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Research Article



Image of India: A Study of Marianne Postan's and Maria Graham's Travel Accounts

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Abstract

From time immemorial, India has been an important place for travel. The reasons for travel to India were many, ranging from pilgrimage, trade, and conquest to exploration and diplomacy, etc. The British traveled to India basically for trade. Invigorated by the improvements in travel and expanding British influence, there was a spurt in travel by not only British men but British women as well. These women travelers traveled for many personal and political reasons. Many travel writers came to India from different parts of the world and depicted it in their own ways.

The British women also depicted India in their own peculiar ways. This paper seeks to study the travel account of Marianne Postans and Maria Graham to understand the ways in which they represent India.

Keywords: Travel, British Women, Representation, Travelogue, Diversity, Problem of Communication, Cultural diversity

Marianne Postans came to India in the year 1833. She came with her husband who was a captain in the Bombay naval infantry. Her husband got posted at Cutch and she basically records her experiences of western India. She begins the Travelogue by mentioning that after a prolonged residence in the mofussil any visitor who comes to Bombay is delighted with its beauty, its cheerfulness and surprised by the wonderful shops and warehouses. But the same visitor when arrives in India from Europe denounces Bombay as dusty, dark, and empty. She starts to write about various improvements happening gradually. The native people now form a recognized part of the community, the younger ones are educated to fit for any sort of appointment. Men of science are organizing Branch societies that endorse research. The present rapid communication between Europe and Western India makes Bombay important.

She praises Bombay a lot and mentions that the landscape at the harbor of Bombay is rightly considered as the loveliest in the world. She even goes to the extent of writing that to detail every feature which composes the beauty of Bombay is impossible. She however, agrees that the appearance of Bombay in general, is not Pleasing. The bundhas (Hindi word) are commonly surrounded by monotonous boats, whose crews conduct the shipping with passengers or cargo. When the British landed, the half-clad coolies come forward in dozens, to forcibly take and convey the luggage and belongings of the stranger. "Some half dozen dirty-looking Mussalman run along by the open door of the palankeen crying out... I master's servant- I get master everything" (Postans 1: 8).

Once employed, this servant readily charges shamelessly for the luggage thus depriving his employer by the help of his associates, and leaves the employer at a stage, where his services are extremely needed. The coachmen and grooms put on a rough cloth of any color with a flat turban. This costume with bare legs and native slippers appears weird. She finds the roads here in very good condition and the general view of the island beautiful. But the more rural drives at the back of the island are reached only through the crowded, long, and dirty bazaars. She also never fails to mention the poverty of India. "The hundreds of miserable buggies standing for hire" (Postans 1: 11).

The streets are not open, not clean and very narrow and the eaves of the houses protect these streets to become more suffocating. She also made sketches to make things very clear. Description of bazaars, merchants, various articles mentioned at length. Also mention of China bazaar and thieves' bazaar. Bombay green gives some respite from congested bazaars. Then she describes the town hall, library, and council chambers. At the presidency, the exposure to the sun produces severe and sudden headaches. She also records the food of Bombay from breakfast to dinner and that the hospitality in Bombay is superb. Earlier where she was praising

Bombay, now she is criticizing it. Any family visiting Bombay feels the discomfort as there are neither a hotels nor other places for accommodating people. The Victoria hotel gives shelter to travelers but it is situated in a very filthy and restricted street of the fort, it also gives the trouble of mosquitoes making it a less respectable place. The sanitarium gives shelter to invalids, but its rooms are also very small for family accommodation. Now again she calls Bombay all in all a pleasing and lovely spot, not like Calcutta, but its climate is better than that of Calcutta. She also believes, like other woman travelers that communication with Europe and the presence of the British have improved India.

As I before observed, even within six years material alterations have occurred to un-Indianize the social condition of Bombay. The present rapid communication with Europe has introduced a very superior class of ideas and interests; and among other advantages are many of the literary kind- reviews, papers, periodicals, and books arrive before their novelty is dimmed in Europe ... and every means of gaining information easily acquired. (Postans 1: 43)

She writes that gradually brahmins whose religious and moral tenets showed extreme intolerance, now show eagerness in their newly awakened curiosity, to receive instruction from their European master. Class distinction is strictly followed in the institutions for considering the rank of the students. The sons of tradesmen or any below the caste of a writer and the Eurasians were not given admission and if it is not followed then the influential will withdraw their sons from schools to avoid pollution of the cast. Indians, Because of their poor circumstances leave unexercised their higher faculties and therefore need the help of the British to improve themselves. Also, she mentions mostly higher class, aristocratic and influential people. Indians should take lessons from the countries where colonization was done and which are now enjoying the highest state of civilization. The British feel it as their sacred obligation to improve India. She also mentions different sections, castes, classes, divisions of Indian society, and the things they deal with. The heat in India is suffocating and native roads full of dust. Anything produced in these bazaars is awaiting to be sold in the lands where arts and civilized life will increase their value and worth. Fakirs could be seen in every part of India so in Indian bazaars too. Fakirs are almost nude and their bodies rubbed and covered with chalk, ashes, wooden beads and amulets around the neck and long hair tangled and plastered together on the shoulders. According to postans, the saints in India are the most cunning. The miseries that this class of devotees undergo are miserable. Some of them are hypocrites also but all are guided by superstition. Mentions the pretty town of Matunga which is now abandoned and deserted because of disease and sickness. At various other big stations of western India, cases of the disease were common.

India is the wealthiest and most valuable of all their colonies, so entire development of its sources must increase the value of India which only British can do. The natives of western India are intelligent and commercial people and therefore they must value the allegiance of the British as friends. The British troops and the Indian troops can never be compared and writes that native soldiers are submissive, contended and respectful to his superiors while European soldiers are unhappy, discontented and insubordinate to their superiors. The natives are

ignorant. The Indian peasant does not give heed to the world he lives in because his circumstances have rendered him helpless. There are so many troubles which a Hindoo faces and therefore he has no feelings left for patriotism, neither he thinks of bettering his condition. All his goods are just a hut erected in the midst of a desert, he subsists on a little grain of the rough kind, and he is devoid of clothes and other basic comforts and if the land becomes less sterile then it is taken from him and taxed. The men of India are ignorant and therefore cannot use agricultural implements. The villages are very dirty, huts built of mud about four feet in height in which the people can hardly stand. Because of ignorance and superstition, lack of knowledge they consider white-faced European as some rakush (demon). She mentions Europeans being of white color. Thus, establishing the superiority of color.

The chief defect which India suffers as an agricultural country is the lack of artificial water resources. Waste of labor should be stopped by using modern implements in agriculture. The agriculturalist should farm their lands in the English manner with English implements with native laborers here she is clearly biased in mentioning native laborers. The native workmen when supervised and trained by the Europeans shows great creativity (defense of empire). She describes Moharram which presents a dangerous party spirit existing between the rival sects of Shias and Sunnis. The details of the city of Surat are mentioned by her. She calls it as a very important city but its shores are not appealing thus making it low, flat, and unattractive. The city has fallen out of repair but the streets are narrow, dirty, and thinly populated. The two great sects of western India were the Jains and the Vishnuvies. All the temples contain curious and exquisite sculptures. In India the Mohammedan princes oppress his subjects and drains the resources of a fine country to support bands of nautch women, musicians etc. She mentions satirically that the nawab has only four wives. India is an idolatrous nation and so, it had adopted the same objects of worship under different titles. India has horrible laws which govern the superstitious ceremonies of several religious rites. The natives have accepted oppression as their birthright. The cantonment of Poonah is the finest station in western India. She agrees that India is the richest colony and British should learn to estimate the full value of this colony.

Maria Graham came to India in the year 1808 with her father. She starts the description of India by explaining what palankeens are, as they were waiting on the shore to convey them further. Next, we find the description of palankeen bearers who wear nothing but turbans and a cloth put around the loins but their scanty clothes do not shock one because of their dark skin color, and since such dark color is not usual to Europeans so this nakedness gives the appearance of a dress. She further describes the costume of the women of different religions, then she describes lower caste natives and writes about their dress, food, and lodging. streets appeared to be dirty and heavily crowded with men, workmen and children. The architecture of houses of rich natives and that of Hindoo houses are described briefly. The lower classes live in huts made of clay and roofed with palmyra and coconut leaves intertwined together. Some of the huts are very compact in size, they fail to accommodate a person sitting upright. She throws light on agriculture also and its modes. On her visit to Mommba Devi temple, she sees some religious men, who were young and fat, covered all over with ashes, and their hair

tangled and dirty. with this description she creates the image of strange. They had no clothes on. “My expectations of Hindoo innocence and virtue are fast giving way” (Graham, 10). She gives in details of poor condition of pariahs and exaggerates it. Indians are cunning and incapable of truth: they do not agree with the accusations of lying and don’t feel shame in practicing them. She shows a sorry picture of poor Indian servants and indicates cheap labor. Further, very detailed descriptions of servants and their roles. India is not advanced and also transportation is poor here. It lacks basic facilities. She brings to the fore an inferior set of traveling merchants and the inside of their boxes are like that of a country shop in England as containing assortments like spelling books, prayer books, soap, scissors, knives, needles etc. she then compares it to Arabian Nights entertainment. Mention of Parsees and their customs and lifestyle by her. In India people witness long-continued droughts, so anyone who builds a tank can become a well-wisher of India. During the famine, many people migrated to find sustenance elsewhere which they failed to get at home. Many perished at the roadside and others when they sought help to receive the means of life that only the British can impart. Even for sustenance, people started to sell their children but still can’t survive.

She mentions the business of worship going on in temples. The various acts of worship are defined by her as acts of indolence in an indolent country.

In one place women pouring oil, water, and milk over the figure of gods; in another child decking them with flowers, here devotees and pilgrims performing their ablutions, and their priests chanting portions of the Vedas; yet all going in a manner that might besem the inhabitants of the castle of indolence. (Graham,72)

Here she represents India as the castle of indolence and its inhabitants extremely fit for such indolence. She is assured that the communication of Indians with Europe would help the natives of India to come out of their moral and religious humiliation and she approves the methods by which the Europeans have obtained possession of India. She is again disappointed as she wants to see a native prince but the Peshwa is absent on the pilgrimage. she mentions that the peshwa is a man of no ability and poor.

I am told that Peshwa is a man of no ability, a great sensualist, and very superstitious. His time is spent in making pilgrimages, or buried in his zenana, every week there is a devout procession passing on which he squanders immense sums, and consequently he is always poor. (Graham, 81)

Here she presents the peshwa in all negative light and spending the money in unnecessary things, to indicate that peshwa is not fit to rule, has no abilities and therefore his territory should be looked after by the British. She finds her first approach to Madras striking. she calls the song of the rovers a wild and plaintive cry. Further, she describes Boatman as naked with just a turban and half a handkerchief fastened on the waist. Graham never forgets to bring color into her discourse. While in Calcutta nothing could be more barren than the entrance to Hoogly. One is surrounded by sharks and crocodiles but more horrible is the object towards the east, it was the black low island of Saugor and the very scene of the jungle that spans over it, is terrific. In Europe, the mind of man flourishes more than in any other place. But in India many negative factors are present.

If we look around us here, the passive submission, the apathy, and the degrading superstition of the Hindus, the more active fanaticism of the Mussalmans; the avarice and ignorance of most of the people seem to place them all at a level, infinitely below that of the least refined nations of Europe. (Graham, 134)

So, Europe is in every way superior to India. She treats men as effeminate, she was not able to get with any native families as was in Bombay. The houses in Calcutta were more commodious than in Bombay or Madras. She mentions the nasty and horrible scene of floating dead bodies, being torn by two wild dogs. She visits the ancient and bizarre town of Mahabalipuram, famous among English as the seven pagodas. She arrives in the daylight to that flat uninteresting place. She says she is attached to India, yet she finds it disagreeable.

I hardly thought I could have felt so much at leaving India, as I did when I embarked at Madras; but there is something in leaving even leaving a disagreeable place forever, that makes one sad, without being able to account for it- much more when that place contains friends with whom one is in habit of daily intercourse and from whom one has received kindness. (Graham, 173)

So whatever attachment she feels it's just because of the friends she has in India. For her travel is a scholarly cruise. The British were quick to notice and take advantage of any discord among native inhabitants.

Both Marianne Postans and Maria Graham delineate a sorry picture of India which is full of poverty, ignorance, and superstitions. India is a place where caste distinctions are followed. Many places in India are full of sickness and disease. Both of them describe small huts and streets as narrow and dirty. Both of them believe that communication with Europe can save India. People of western India are intelligent because they value the friendship of the British. With the mention of ash-smearing fakirs, they both make India a mysterious place full of strange people. These travel writers portrayed India which was a reflection of India of their perceptions and belief. They showed India as a place which is in dire need of British help and intervention. The Hindus and Muslims of India are presented at perpetual war with one another. Even Hindus and Muslims are rivals of people of their own religion and sects who are rivals of each other – Hindus have caste distinctions and Muslims are divided into Shias and Sunnis. So they need British rule to save Hindus and Muslims from each other. The Indian rulers are described as effeminate and incompetent, who are good for nothing so again British needed to look after the rule of kingdoms to save them from anarchy. The representation of India by both these women travel writers clearly shows the politics of justification of British rule in India.

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