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## East India Company in India through Naked Eyes of the British.

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### Abstract

India has been a centre of attraction in the eyes of foreigners for many reasons. In the old days some tourists visited here to have a glimpse of its rich and highly appreciable culture. At the same time they saw diversity and fractured unity here. The society of India was divided in different sects and clans. Kings and Nababs had their own internal clashes. The fertile fields of Ganges and Yamuna were boasting of their rich crops, happy residents, and enviable beauty. East India Company entered the Indian vicinity as a trader only. Later on French, Dutch, and Portuguese all found this land suitable for their economic interest. After 1757, the English showed their vested interest in local politics too. Business and battle both changed the lot of India swiftly. Maria Logan, Fanny parks and several other minor English writers saw and felt the plight of Indians seriously. Poetic heart and mind of these writers turned their words into real sobbing of the land.

**Key Words-** East India Company, Kings, Ganges, Yamuna , Economic Interest, Local Politics.

### Introduction

East India Company entered Indian Territory in the form of purely traders. The lush green flat fields full of varied crops, coal mines, iron ores, and the booty in the form of gold and gems in the treasure houses of Kings and Nababs, attracted the shahibs attention seriously. The poverty of India and the condition of masses also added to the lure of cheap wages and labour in the minds of these traders. In this the company officials find an added advantage to earn more and more wealth. In order to earn much more profit, the British in India expanded their own business and banned slowly the Indian business and trade with several imposed checks. Upto the period of Battle of Plassey in 1757, the British expanded themselves in the field of trade as well as military and increased their Influence upto Lucknow in north and Gujrat in west. The Battle of Plassey in 1757 opened up the military field to these traders another trajectory of a big future business to amass more and more wealth and plunder the Indian booty

by both hands openly. After the battle of Buxor in 1764 the company gained almost absolute power to plunder Indian wealth in a various ways.

In this period the company was given a Governor-General in India, based in Calcutta to unite the administration. Pitts India Act of 1784 brought the East India Company more directly under the supervision of the British crown with the creation of a Board of Control. In this period a big number of Scots both in officers and sepoy introduced in the company's army in India.

Land revenue rather than trade become the major interest of the British in India in the early nineteenth century. Though the Opium trade was one of the most coveted business among planters in India at the same time Maria Logan captures the nerve in her poem 'To Opium' :

Be mine the balm, whose sovereign pow'r,

Can still the throb of pain;

The produce of the scentless flow'r,

That strews Hindostan's plain.<sup>1</sup>

Slowly, the company's status of pure mercantile form diminished and the charters of 1813 and 1833 also added to the misery by giving the company a pure basis of administrator only. From this point on administration of Indian territory become a prime focus of the company's activities.

But, still averse to wound her pride,

Sad silence kept, and pined, and died:....

My likeness in that victim see,

And pitying him thou'lt pity me.<sup>2</sup>

In this period the British also felt a need of the same old Indian laws to govern and administer the company. Now it was a sore need of the company officials to understand the Baliety, culture and languages of the territory. In this field the first pioneering name comes before us is of Sir willion Jones, the great Orientalist. He argued that India was best ruled by its own laws and customs. Now more and more british officials, writers, journalish and dianists shown their interests for orientalist reholarship on India much of which was of both academic interest and administrature utility. Scoltish Intellectual, Jomes Mill, especially during 1820 B and 1830 B, produced History of India in 1818 and it become a popular document of information about India among the coming generations of Britain.

The British in India employed several land policies in aifferent areas and provinces to inerease land revenue. These new revenue settlements in trodueed in the early nineteenth century, enhanced the

problems of the land owners multiply. In some cases the enforced introduction of cash-crops such as indigo even led to famines. This deteriorating condition of Indian farmers and peasants was highly disruptive and often met with violent resistance. Indian rulers who opposed the colonial state were usually termed as rebels and suppressed with the use of company's force. Indian masses also indulged in violent crime against company officials because of their deteriorating condition. Against it the British in India termed the Indian masses as corrupt, illiterate and despotic.

Though the ethics of colonial rule was challenged several times in Britain by the British alone. The actions and policies of Warren Hastings, the then governor-general of India, also faced trial in Britain. Several poems on the Trial of Hastings prove his treachery in India.

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While thou, illustrious Dame, shall shine, Where e'er thy fancy may  
incline; Alike rever'd if thou resort. To Britain's, or thine Indian Court."

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Letters from Edmund Burke, who led the campaign against Hastings, are the testimony which provide a valuable insight into his views on Hastings as well as Indian affairs. Under the influence of Evangelicalism in the U.K., the British officials in India suppressed widowburning - sati, which had formerly been tolerated, become emblematic of the reformist zeal of the rule during 1830.

The introduction of steam engine in the late 1820s geared up the speed of journey through out the world. Both at land and water, now this engine was creating new milestones. It is also a noteworthy fact that the British colonists faced the rigours of the Indian environment. In India, these settlers had to face the scorching heat and Sun. The Indian climate and tropical disease led to high mortality rates of men, women and especially children. Travel in India was very difficult and full of hardships because it was undertaken by carriage, horseback or on foot. Sometimes the fear of dacoits or bandits increased the fear of life multifariously.

Despite of hardships in travelling in India, the British used to travel almost everywhere in the countryside. Hugh Seton gives such a fascinating record of his fatal journey. Another traveller Fanny Parks, a famous memsahib, also travelled from Calcutta to Lahore to the Court of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh on the occasion of Holi. In her memoir the graphic description of her journey attracts the reader's attention at once.

Fond of wandering and adventure and unmindful of creature comforts, Fanny travelled extensively during her twenty-four-year stay in the country (1822-46) and recorded her experiences in a monumental two-volume journal entitled, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*. A keen observer with an open mind, she felt at home with native people of different classes and evinced genuine interest in learning their way of life, beliefs, and customs. She learnt Persian and Hindi and used Hindi words, idioms and phrases extensively in her texts in order to give an Oriental flavour to her expressions. Illustrated with sketches and paintings drawn by her, the journal is replete with lively eyewitness accounts of her encounters in India. Full of information on practically every aspect of the Indian social and cultural scene, her journal is a favourite document with Raj historians who recognize it as a classic, comparable with the works of famous India experts like Coryat, Roe, Bernier, Tavernier, and Manucci. Fanny was a great admirer of the picturesque sights of India. She enjoyed participating in native festivities at river ghats and temples. She pursued visual beauty with greed, enjoying both ‘the grandeur of storms’ and the hurly burly scenes in towns and villages.<sup>4</sup>

In this age the Englishmen in India soon realised that if they need political success, the basic knowledge about Hindu masses, their culture, mythology, philosophy and above all their psyche is very necessary. For this, the mastery of Sanskrit and other languages of the Hindus is very necessary. In this age we find several scholars who have shown their interest in Sanskrit studies. Robert Orme (1728-1801), the famous author of “The History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan from 1745”, had drawn up a general idea of the government and people of Hindustan as early in 1752 but it could be published only posthumously in 1805. Orme did not know Sanskrit, he needed Persian texts of Indian Upanishadas and other books. Similarly, J. Z. Holwel, governor of Bengal, who had presented Indian image as the black one, was unaware of Sanskrit language. The very first British scholar of Sanskrit, with general idea, was Alexander Dow who was all praise for Indian culture and the richness of the Sanskrit language. His book “The History of Hindustan” also contains some translations of Farishta, a Muslim historian of medieval India. Ample space is given to the various schools of Indian philosophy - Nyaya, Sankhya, Vedanta, Buddhism and Jainism. Professor K. G. Srivastava in his book ‘Bhagwad Geeta and The English Romantic Movement - A Study in Influence’, speaks at length about the importance of Dow’s book :

Dow’s book deserves a great and exalted place in the history of the English understanding of Indian letters. Much before Wilkins and Jones, he had provided the

Englishmen a very authentic account of the achievements of the Hindu mind in the realms of religion and philosophy, besides introducing the Sanskrit script. Indeed, he was the first Sanskrit scholar from the British nation, who had revealed the secrets of the Hindu wisdom for the first time in a very impartial manner.<sup>5</sup>

Another well chosen name among the British scholars who were well aware with Sanskrit language and Indian brahmanical tradition comes that of N. B. Halhed, the author of A Code of Gentoo Laws. Halhed was directly influenced with the vision of Hastings to rule Indians through their own customs and traditions. Hastings had appointed a large body of Brahmins to compile a common, moral and legal code from the various Indian religious sources. This compilation was again translated into Persian. Halhed an intellectual of Persian translated it into English with Sanskrit *shlokas*. Later on several British scholars devoted themselves to the real learning of Sanskrit. Among the celebrated names in this field include Charles Wilkins, Sir William Jones, H. T. Colebrooke, H. H. Wilson, William Monier Williams and Max Mueller. One thing is very necessary here to remember that the true guiding spirit behind these scholars had been Warren Hastings who himself attained a great proficiency in Sanskrit language. He translated some portions of the greatest Indian epic The Mahabharata. The first prose translation of Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta came after the great inspiration of Hastings through the pen of Charles Wilkins, a clerk in the Bengal establishment of the British East India Company. For this kind and generous service of Indian religious sources Hastings is saluted by Professor Srivastava.

Indians should be deeply grateful to him for at least the publication of the English prose translation of their most popular religious text, namely, the Bhagavad-Gita, because it was the publication of this text in a European language which opened the eyes of the West in regard to the ancient civilization that the text represented and to whose glories it bore a live testimony.<sup>6</sup>

Hastings allowed Nathaniel Smith, the then Chairman of British East India Company to publish the English translated version of Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta. Later on, Sir William Jones' translation of Kalidasa's "Abhigyanashakuntalam" came into being then Manusmriti into English version, Hitopadesh and later on several other books were translated into English. This opened the eyes of the British towards Indian contribution in the field of real life and the aim of life in the real humanitarian view.

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