



NARRATIVE ON ANGLO-INDIAN LITERATURE AND INDIAN CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The narration of Anglo Indian literature of the great British self-governing dominions, Anglo-Indian literature should, logically, is the territorial English literature of Anglo India. But the degree to which the ever-changing English community that guards and administers India differs from the settled inhabitants of Canada or Australia is, at the same time, an explanation of the main peculiarities of that literature and, also, the measure of the difficulty which confronts any attempt to it.

KEYWORDS: narration of Anglo Indian literature, Englishmen, English life and culture.

Introduction

Anglo-Indian literature, as regards the greater part of it, is the literature of a comparatively small body of Englishmen who, during the working part of their lives, become residents in a country so different in every respect from their own that they seldom take root in its soil. On the contrary, they strive to remain English in thought and aspiration. By occasional periods of residence in England, they keep themselves in intimate touch with English life and culture: throughout the period of their life in India they are subject to the influence of two civilizations, but they never lose their bias towards that of England, which, in most cases, ultimately reabsorbs them.

Anglo-Indian literature, therefore, is, for the most part, merely English literature strongly marked by Indian local colour. It has been published, to a great extent, in England, owing partly to lack of facilities in India, and, partly, to the fact that the Anglo-Indian writer must, as a rule, make his appeal mainly to the public in England and only secondarily to the English community in India. The actual writing has often been done in England during furlough or after retirement, because that is precisely the time when the Anglo-Indian has leisure for literary work. The years of retirement are also especially fertile for another reason, since not until he leaves India has the official complete freedom from those bonds of discipline which, in India, have always hampered the free expression of opinion. Thus, Anglo-Indian literature is based in origin, spirit and influences upon two separate countries at one and the same time.

That this condition of affairs has prevailed in the past does not necessarily imply that it must continue. The future of the English language in India is a question of great moment to English literature. As collateral, though not by any means inevitable, result of the establishment of the British Indian empire, English has become the language of government and a common medium of literary expression throughout a vast sub-continent containing 300,000,000 inhabitants. At the time when the empire was founded on the ruins of the Mogul dominion, the Persian language performed that double task, and it might have continued to do so have Englishmen preferred to orientalise themselves rather than to anglicize those among whom they lived. But, in addition to the natural disinclination of the Englishman to steep him in orientalism, the introduction of English law and English learning carried with it, as an almost necessary corollary, the adoption of English as the language of universities and of the highest courts of justice. Hence, it followed that English became a medium of literary expression for the educated Indian. His writings in our language, together with those of the domiciled community of European or mixed origin, constitute a strictly territorial English literature, and may be regarded as that part of Anglo-Indian literature which is most potential of development in the future; but, in the past, they have, naturally, attracted little notice in comparison with the writings of the English immigrant population.

Father Thomas Stephens, who went to Goa in 1579, was the first Englishman to settle in India, and Anglo-Indian literature began with his letters, of no extrinsic value, to his father, which have been preserved by Purchas. Master Ralph Fitch, merchant of London, travelled in India and the east from 1583 to 1591, and his lively description of his adventures, preserved by Hakluyt and Purchas, was of the utmost value to those who sought to promote an English East India company.

For a hundred years after the East India company received its charter, Anglo-Indian literature consisted solely of books of travel. Of the large number of writings of this class, a few may find mention here. Sir Thomas Roe, the gallant Stewart diplomat who was the ambassador of James I at the court of "the Great Mogor, King of the Orientall Indyes, of Condahy, of Chismer, and of Corason,"

wrote a very readable journal narrating his life at the court of Jahangir. Edward Terry, his chaplain, wrote a *Relation of a Voyage to the Easterne India*, full of interesting observation, and including an account of his meeting with the "Odcumbian legstretcher," Thomas Coryate, whom Roe also mentions. William Bruton's *Newes from the East Indies* relates how the English obtained their first footing in Orissa in 1632, and is a fine piece of vigorous narrative English. William Methold, who was in India at the same time, tells in his *Relations of the Kingdome of Golconda*, preserved by Purchas, of his experiences in south India; while John Fryer, who belongs to the latter half of the seventeenth century, and had an interview with Aurangzib, throws a good deal of light on the contemporary politics of western India in his *New Account of East India and Persia*. These English writers of travel tales are far less famous than their brilliant French contemporaries of the seventeenth century, Bernier and Tavernier; but their *naïveté*, in the face of the many novel things they saw, combined with the delightful seventeenth-century narrative style in which they wrote, gives their writings a distinction which Anglo-Indian literature of this kind has never recaptured.

The greater part of the eighteenth century, until near the close of the governorship of Warren Hastings, was, in a literary sense, all but uneventful. It was a period of anarchy and war in India. The beginning of the century saw the English mere traders struggling for a foothold in India; its closing decades saw them sovereigns of vast territories. Alexander Hamilton, who was in the east from 1688 to 1723, wrote *A New Account of the East Indies*, but his book, though comprehensive, is rather rambling and commonplace. Between his date and 1780 there are only a few names which call for comment. Pre-eminent among them was that of Robert Orme. Born in India in 1728, he returned to the land of his birth as a "writer" in 1743, and there, during the course of a successful official career, in which he was closely connected with many of the events afterwards discussed in his books, he gathered the knowledge which enabled him to become one of the greatest of Anglo-Indian historians. 2 His *History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan* is the prose epic of the early military achievements of our race in India. An indefatigable, rather than a brilliant, writer, Orme remains a mine in which all subsequent historians must quarry. In his *Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire, of the Morattoes and of the English concerns in Indostan from the year 1659*, the conscientious and unwearied narrator of contemporary events became the industrious investigator of past history, though it is by his first book that Orme's name chiefly lives. Alexander Dow, who died at Bhagalpur in 1779, not only translated histories from the Persian, but wrote two tragedies, *Zingis* and *Sethona*, which were produced at Drury lane. His authorship of these plays, which were oriental in setting, was challenged by Baker in his *Biographia Dramatica*, "for he is said by those who know him well to be utterly unqualified for the production of learning or of fancy, either in prose or verse." Others who may be mentioned are John Zephaniah Holwell, a survivor of the Black Hole, who wrote on historical and other subjects after his retirement in 1760, including a *Narrative of the deplorable deaths of the English gentlemen who were suffocated in the Black Hole*, which was included in his *India Tracts*. Charles Hamilton, who wrote a history of those Rohilla Afghans whose expulsion from Rohilcand brought much odium upon Warren Hastings; James Rennell, the father of Indian geography, who wrote after his retirement in 1777; and William Bolts and Henry Verelst, whose quarrels in India resulted in the production of polemical history by them both.

The closing years of Warren Hasting's Indian career saw the real birth of English literature and literary studies in India. Hicky's Bengal Gazette, the first newspaper of modern India, was founded at Calcutta by James Augustus Hicky in 1780. It was a scurrilous production, but a sign of life. James Forbes left India in 1784, carrying with him the collected materials which he afterwards published as his

Oriental Memoirs. The appointment, in 1783, of Sir William Jones as judge of the supreme court was an event of high importance in the history of the relations between east and west, as was also his foundation of the Asiatic society of Bengal. He is remembered primarily as the earliest English Sanskrit scholar; but, in the domain of Anglo-Indian letters, he takes rank not only by his translation of Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*, but, also, as the first Anglo-Indian poet. He had written verse before he came to India; while in India, he addressed the gods of Indian mythology in a series of hymns which, if not of the highest order of poetry, are yet aflame with enthusiasm and knowledge. Inferior to Jones as an orientalist, but superior as a poet, was John Leyden, that "lamp too early quenched," as Sir Walter Scott put it. He lived in the east from 1803 to 1811, and, though he, too, is remembered chiefly as an orientalist, he is to be noted as the first of that long line of writers who expressed in verse the common feelings of Englishmen in "the land of regrets." His poetry is a simple expression of the emotions which all Anglo-Indians experience at some time—pride in the military achievements of our race, loathing at the darker aspects of Indian superstition and the exile's longing for home. His *Ode to an Indian Gold Coin* deserves a place in every Anglo-Indian anthology of verse as an expression of this last emotion.

The closing years of the eighteenth century, and the first two decades of the nineteenth, were marked by other signs of literary advance. Hugh Boyd, who, by some, was alleged to be Junius, was in India from 1781 to 1794, and made some attempt, in essays on literary and moral subjects in local journals which he conducted, to keep alive the flame of English literary culture in his adopted country. In 1789, the quaint translation into English of Ghulam Hussein Khan's *Siyar-ul-Muta'akhhirin* by the Franco-Turk Raymond, alias Haji Mustapha, was published in Calcutta. The intrinsic interest of this contemporary history of India, combined with the oriental phraseology and the Gallicisms with which the translation abounds, renders Raymond's book one of the most curious pieces of literature among Anglo-Indian writings. Meanwhile, Henry Thomas Colebrooke made a name for himself as the leading Sanskrit scholar of the day; James Tod was carrying on those researches in Rajputana which he ultimately gave to the world in the classic *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, a work fuller of romance than most epics; Mark Wilks, in the south of India, was both helping to make history and amassing the materials for writing it, which he eventually published as his impartially and critically written *Historical Sketches of the South of India*. Sir John Malcolm, who, also, took part in many of the events which he described, followed with his *Political History of India* in 1811, and, subsequently, with his *History of Persia*, his *Central India* and other works, including a volume of poems; while Francis Buchanan-Hamilton wrote on scientific and historical subjects, including *An Account of the Kingdom of Nipal*. As belonging to this period, too, may be mentioned Eliza Fay's *Original Letters from Calcutta*, descriptive of her travels from England to Calcutta, and the anonymous *Hartly House*, described as a novel, though, in form, a series of letters written by a lady and descriptive of life in Calcutta towards the close of the eighteenth century. Finally, Mary Martha Sherwood, the children's writer, was in India during this period and her *Little Henry* and his Bearer was the gift which she gave to Anglo-Indian children in memory of the child she had lost.

The thirty or forty years which preceded the mutiny were full of events of the greatest moment for the future of the English language in India.

Macaulay was in India from 1834 to 1838, and his minute on education resulted in the definite adoption by Lord Bentinck's government of the English language as the basis of all higher education in India. Ram Mohan Roy, the Bengali reformer, had advocated in English writing this and other reforms, the style of which Jeremy Bentham compared favourably with that of James Mill. David Hare, a Calcutta watchmaker, gave him strong support, and eventually in 1816 the Hindu college was founded at Calcutta for the instruction of Indians in English; and the decision of the government of India, in 1835, that its educational subsidies should promote mainly the study of European literature and science, found its natural sequel in the foundation, in 1857, during the very crisis of the mutiny, of universities in which English was to be the medium of instruction at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. The government of India had set out to give its subjects, so far as might be, an English mind.

As a result of this policy, there is, in modern British India, a steady and increasing output of English literature written by Indians. But, as is only natural, so drastic an innovation as the complete changing of a people's literary language could not bear immediate results of value, and not only has the bulk of Anglo-Indian literature continued to be written by Englishmen, but, for a very long time, it remained doubtful whether Indians, could so completely become Englishmen in mind and thought as to add, except in the rarest and most exceptional cases, anything of lasting value to the roll of English literature.

Conclusion

Of the historians during the period, James Grant Duff and Mountstuart Elphinstone are pre-eminent. Grant Duff's *History of the Mahrattas* (1826) and Elphinstone's *History of India* (1841) are two of the classics of Indian history. The romantic interest of the former book, the accurate though uninspiring conciseness of the second, and the pioneering ability shown by both in the untitled regions which they surveyed, gave these books a standing which they still hold, despite the advance of knowledge since they appeared. Other historians were Horace Hayman Wilson, the Sanskrit scholar, who continued and edited James Mill's *History of British India*; John Briggs, the translator of Ferishta's *Muhammedan Power in India*; Sir Henry Miers Elliot, the unwearied student of the history of Mussulman India, whose *History of India* as told by its own historians was edited after his death by John Dowson; and Sir John Kaye, prominent in the history of Anglo-Indian letters as the founder, in 1844, of *The Calcutta Review*, to which he frequently contributed. He also, long after his departure from India, wrote Indian history voluminously, his *History of the Sepoy War* in India being his best known work.