

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY INVITES YOU

TO A TALKON

Civility and its Translations in Hindi Advice Manuals

by

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ABSTRACT: In the power relationships of knowledge in colonial India, education was seen as a means to bring forth the moralizing effect of the civilizing process, and also uphold the stability of colonial rule. In the late 19th and early 20th century, Indian educationalists, language-enthusiasts and social reformers in the Hindi-speaking region gradually took over this “moralizing mission”. They published a number of books that especially emphasized the process of character-building, the cultivation of sympathy, and the refinement of feelings. These books were initially often translations and adaptations from well-known English books, but increasingly also original works in Hindi.

The writers of Hindi advice manuals maintained the idea that morality, manners and the proper kind of emotions would constitute the backbone of every educated, modern and civilized society. While doing so, however, the authors refuted earlier Western claims to moral superiority and instead started to postulate nationalized (and hindu-ised) guidelines for Indian etiquette and ethics, which mapped out the qualities of an educated, civilized and refined personality. Feelings such as compassion were thus promoted as signs of individual excellence, but at the same time also used to demarcate the ideals of a community defined through its emotions.

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