writing in an almost dream-like way, Raffles asserted that the Hindus/Buddhists “*were literally seem to be almost without crime, they are universally peaceable, interfere with no one, neither quarrel amongst themselves [italics mine]*”. Furthermore, unlike the Muslims, they were never attracted to the evil vices of gambling and opium-smoking (Raffles 1991, p. 169).

Hence, Hinduism/Buddhism was to Raffles a great religion and civilization, unlike Islam. One essential step to revive this lost civilization was the reinstatement of what was called the “village system”, in contrast to the decadent Islamic system. Raffles perceived that such a system was necessary to regain the past greatness of the Malay peoples, whose Hindu/Buddhist cultural matrix was still present behind the veneer of Islamic consciousness (Raffles 1991, p. 208). The Malays must also be compelled to revive the idea of the different titles and gradations of rank. They must “revert to what they were supposed to be in the days of *Majapahit* and previously, when Hindu faith and institutions exclusively prevailed” (Raffles, vol. II, 1988, p. 312). Only then could peace and stability be restored, and British interests pursued.

To support his earlier assertions, Raffles emphasized the literary achievements of Hinduism/Buddhism which were subsequently ruined by the Muslims. To Raffles, the Hindu/Buddhist era had been characterized by much poetic and literary creativity in contrast to the

unimaginative texts produced by Muslims in the later period (Raffles 1991, p. 236). Although he was aware of his linguistic limitations, Raffles argued that his amateur elucidation of such texts was necessary to enlighten his readers about the existence of Hindu influences in the literary compositions of the Malays (Raffles, vol. I, 1988, p. 372). Thus, echoing preceding Orientalists' philological scholarship, Raffles asserted:

The general character of the language is strongly indicative of a former advanced state of civilization, and illustrates, in some degree, the present character of the people. It is rich and refined; it abounds in synonyms [*sic*] and nice distinctions; it is mixed and easily made to bend, and suit itself to every occasion; it is, in a high degree, expressive of power and servility. (Raffles, vol. I, 1988, p. 371)

Having adopted the works of many Dutch scholars which he did not duly acknowledge, Raffles' limited the literary achievements of the Hindu/Buddhist period to selected texts such as the *Ramayana* (The Travels of Rama) and *Mahabharata* (Great Battle of the Descendants of Bharata) within the larger Javanese literary tradition. Laurie J. Sears suggests that such emphasis on the importance of Hindu/Buddhist texts was a strategy employed by Raffles to mitigate the pervasive influence of Islam within Javanese culture (Sears 1996, p. 77). Hence, in *The History of Java*, 47 pages were devoted to the *Mahabharata*, 60 pages to Hinduism and Buddhism, and only four pages to Islam (see also Steenbrink 1993, pp. 73–74).

Furthermore, it is worthwhile to state that in his attempt to contrast the literary achievements of the Hindu/Buddhist and Islamic traditions, Raffles (perhaps unconsciously) located the core of Hindu/Buddhist literature and religiosity amongst the Malays in selected Sanskrit texts. The primacy of written texts as the locus of religiousness has some serious implications for the appreciation of the remnants of Hinduism/Buddhism in the Malay Archipelago by his contemporary readers and subsequent scholars. First, the oral and "popular" aspects of the Hindu/Buddhist religious traditions were ignored or belittled and remained unknown. By focusing on Sanskrit texts as the sources of Hindu and Buddhist religious beliefs, Raffles limited his discourse to the literary

expressions of the elite. The religious beliefs and creative achievements of the non-literate masses were thus marginalized (King 1999, p. 66). Secondly, Raffles' discursive strategy implied that the Hindus/Buddhists of the past were, unlike the Muslims, in a state of progress. This contrast meant that the Muslims in the Malay World were in no way comparable to their Hindu/Buddhist predecessors.

There was also the identification of ancient monuments as evidences of the superiority of Hindu/Buddhist civilization as compared with Islam. Raffles' encounter with these Indic monuments occurred while he was serving his term in Java. As a member of one of the oldest Oriental societies, the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences (*Bataviaasch Genootschap voor Kunsten en Wetenschappen* established in 1778), whose primary focus was pre-Islamic art and archaeology (Steenbrink 1993, p. 59), Raffles was mesmerized with ancient Hindu/Buddhist ruins. Such feelings were sustained throughout his term in Sumatra, which made him convinced that the greatness of the past was then in retreat. As early as 1812, Raffles had already written to his close acquaintance William Ramsay, explaining that the "numerous remains of Brahminical structures, in every part of the island, prove, beyond a doubt, that a colony of Hindus settled on this island about the first century of the Christian era" (Raffles 1991, p. 106).

When observing Hindu/Buddhist monuments in the Malay World, Raffles used the comparative approach. This was a method commonly adopted by Orientalists who were primarily influenced by Charles de Secondat Montesquieu and his approaches to the study of societies (Montesquieu 1989). By comparing the Hindu and Buddhist monuments found in other societies that he encountered or read about vis-à-vis those in the Malay Archipelago, Raffles posited that the architectural and sculptural remains were not of local origins but were in many ways similar to the style of sculpture and decoration from the Coromandel Coast. However, the images of Brahma, Mahadewa, Ganesa, the Bull Nandi, and other Hindu/Buddhist deities that could still be found in Java were of finer quality than those of India. Raffles imputed to the dominance of the Muslims the fact that these treasures had become utterly neglected, mutilated, or entirely buried under heaps

of rubbish. Such a predicament thus provided him with a convenient reason to commission his soldiers to make detailed drawings and deciphering of all the sculptures and inscriptions found (Raffles 1988, vol. II, p. 6; Raffles 1991, p. 384).

The Borobudur temple was another major discovery that led to Raffles' conviction of the existence of a great Hindu/Buddhist civilization in Java prior to the advent of Islam. In order to arrest the decadence that was threatening this monument, he started the first European conservation project. In 1814, an army engineer, H.C. Cornelius, was chosen to undertake this difficult task. Working laboriously for six weeks with the support of two hundred men, he managed to clear most of the fallen trees, trash, and soil from the Buddhist monuments. This was so extensive that it eased the work of subsequent Dutch archaeologists. More interesting, however, is the fact that Raffles' detailed description of Javanese antiquities was among the first to reach the European public (Dumarcay 1991, p. 58). To Raffles, the images in Borobudur were like that of the Buddha; hence the temple must have been built to worship him. Demonstrating his contempt for the local Muslims who, he believed, ignored the importance of such treasures, Raffles argued that the word "Bodo", meaning "stupid" in Malay, was deliberately attached to the monument as a sign of Muslims' contempt (Raffles 1991, p. 159).⁸

Next was the discovery of the temples at Brambanan in Java and other remains in Sumatra, which Raffles saw as similar to those discovered at the Borobudur. Raffles suspected that the remains in Sumatra were the work of similar Hindu/Buddhist artists from Java. For him, these temples were used for a similar form of Hindu worship (Raffles 1991, p. 359; Raffles 1819b, p. 6). Like the Borobudur, Raffles saw these extensive remains as proofs of the high development of the arts and craftsmanship skills that the natives had attained during the age of Hindu/Buddhist rule. They were "admirable as majestic works of art" that needed to be examined, sketched, and described (Raffles, vol. II, 1988, p. 86).

To sum up, Raffles' discourse on ancient monuments and inscriptions implied two arguments. First, the assured existence of the faith of

Brahma and/or Buddha amongst the Malays. Second, Hinduism/Buddhism manifested in the form of monuments demonstrated the greatness of the Malays preceding Islamization (Raffles 1870, p. 13). It also implied otherwise — the deplorable state of the Malays as Muslims during his time. Describing the reaction of his Muslim attendant to the sight of those monuments:

Nothing could equal the astonishment of the man who attended me throughout this survey at everything he saw; nor did he fail to draw a very degrading and natural contrast between the ancient Javans, as Hindus and artists, and their degenerate sons, with scarce a remnant of arts, science, or of any religion at all. (Raffles, vol. II, 1988, p. 27)

Propinquity to European Traditions

In order to further justify the revival of the Hindu/Buddhist legacies, Raffles sought to show how the legacy of the former were in many ways comparable and similar to the European past and even to some elements of European civilization at present. Raffles observed that the Hindus/Buddhists resided in “the most beautifully rich and romantic spots on Java” whose vegetation was almost a direct replica of many places in Europe (Raffles 1991, p. 169). In the realm of religious practices, the rituals of the remote Tenggerese demonstrated a simplicity common to their European counterparts. The burial practices, for example, were parallel to the Old and New Testament traditions and to Virgil Romans, who “likewise were in the habit of washing the dead body several times before interment with water, which in their case was warm” (Raffles 1988, vol. I, p. 321).

Furthermore, to Raffles, Hinduism/Buddhism as practised by the Malays was a “religion” like Christianity. Such assumption, according to Tony Ballantyne, was common amongst Britons in that period, who understood “religion as a system”. Like Christianity, all religions were judged based on preconceived principles, namely, the existence of historical founders, sects, or denominations, priests, and sacred texts that elucidated the teachings of God. Religious adherents that were lacking in the observances of such systematic principles were regarded as pagans (Ballantyne 2002, p. 95). Starting from such a framework of thought,

Raffles thus observed that one of the central tenets of the Hindu/Buddhist religion amongst the Tenggerese was the belief in a *Dewa*, who, like the Christian God, was all-powerful (Raffles 1991, p. 169). Such beliefs were prevalent amongst the different Hindu/Buddhist groups all over the Archipelago.

Upon his examination of several literary texts, Raffles went further to state that the Kawi versions of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* were poems “held by Javanese of the present day in about the same estimation as the *Illiad* and *Odyssey* of Homer are by Europeans” (Boon 1990, p. 39). Due to the binary features from Islam that were present in Hindu/Buddhist religion and societies, as well as its similarities to the European culture, Raffles posited that such civilizations “perhaps promise fairer for a progress in civilization and good government than any of their neighbours”. They thus deserve more attention and support from the British (Raffles 1991, p. 169).

Bali: The Last Living Vestige of Hinduism/Buddhism

To add to his earlier arguments on the superiority of the Hindu/Buddhist traditions, Raffles propounded that these religions were on the retreat due to the rapid advancement of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. In Banjarmasin, on the island of Borneo, only some remnants of Hindu influences had been retained. Then there were the inhabitants of the mountains of Tengger; located east of Surabaya was a place where the adherents of Hinduism/Buddhism took refuge (Raffles 1988, vol. I, p. 329). To Raffles, Hinduism/Buddhism in these places was on the verge of extinction: “Bali is now the only Island in the Eastern Seas in which that religion is still prevalent as the national and established religion of the country” (Raffles 1991, p. 171).

Indeed, Raffles regarded Bali as the last vestige of the lost Hindu/Buddhist civilization of Java and, perhaps, the entire Malay Archipelago. The island, to the east of Java, was a place where the persecuted Hindus/Buddhists defended their original faith. Their migration from Muslim Java was augmented by a process of preserving and “nationalizing” the Hindu religion and subsequently the establishment of an independent

government (Raffles 1870, p. 8; Vickers 1996, p. 23). Most importantly, setting the path for a century of Orientalist scholarship, Bali was regarded as a “living museum” manifesting the main elements of Hinduism/Buddhism. The religion, which on Java was manifested in monuments, inscriptions, and texts, was in Bali, a living source of action and a universal code. The caste system, similar to the one in India, was in place with an additional group of outcast called *Chandalas*. Raffles, however, devoted much of his discussion to the elite caste, the *Brahmana*, which is revealing of his inadequate exposure to the social order of Bali. The practice of *suttee* (burning of widows), according to Raffles, was implemented faithfully upon the death of their husbands. He described such incidents vividly:

The bodies of the deceased are invariably burnt, and the wives and concubines of the higher classes perform the *Satia*. A few days previous to my landing on Bali, nineteen women, the wives and concubines of the younger Rajah, who was lately put to death, sacrificed themselves in this manner. (Quoted in Boon 1990, p. 39)

Yet, amidst his discussion of the existence of an “authentic” form of Hinduism/Buddhism in Bali as compared with the rest of the Malay Archipelago, Raffles observed that both places shared a common trait: Hinduism/Buddhism mixed with many of the preceding local customs.

At this juncture, it is important to realize the significance that Raffles’ presentation of Hinduism/Buddhism in Bali had for the European public at that time. Through the exposition a long lost, and now found, peaceful and ordered society based on a peculiar faith, an “ideal world” was revealed to Europeans for making a treasure and to learn from. It was also a way of suggesting that the savage Muslim societies were in need of a complete reformation. Bali was *the* model of an ideal Malay World to be protected at all costs.

Alternative “Truths” of Islam and Hinduism/Buddhism amongst Malays

Whilst Raffles had relentlessly argued that Islam is a binary opposite to that of Hinduism/Buddhism and that the former had brought about

negative effects and backwardness upon the Malay way of life, it is imperative to highlight that a selected few amongst his contemporaries viewed otherwise, hence providing alternative “truths”. Foremost amongst these was William Marsden who, as mentioned earlier, was Raffles’ intellectual confidante, renowned for the publication of his book *The History of Sumatra*. Upon his return to England, Marsden devoted himself to the study of the Malay language, which was subsequently published in two separate volumes in 1812. This was followed by other illuminating discourses on linguistics, comparative philology, and other aspects of the lives of Muslims in the Malay world.

Departing from Raffles’ portrayal of a radical differentiation between Hindu/Buddhist literature to that of the Islamic one, Marsden argued that Malays had incorporated the best of both religious influences into their literary compositions. He acknowledged that whilst a substantial portion of Malay literary works during his time were preoccupied with translations of the Qur’an, Muslim laws, and Arab-Persian romances, Hindu languages and mythology were not entirely displaced. In fact, the *Ramayana* (a famous Sanskrit poem) had been translated into the Malay language by Muslims, which was revealing of how the coming of Islam did not signify a complete break from the glorious Hindu/Buddhist past (Marsden 1986, p. 346). Marsden took a step further to assert that this was due to the gradual spread of Islam amongst Malays. It was a “gradual process, the effect of persuasion rather than force” (Marsden 1812, p. xxxiv).

The second personality to be highlighted is John Crawfurd (1783–1868). Like Raffles, Crawfurd was proficient in Malay and he became Resident of Yogyakarta in 1811. Crawfurd is, however, known more for his appointment as the second Resident of Singapore in 1823. Following Marsden’s footsteps, Crawfurd wrote voluminous works on many important aspects of Southeast Asia, amongst which were on the Malays.

Unlike Raffles, Crawfurd regarded Islam as a positive element in the lives of Malays, particularly for the Javanese. In Crawfurd’s appreciation, Islam had brought forth an interest towards the writing of history and an enhancement in rational thought, which he perceived as lacking during the Hindu/Buddhist past. In his own words:

Previous to the introduction of Mahomedanism (Islam), the Javanese made no attempt to write history, and we were as ignorant of chronology as the Hindus, with whom they were so intimately connected. The Mahomedan religion brought with it, as it did in India, a more manly and sober style of thinking, and since the era of conversion, we are possessed of a tolerably connected and circumstantial narrative, improving in detail and to common sense as we descend. (Crawfurd, vol. II, 1967, p. 27)

Adding on to that, Crawfurd refined Marden's ideas on the close interaction between Islam and Hindu/Buddhism in the Malay World. Unlike Raffles, Crawfurd opined that spectres of Hinduism linger within the various customs and rituals of the Javanese and such synthesis were attributed to the excellent proselytizing of early Muslim missionaries. Having written in a lucid way, it worthwhile to quote Crawfurd at length:

In most Mahomedan institutions of the Javanese, we discover marks of Hinduism. The institutions of the latter have been rather modified and built upon rather than destroyed, and in viewing them, we cannot withhold the tribute of our applause to the discreet and artful conduct of the first Mahomedan teachers, whose temperate zeal is always marked by a politic and wise forbearance. (Crawfurd, vol. III, 1967, p. 266)

Conclusion

Returning back to where this article began, it can be seen that Raffles was not as enlightened as many had assumed him to be. Through a detailed exposition of his discourse on Hinduism/Buddhism, I have demonstrated that Raffles' sympathies tended to be on the side of the Hindus/Buddhists against the Muslims. Raffles perceived Hinduism/Buddhism as one of the civilizing factors in Malay societies against the backwardness, which Islam had brought about. Hinduism/Buddhism, which was comparable to Christianity, possessed many features that made it possible to be portray it as similar to European culture. Yet, the importance and significance of Raffles' discourse of Hinduism/Buddhism does not stop there.

Raffles' desire to recover what was lost brought about many achievements on his part and also other effects. He is often hailed as the

pioneer in the recovery of the Borobudur and other great monuments in the Malay Archipelago. Through his prolific writings, Raffles exposed many aspects of Hinduism/Buddhism amongst Malays to the European audience. Furthermore, Raffles was the first amongst his countrymen to visit the Tengger highlands in eastern Java, bringing this isolated community into anthropological prominence. Most important of all, his emphasis on the Hinduistic/Buddhistic legacy and its importance in every Orientalist's attempt to appreciate the Malay Archipelago became a scholarly "invented tradition" soon to become standard in Dutch academic circles (Roberts 1999, p. 67).

Yet, looking at the flip side of the coin, Raffles, like the preceding European Orientalists, "saw many things that struck them as being anything but Hindu, but they saw such things through Hindu spectacles, and so had a distorted view" (Boon 1990, p. 22). One of the effects of this was to give the impression that Hinduism/Buddhism in the Malay Archipelago was ordered in a natural and stable way. Hinduism/ Buddhism was reduced to a few main elements: the ideal social order manifested in the caste system, the supremacy of Sanskrit texts and great monuments. Bali was regarded as the "living museum" manifesting these elements. In doing so, like the preceding British Orientalists, Raffles was trapped in emphasizing these limited features as accurate guides to the practice and appreciation of Hinduism/Buddhism by the Malays (Cohn 1988, p. 142). Also, by portraying Hinduism/Buddhism as a binary of Islam, he failed to see that whilst there were differences between them the former's evolution and transformation owed much to the interaction and adoption of some ideas from the latter (Mahmood 1999, p. 306). Furthermore, through the prism of Marsden's and Crawford's works discussed earlier, we have seen that the emphasis of a binary relationship between Islam and Hinduism/Buddhism was in many ways misleading. Indeed, it has *misled* succeeding generations of European scholars who emphasized the importance of Hinduism/Buddhism in Malay culture and life above that of the contributions of Islam (Al-Attas 1972).

To conclude, it is beyond doubt that there is a dire need to re-think and re-construct the hegemonic portrayals of Sir Thomas Stamford

Raffles in the pages of Southeast Asian history. I have shown that his ideas on religions of the Malays were filled with biases and prejudiced conceptions which were underpinned by various ideologies and methodologies that were dominant during his milieu. In some ways, this article has demystified the “saintly” expositions of him by preceding historians and textbook writers. It is hoped that future scholars will engage in an examination of Raffles’ life and discourses in order to reconfigure the dominant perceptions of him. One of the useful areas identified by Syed Hussein Alatas is on Raffles’ jaundiced view towards various ethnic groups in the Malay Archipelago: Chinese, Arabs, Americans, and so forth. Another area worthy of study is on Raffles’ agency and contribution within several clubs, missionary societies, and organizations, amongst which were the Freemasons, on how such involvement had an influence on his attitudes and policies towards the varied peoples he encountered. Having provided the impetus via this article, such undertaking, is indeed, alluring.

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NOTES

1. It is important to note that Raffles had a unique rendering of what was to be understood as “Malay”. To Raffles, Malays were “one people, speaking one language, though spread over so wide a space, and preserving their character and customs, in all maritime states lying between the Sula Seas and the Southern Ocean, and bounded longitudinally by Sumatra and the western side of Papua or New Guinea” (Raffles 1818, p. 103). Such erroneous understanding of his is a reflection of the premature state of Orientalist scholarship on the Malay-Indonesian world during his milieu. Evidences from modern-day studies of Southeast Asia have shown that there *are* cultural differences between Javanese in Java and Malays of

Sumatra. Conflating these groups of people within a constricted “Malay” ethnicity is inaccurate.

2. For insights into Raffles' attitudes towards Islam, see Alatas (1971, p. 30; 1977, pp. 130–31); Steenbrink (1993, pp. 73–74); Boland and Farjon (1983, p. 5).
3. “Marsden to Raffles, London, 2nd January 1809”, Mss. Eur. D. 742/2.
4. In his discussion on Bali, Raffles mentioned that the island had two separate religions, “that of *Budh* and that of *Brahma*” (Raffles, vol. II, 1988, p. ccxxviii). The Buddhists were to him a minority group as opposed to the majority “Hindus”. Unlike the latter, the former were said to practise a strict diet forbidding consumption of any animal. However, at the end of the section on Bali, Raffles provided a contradictory account on the “Hindu religion” on the island given to him by a Muslim. Instead of reiterating his earlier assertions about the differences between the two religions, the “Hindu religion” was propounded as being “the religion of Budh” (Raffles, vol. II, 1988, p. ccxxxix)!
5. *Wayang* literally means shadow. It is a Javanese ancient cultural heritage embracing most types of theatre.
6. The word *gamelan* means “things struck together”. A *gamelan* includes instruments that are struck, such as gongs, gong chimes, drums, and cymbals.
7. Such de-emphasis by Orientalists on the role of Islam as compared with Hinduism and Buddhism on the Malays has been disputed and debunked forcefully by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. See Al-Attas (1972).
8. In reality, the word Borobudur originated from a mid-fourteenth century Javanese text, *Negarakertagama*. It was the name of one of the Vajradhara Buddhist shrines. See Dumarcaay (1991, p. 5).

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