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## Representation of India in the Poems of Romantic Women Poets.

<sup>1</sup>Dr.Narendra Kumar

<sup>1</sup>Asso.Prof. in English Govt. P.G. College Chharra, Aligarh Uttar Pradesh

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### **Abstract**

British Women Romantic Poets and their poetic outputs remained in the dark for a long period. Only a handful among these was visible on the international literary arena. Some poetesses like Felicia Hemans, Helen Maria Williams, and Anna Maria Jones twinkled brightly. Helen Maria Williams first time in the Great Britain appeared in the form of the protector of human rights. Even the poets like William Wordsworth had high veneration for her. In this period East India Company was increasing its affect area both in business and internal affairs of India. Some women who accompanied their families in India had fine portraiture of their experiences in their poems. They realistically penned the actual doings of company in the memoires. During the whole period from late eighteenth century to mid nineteenth century, the British showed deep interest in India - the people, history, literature, antiquities, customs and manners. This generated specific interest among British artists towards India both for wealth and patronage.

**Key words-** Helen Maria Williams, human rights, affect area, customs and manners, wealth and patronage.

### **Introdution**

The East India Company after its first settling up in Bengal, in the 17th century entered the field of trade in India. Gradually the field of the company grew all rounds. The Indian masses felt the smell of company and its officials in the coastal areas of Bengal, Madras and Bombay. Later on, with the increase in the area and mercantile field, the company enhanced the number of its employees. A big number of British citizens wished to visit India after learning about the wealth of this country. Whatever they heard about India, it impressed them much. It is quite evident through their writings both here (in India) and there (in Britain).

In this project the Indian women writing about India and its plight are not considered. Strictly, the British women, whosoever, wrote about India, its religion, social structure, flora and fauna and anything else are the part of this project. There are a big number of British women who accompanied

with their husbands and relatives to India like Anna Maria Jones, Amelia Opie, Felicia Hemans and several others, while on the other hand, there are some women who never visited India and even after that they wrote comprehensively about India. Their write-ups depend upon the stories, the news, the travellogues and other writings they read about India. Letitia Elizabeth Landon belongs to such a group of women who wrote about India and the plight of Indian people. Some of them portrayed the sympathetic view about the sorry sights of Indian masses.

In 31st December, 1600 Queen Elizabeth gave the charter for business in India to the 217 partners of the company. Later on, with the calculative and cunning moves, the company established itself well in India. Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Bombay, Madras, Punjab, etc. come under the supervision of the company after the defeat of Plassey in 1757 and Buxor in 1764. The battle of 1757 of Plassey between Robert Clive and Nawab Sirajuddaula ensured the forthcoming good luck of this British East India Company. But the battle of 1764 of Buxor was pivotal in the fate of the company. This battle left in the hands of the company an unsigned cheque for the plight of Indian masses. Slowly, the result of this defeat started in the form of ruin of Indian masses. The Company was running over the Indian business and was gaining benefit everywhere by leaps and bounds. Now with the fast growing business and expansion of the company, the need of more and more Englishmen was felt. It is also very interesting to note that a big number of British were interested to visit India through East India Company to share the Indian bounty and to exploit fastly the Indian resources.

East India Company in this period (1750-1850) expanded fastly and more and more British people were attracted towards India during this period. Warren Hastings in this period put his best efforts to expand the company's resources. At the same time, the English also took firm steps in order to curb the Indian social evils. In the form of serious reforms among the major steps comes the end of Sati system. Widow burning on the funeral pyre of her husband is known as *sutee*. This Sutee system was prevalent in India for several centuries. 'A Suttee' a poem by H.B. Henderson depicts the true scene of a funeral pyre :

And leaves that victim breast no sigh,

As stalks the feel procession by ?

And o'er her pale, yet beauteous face,

No signs of sorrow can they trace ?

No fond regret, nor trembling fear,

Both naught of terror, - dread appear ?

The Brahmin's hopes would answer nay,

But pity weeps and falters yea.

Oh! who could read that woman's heart,

Nor own its bitter anguished smart;

She dies with him she never loved -

She bursts the ties her heart approv'd -

She leaves - ah! Leaves the chosen youth,

Whose vows she heard - believed his truth; -

She dies! - too conscious that the death

That steals in flames her latest breath,

Shall sting the hopeless lover's breast

With throe unceasing - spurning rest,-

For worse than e'en the fiery flame

Which soon shall seize her gasping frame :

For this may shortly bring relief, -

But when shall cease her lover's grief ?<sup>1</sup>

In this extract from "A Sutte" the poet raises some valid questions, as 'No signs of sorrow can they trace ? -', 'She dies with him she never lov'd -', and 'But when shall cease her lover's grief ?'. In the form of these questions the poet raised the basic questions which were unanswered and no body paid attention towards the grief of this lady and her lover.

Ere blooming MIRA left her humble home,

Or ever dreamed from native bower to roam.

Then every Sunday decked in best array.

Prayer-book in hand, to Church she tripped away;

Smiled, as she caught each young admirer's stare.  
 And read their eyes more deeply than the prayer.  
 Full many a dashing clerk had sighed his pain.  
 Full many a spruce apprentice owned her reign:  
 At home - her samplers ranged in order fair.  
 And counterpanes of patch-work, proved her care;  
 Her younger brother's shirts, so neatly made.  
 So neatly marked, her industry betrayed;  
 While smiling Guests declared her tarts and pies.  
 Confessed her skill, and claimed the housewife's prize.  
 Such was fair MIRA - when an Uncle came,  
 Rich as a Nabob - fraught with wealth and fame,  
 Fresh from the East; and then her heart was fired.  
 The dream of Indian pomp her soul inspired:  
 Nor long her wishes vain - her Uncle's care  
 Bade his loved niece some masters' lessons share;  
 Till soon, how changed in every art to please!  
 She painted skies all blue, and bright green trees;  
 Could ratde, 'Ah vous dirai-je' with an air,  
 And dressed in newest, gayest '*style of Hair*.' <sup>2</sup>

East India Company from 1750 to 1850 firmly stepped its steps in the fields of trade and commerce, education and social fields. The Trial of Hasting, a poem on Warren Hastings also gives a look into the doings of the company and its officials in those days. The figure of Warren Hastings, the first Governor - General of India (1773 - 85), dominates any discussion of British India in the 1780s and 90s. In Calcutta, the poetry of the legal scholar and philologist William Jones exemplifies one aspect of

Hasting's administration : his reorganisation of the legal system of Bengal, involving the codification of Hindu and Islamic law, required British legal scholars to work in cooperation with those of India. This fostered British interest in and knowledge of indigenous languages and cultures, the theme underlying Jones' 'Hymn to Camdeo', an early example of his interest in Hinduism. Later on John Horsford, an army officer also worked on the same theme. In Britain, a comparable interest in Hindu aesthetics gave rise to the lyrics of Amelia Opie, written to accompany the 'Hindoo Airs' fashionable first in Calcutta and then in London.

Another and more contentious aspect of Hastings' term in office was his own and his administration's political and financial dealings with India. From the 1760s onwards, the activities of some East India Company employees, the 'nabobs' who had made fortunes in India, become the focus of public concern. Their extravagance and their use of their new found wealth to acquire political influence, become the target of satiric portraits in variety of media. Both the *Hastimad*, ascribed to Elizabeth Ryves; and the pseudonyms *Tea and Sugar*, embody these concerns. On Hastings' return from India, his opponents succeeded in having him impeached before the House of Parliament on a variety of charges including those of personal and political corruption. The trial lasted from 1788 to 1795. Hastings was eventually acquitted of all the charges, but the process focussed public attention on the activities of the Company and its dealings with India, and aroused a rancorous debate carried out through the means of pamphlets and articles. One of the most committed of these pamphleteers and supporter of Hastings was Ralph Broome, himself returned from a long career in India. His work includes a satirical commentary on the trial, 'The Letters of Simkin the Second.'

In the field of Hinduism the interest of the British in India become less sympathetic in comparison to Jones and his colleagues in later years. Missionary activities now geared up the spread of Christianity in India. John Lawson, a missionary based in Calcutta, viewed the Hindu religion as both inferior to Christianity and destructive to its followers, as 'The Hindoo's Complaint' and 'Jagannath' both demonstrate. A similar attitude is evident in 'Verses Written at the Island of Sagur', by John Leyden : the custom of infanticide, as described on this poem, become during the nineteenth century a 'sign of Indian degeneracy'.

The details of religious worship, such as Robert Calder Campbell's 'Madras Mohurrim Song', or D.L. Richardson's 'Laha Pennoo' and 'Bera Pennoo' also give a sly picture of India.

Mostly, the British poetry here is in the form of experience they had in India. The close interracial relationships engaged in by the Indianized British men of the eighteenth century were becoming less acceptable in the nineteenth. In historical records such traces of the relationships with

Indian women pursued by poets such as Thomas D' Arcy Morris, who left a mixed-race child at his death in 1835 abound in number.

Another aspect of interest in the poetry of this age deals with perennial concerns of the British in India. The alien and sometimes threatening aspects of the land and its occupants are described in the complaints about heat, dust, disease and insects that occupy very many lines of verse. The account of the ravages of insects in Calcutta : A poem finds an echo in other works, including James Young's comic ode 'The Mosquito's song'. The prevalence of disease and death is marked in the works of many writers who watched those around them suffer. Catherine Eliza Richardson's 'Fragment : To the Memory of P.C.S.' is one among many memorial poems in this tradition. Emma Roberts, whose sister died soon after they both moved to India, gave expression to the British fear of mortality in her poem 'Indian Graves'.

When the coming shadows rest  
 A welcome sight - on India's plains  
 And o'er the brightly glowing west,  
 The sun has flung his amber stains;  
 When the tired boatman drops his oar  
 And nears his light bark to the shore;  
 When the rich odorous scent that dwells  
 Within the baubool's<sup>22</sup> golden cells,  
 Wooed by the gale's soft witcheries  
 Comes stealing out in balmy sighs;  
 When, glancing in the sloping beam  
 Pearl like, or bright with emerald gleam,  
 The rice birds, and the paroquets,  
 Across the golden ether sweep,  
 And lamps from distant minarets,

And groves begemmed with fire-flies peep;

When the pagoda's silvery bells

Ring out from some romantic tower.<sup>3</sup>

Specific complaint of the British officials and sepoys in India was about the Indian languages. The anonymous writers of the Calcutta Journal are among those who describe their protagonists hopeless attempts to function within a legal system where Persian is the main language. The experience of exile is also a common theme: the absence of beloved family members is lamented in poems by Maria Nugent and Reginald Heber, while Emma Roberts writes of nostalgia for a Scottish or English homeland.

Alongside this poetry of nostalgia for home, the accounts of the Indian landscape written in the picturesque mode feature throughout the period. The poems of Anna Maria Jones are full of such portraits. In this tradition 'The Bengal Annual (1830-36)', edited by D.L. Richardson is the most successful of these titles; another is Orient Pearl (1834-35). During the whole period from late eighteenth century to mid nineteenth century, the British showed deep interest in India - the people, history, literature, antiquities, customs and manners. This generated specific interest among British artists towards India both for wealth and patronage. Fanny Parks' access to the *zenana* impressed her seriously. In her own memoir she recalls :

"The story of a jealous wife telling her husband, "I wish I were married to a grass cutter because he being so poor could afford only one wife. She sketched her own grass cutter from real life. The romanticised or idealised images of people and Indian scenes were vividly captured by her."<sup>4</sup>

Indian flora and fauna attracted British artists variously. Indian birds, animals, trees and flowers captured the British eye at once. They not only showed interest in Indian scenery and beauty of the land but at the same time they also developed many cities and hill stations for their own interest. Shimla is one of them. In the eyes of the British this city was the pride of the Raj.

" Among the notable contributions of the Raj are the hill stations opened up by the British in the nineteenth century. Simla was the pride of the Raj. It was Kipling's great and gay summer capital of India ..... It was also called Mount Olympus, the 'Indian Capua' and the 'Abode of Hindu Gods'. It provided escape from the searing heat of the plains, a refuge for the invalid and the bored a fun place with escapades for the pleasure seekers. Above all, with its pines and flowers in the misty landscape, it reminded Englishmen of home. Many considered it not really a part of India."<sup>5</sup>

The downfall of flourishing trade and commerce in India is attributed to the British East India Company after 1764 - the Battle of Plassey. Slowly and steadily, the Englishmen tried to capture the Indian trade through all means - fair and foul.. Through various charges and duties the Indian businesses were thrown into dust. The ever increasing rent of land revenue broke down the nerve of Indian farming system. What is to be sown or not, the Indian farmers were not free even at their own land.

In this way the Englishmen exploited Indian resources at one hand while at other hand they seriously developed some Indian sites and tried to establish a faithful government for the British. In most of the cases the Indians were on the losing side.

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