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## Religious Image of India in the View of Romantic Poetesses

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### Abstract

Religion binds people with a bond of soft social thread. In such threads there are some thorns of unseen obstacles. Women are considered soft in this matter. European women who visited India during company rule also took interest in these matters. They visited ghats of Ganges to have a look of beautiful lamps floating on the soft water. Indian cupid Kamdeo, Lord Jagannath, lord Vishnu, Mathura, Kashi all captured the attention of these memsahibs. Anna Maria Jones during her stay from 1783 to 1783 visited Haridwar, Kashi, and Himalaya many times. Benaras occupied an important place like 'Oxford of the East'. John Lawson who came to India in 1812 learnt well the Indian languages. The Ghats of Benaras, the famous Vishwanath temple and renowned seat of learning are the important themes exploited in the poetry of these poets. "Ode to Benaras" of John Hersford anticipates the flowering of Hindu learning and culture under a British 'Fostering hand'.

**Key words-** Religion, Oxford of East, Vishwnath Temple, Haridwar, Memsahibs.

### Introduction

Unlike male poets, British women poets of early nineteenth century showed their interest in Indian religious system. Most of the women in those days were housewives and their interest in Indian religion outpoured in the form of several poems devoted to the Indian deities. In this field, though the pioneering name belongs to a reputed civil servant of East India Company Sir William Jones. His "A Hymn to Camdeo" of 1784 provides a testimony of his interest in Indian religious system. According to Indian mythology, *Camdeo* was the son of *Maya* or the high attraction power and married to *Rati* or affection and his bosom friend is *Basant* or spring. His chosen place is near Agra, Mathura and Brindavan. Here he is involved in different acts or *lila*. So many *Gopis* or beautiful

women accompany him or seek his company to find the eternal pleasure away from this material world. A large number of poems were composed during this age on religion, religious seats, aspects and on religious doctrines. Poems abound on the sacred rivers like Saraswati, Ganga and Yamuna. Sir William Jones, John Hersford etc. wrote memorable poems on these issues. Among the famous religious seats Mathura, Brindavan and Benaras several poets and poetesses contributed various poems. The Ghats of Benaras, the famous Baba Vishwanath temple and renowned seat of learning are the important themes exploited in the poetry of British poets. "Ode to Benaras" of John Hersford anticipates the flowering of Hindu learning and culture under a British 'Fostering hand'. To this learned poet who remained in India for a longer period, this great seat of learning, Benaras occupies an important place like 'Oxford of the East'.

Where BENARES ON GANGES' smiling side,  
 Stupendous temples shews in idol pride;  
 Where, AURENGZEBE.A thy minarets tow'r on high,  
 And their exalted tops hide in the sky;  
 Where HINDOO priests, in holy vestments dress'd.  
 Rule o'er this far-fam'd OXFORD of the East;  
 And rend, Hindostan thy dismember'd frame,  
 Thou, GREAT MOGUL!" but bear'st that mighty name.  
 Ah! may I live where Freedom holds her reign,  
 In the mild islands of the western main,  
 With whose applause admiring nations ring;  
 Ah! may I live beneath an ENGLISH KING.<sup>1</sup>

Another very learned man, who later on became professor, judge, magistrate and commissioner in India was John Leyden. He rose upto the position of interpreter and assistant to Lord Minto, the governor-general of India. "Verses Written at the Island of Sagur" a poem of Leyden exposes the follies of Indian religion

as wicked, shameless, impudent and obscene. He paints the skull- chaplet wearers and dark goddess as flesh tearers and questions about the lady who throws her infant in the watery bier and did not shrunk once to listen to the pitiful cries of her baby.

On sea-girt Sagurs desert isle,  
 Mantled with thickets dark and dun,  
 May never moon or star light smile.  
 Nor ever beam the summer sun!  
 Strange deeds of blood have there been done,  
 In mercy ne'er to be forgiven;  
 Deeds the far seeing eye of heaven  
 Veiled his radiant orb to shun.

To glut the shark and crocodile  
 A mother brought her infant here,  
 She saw its tender playful smile,  
 She shed not one maternal tear;  
 She threw it on a watery bier,  
 With grinding teeth sea monsters tore  
 The smiling infant which she bore,  
 She shrunk not once its cries to hear.<sup>2</sup>

(Verses Written at the Island of Sagur, in the Mouth of the Ganges, where Human Victims were Exposed by the Superstitious Hindus)

John Lawson who came to India in 1812 learnt well the Indian languages. His long poem "Orient Harping" is the only work that has survived among his many writings. Lawson explains ridiculously that at the

time of death every Indian wishes to be near Ganga . A jeering look on the image of Lord Jagannath marks his mental image of Hinduism.

Another poet David Lester Richardson prays holy river Ganga in these words :

The shades of evening veil the lofty spires  
 Of proud Benares' fanes! A thickening haze  
 Hangs o'er the stream. The weary boatmen raise  
 Along the dusky shore their crimson fires,  
 That tinge the circling groups. Now hope inspires  
 Yon Hindoo maid, whose heart true passion sways.  
 To launch on Gunga's flood the glimmering rays  
 Of Love's frail lamp, - but, lo! the light expires!  
 Alas! what sudden sorrow fills her breast!  
 No charm of life remains. Her tears deplore  
 An absent lovet's doom, and never more  
 Shall hope's rweet vision yield her spirit rest!  
 The cold wave quenched the flame - an omen dread  
 The maiden dares not question; - *he is dead!*<sup>3</sup>

Maria Nugent's view at Haridwar speaks a lot about this holy place with rich religious overtones. She found this imperially religious city the 'holy seer' and 'the dwelling of the Godhead':

Ah! who can wonder that the holy Seer  
 Should fix the dwelling of the Godhead here,  
 Where, from the stately mountain's snowy side,  
 The Ganges rolls his clear majestic tide,  
 And through far distant regions takes his course,  
 With god-like bounty and with giant force;

Whilst all around us, in the varied scene,  
The glorious attributes of God are seen?  
The mountain, fertile vales, the stream, the grove.  
Speak his High Majesty, paternal care, and love.<sup>4</sup>

Lady Nugent with high esteem respects the Ganges and describes it as a male deity with the words as 'holyseer', 'dwelling of the Godhead', 'majestic tide', 'with god like bounty and with giant force', etc. She richly describes the city as the glorious attributes of 'God' and High Majesty'.

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