

## Paternalistic Colonialism in William Hodges' *Travels in India*

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### **Abstract**

*This paper seeks to discuss the idea of paternalistic colonialism in William Hodges' travelogue, Travels in India. This idea adheres to the discourse in which actions and decisions are made for another person or group with the intention of benefitting them. By executing the critical idea, "Paternalism" advanced by Nicholas Cornell and Fiona Robinson, this researcher draws the conclusion that Hodges, here, stands for an altruistic colonial rule that can set India's destiny. By placing spotlight on ruinous lands and landscapes, the writer makes an attempt to appropriate the presence of British Empire therein for the reconstruction of India. It is through the rhetoric of ruin, he strives to justify the British colonialism in India as an inevitable force for the overall development of the country. He favors the glorious presence of British government as a passport to transform the ignominious destiny of India and Indians. By critically analyzing Hodges' recurrent emphasis on the presence of British government in order for India to take a gigantic leap from rags to riches, this article gives sustained attention to argue that the writer is in favor of paternalistic colonialism.*

### **Keywords**

*benevolent, paintings, travelogue, ruin, British government.*

## **Introduction**

The romantic period was marked by the massive British imperial expansion that was to make it dominant during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was ensuing expansion in travel writings, which, highly popular at that time, seemed to bring exotic lands and landscapes within the grasp of ethnographic and cultural information about other societies. In the same light, William Hodges, as a first professional English landscape painter to visit India under the patronage of Governor General of East India Company, Warren Hastings, captured the Indian panorama in his paintings and prints. Despite being an agent of East India Company, in his travelogue, *Travels in India*, he has brilliantly captured the Indian scene and culture in their glorious specificity without sensationalizing the things in any way.

In his travelogue, Hodges valorizes British colonial rule in India as a galvanizing force to transform it from the pervasive ruins to the pinnacle of glory. Under the veil of capturing Indian panorama and culture in their glorious specificity in his paintings and prints, he represents India as ruin, except where British rule has transformed into cultivated and prosperous landscape. In the length and breadth of the narrative of the travelogue, British presence in India has been presented as agricultural development, prosperity, well-demarcated field and a sense of peace and security among the people.

At the heart of the narrative of his travelogue is the projection of British presence in India as agricultural development, prosperity, well-demarcated field and a sense of peace and security among the people. Hodges, here, is adhering to a discourse where improvement and colonial rule were inseparable. By critically analyzing the rhetoric of ruin executed by the writer, this paper aims to present a colonial ideology of benevolent paternalism. To bring in Hodges' strategy to achieve his colonial upshot: the justification of British colonial rule in India for benevolent purpose is the objective of this research.

Literature review unveils that the issue of paternalistic colonialism in the mentioned travelogue receives only oblique and sketchy attention by the critics. Geoff Quiley (2004), for example, by supporting British colonialism asserts, "The East India Company was actively cultivating in India during 1780s and 1790s" (p. 3). In other words, British colonialism was not exploiting India; rather it was refining India. Agreeing with this view of the critic, my line of critique remains focused on benevolent colonial rule of Britain, which is not much discussed by the critic herein. Harriet Guest (1989), in the same way argues:

Hodges is eager to get beyond Madras, to explore the interior, perhaps because, in his account, the recognition and identification of the people there seems over determined. Madras was formed by the English in the mid seventeenth century, and since the wars of 1778-52, they may be considered as 'Sovereigns.' (p. 37)

The critic, here, means to say that Hodges wants to explore and excavate the Indian territories beyond Madras with a view to making them cultured, completed and cultivated. And he envisages the sovereignty of Indian people wherever Englishmen go and rule. Since Madras was formed by Englishmen, therefore, no need to doubt in its prosperity. Although the critic takes colonialism in India with sense of optimism, he is oblivious to highlight the rhetoric of ruin executed by Hodges to justify British colonialism. In the same vein, taking reference to Hodges' travelogue, G. H. R. Tillotson (1992) discusses the *sati* custom in India and its abolition in British controlled area thus:

[...] an obvious arena in which to make such observations, and Hodges

spent much time there. Sati was a subject obsessively discussed by European travellers at this time, though its actual occurrence was not as common as readers of those discussions might be led to think. In the decade before 1829/30, when the custom was banned in British-controlled regions. ( p. 377-378)

Here, the critic valorizes the grace of British Government to root out the so-called *sati* system. In other words, he is glorifying British rule in India to root out the social evils like *sati* system. Similarly, William Foster (1950) makes comment on how Hodges made his fortune by selling his painting about India thus:

The first landscape artist to visit India - William Hodges, a future R.A. -arrived in Madras early in 1780, and a year later proceeded to Calcutta. Generously assisted by Warren Hastings, he travelled extensively in Upper India and painted many pictures of the scenery. Some of these he appears to have sold at a good prices. (p. 519)

Here also the idea of paternalistic colonialism and the idea of the rhetoric of ruin used by Hodges fall short. His line of criticism merely focuses on the places visited by Hodges, Indian panoramic beauty and its value in London.

By the same token, for Isabel Stuebe (1973), Hodges' travelogue captures "a vivid description of his first sight of Calcutta with massive walls of Fort William and the dazzling white string of Palladian buildings on the esplanade [...] the warm hospitality of the city"( p. 659). Aside from the valorization of Indian people and places, the idea of paternalistic colonialism remains untouched in this criticism. Focusing on imperial gaze of William Hodges, Dr Md Monirul Islam & Dr Subhajit Das (2017) argue:

If stereotyping the Indian rulers as despotic plays a significant role in Hodges's imperial rhetoric, the recurrent images of the unmanageable, the dangerous, the ruinous and the chaotic aspects of Indian landscape and life also play an important role in constructing his imperial gaze. (p. 8)

The critics, here, are concerned with the projection of India as unsystematic country with stereotypical images by the colonial master. Hodges' prints and paintings are representation of India with colonial mindset according to these critics. Like earlier critics, they too, are oblivious regarding the idea of benevolent colonial rule by highlighting the rhetoric of ruin. Likewise, David Peter Robinson (2020), glorifying William Hodges in his representation of India argues, "Hodges challenged the authenticity of India as presented by Orientalist scholars, noting that little had been presented to the general public that represented 'the face of the country'" (p. 131). Here,

the critic demystifies the orientalist representation of India, which most of the time is guided by fabrication. However, he gives little room for paternalistic colonialism in his criticism.

The above-discussed critical studies on the mentioned text mostly veer around the representation of beautiful Indian lands, landscapes and hospitable people therein. They are oblivious regarding the idea of paternalistic colonialism, which exists in the text. My paper seeks to plug this critical gap.

## Methodology

This paper uses qualitative research method for the textual analysis of the selected primary text. It also takes recourse to published books, research journals, research articles, and reviews on the related topic to serve as the secondary data for the research purpose.

## Theoretical Framework

This paper uses a close discursive analytical style by drawing upon the critical idea, “paternalism” advanced by Nicholas Cornell and Fiona Robinson. Cornell’s approach of “paternalism” is that the actor knows better than the person acted upon. Fiona Robinson, on the other hand, takes the idea of “paternalism” as the rhetoric of the West in venturing to other countries with civilizing mission. This paper uses the mentioned critical idea to examine, analyze and interpret the primary text from the lens of paternalistic colonialism.

## Textual Analysis

Hodges’ in his travelogue, *Travels in India*, persistently brings the idea of ruinous lands and landscapes to the fore and expresses his utmost wish to be the British government there for transforming them into beautiful and better places. He is worried about huge crowd of people, incongruous locations, *sati* custom, barren lands and host of unsystematic and uncivilized ways of life in India. He then expects the presence of British government to systematize and civilize everything. By this, he favors British colonialism in India with great sense of paternalism.

At the outset of his travelogue, Hodges describes India as a lovely country of interest for Englishmen and it is, therefore, must be patronized and protected by English people. As the narrative goes in the preface:

The intimate connection which has so long subsisted between this country and the continent of India, naturally renders every Englishman deeply interested in all that relates to a quarter of the globe which has been the theatre of scenes highly important to his country.... (Hodges, 1794, p. iii)

English fascination to India is projected here. During the heyday of colonization, fascination to far-off lands and landscapes was commonplace phenomenon. Fascination of Britain towards India and its exotic people and places was the root cause of British colonial venture.

Hodges, in the narrative of his travelogue often hankers after the ruins, and the moment he happens to see the ruins and the unpopulated areas in India, he cannot help realizing the lack of British rule there. His description, which foregrounds the ruins, goes thus:

My route was scarcely fixed when I was interrupted by the great scourge of human nature, the great enemy of the arts, war, which, with horrors perhaps unknown to civilized regions of Europe, descended like a torrent over the whole face of the country, during the peaceful husbandmen from his plow, and the manufacturer from his loom. (p. 5)

The destruction of the production-process lurked in the above-mentioned lines evokes the downfall of the country's economy through wars. Hodges' description of the war immediately changes into a description of the ruin of the habitat. He describes the naked doors and windows in the houses of countryside and overwhelmingly maintains that no security is possible in such houses; enemies can attack at any time there. Here, he places emphasis on the fort made by Englishmen and connects it with the sense of security, and accentuates that no security is viable without English fort. As he says, "every gentleman now possessing a house with the fort, was happy in accommodating the family of his friend who before had resided on Choultry plain" (p. 6-7). By this, Hodges hints at the requirement of English forts for Indian people to save themselves from the potential problem likely to cause by the ruins. When the writer describes the landscape of Agra, he again cannot help foregrounding the ruins. As the narrative goes:

It was impossible to contemplate the ruins of this grand and venerable city, without feeling the deepest impressions of melancholy. I am, indeed, well informed, that the ruins extend, along the banks of the river, not less than fourteen English miles. (p.117)

Here, by focusing on ruins, Hodges is expressing his innermost expectation from British government to systematize the ruins and transforms each and every rough locale into rewarding and alluring ones. Such transformation is possible only by English people. Hodges also seems to be scared of the mob in India. Mob psychology haunts him much. This becomes clear in his description of Patna in his narrative:

When the fleet arrived at the city of Patna the shores were lined with

people; the windows in the houses on the banks of the river were filled; even the tops of buildings and every wall was crowded; so that when the Governor General went on shore, it was scarcely possible to proceed, from the multitude, which pressed on every side to salute him. (p. 43-44)

His description captures the mob and multitude. Mob is generally taken as negative force. It is equivalently regarded as mess, disorder, irrational, emotional, etc. In short, mob and multitude have negative connotations. Here, by highlighting mob, Hodges is not only trying to express his idea of presence of English people in India to systematize and civilize India and Indians but also to unpack the idea that mobs and multitude lead to the ultimate ruin.

It is through the rhetoric of ruins, Hodges implies that the entire country is ruined, deserted and unsafe, hence, needs glorious transformation from the part of British government. This kind of idea anchors Hodges' paintings and prints firmly within the larger discursive construction of India during this period. Such discursive construction is associated with the idea of paternalism.

Generally speaking, paternalism refers to the interference of someone to someone else with a view to protecting, promoting and purifying him or her. If someone interferes others with benevolent purpose, it is not other than paternalistic move. In the context of the given text, British colonialism in India is not to exploit it but to protect and promote it. In other words, British colonialism in India is associated with father-son relationship, in which father figure is always concerned and protective to the son. Nicolas Cornell (2015) takes paternalism quite positively. He talks about normative significance of paternalism. According to him normative approach of paternalism, "expresses the idea that the actor knows better than the person acted upon; it implies that the other party is not capable of making good judgment" (p.1295). In this line of thought, British intervention to India under the banner of colonialism is not to bring coercive and crippling effect but to make India and Indians sober, sophisticated and civilized. By focusing on unsystematic lands and landscapes, social evil like *sati* custom, old ruins or barren lands, etc. in diverse territories of India, Hodges, silently invokes to British Empire to bring about positive change in such places.

In the same light, Fiona Robinson (2016), by focusing on the civilizing mission of the West and its role as a protector and promoter in other countries argues:

The globalist and narcissistic tendencies of Western liberalism are inextricably linked to the paternalism that justified 'civilizing missions' around the world, and continue to justify various kinds of 'humanitarian' intervention in the lives of others today [...] Spreading 'our values' – through the promotion of democracy, the enactment of the

‘Responsibility to Protect’, or discourses of ‘end poverty’ campaigns – is often undertaken not only under the guise of care but under the guise of liberation. (P.168-169)

Her analysis, here, takes the line civilizing mission of Britain in India. The motive behind such is to liberate the country from all kinds of evils, which may be potential to further darken the country. Her line of thought tilts towards the paternalistic enterprises of Britain in India.

Hodges’ description of formlessness and boundariless ruins of Etamadpoor goes, “the whole of this spot, as far as the eye can reach, is one general scene of ruined buildings, long walls, vast arches, parts of domes, and some very large buildings (p. 111).” The writer’s focus, here, is on ruins and vast unsystematic walls and domes, which have made the scene not terribly beautiful and fascinating. Similarly, Hodges, by describing the drudgery of 1770 famine writes of the landscape as “the silence that reigns here, owing to this depopulation, spreads a melancholy over the mind of the traveler” (p. 95). Here, the writer considers population and bounded field as sources of prosperity whereas ruins and depopulation as sources of adversity. In his description of ruins in the narrative, he valorizes the government of East India Company as the protector not the oppressor of people, and also implicitly says that the grace of English rule was a must to salvate the country from eternal damnation. Pramod K. Nayar (2002) also points out the tendencies of patronizing the “other” by British travelers during the eighteenth century thus:

In the travelogues of the eighteenth century, sublime and beautiful landscapes are suggested by a set of oppositions: barren/cultivated, uninhabited/populated, uncontrolled/regulated poverty stricken/prosperous, unsafe/safe. These oppositions are also temporally categorized, where the sublime features of barrenness and emptiness are associated with an Indian past. Safety and prosperity are associated with English activities in the present, while being directed toward the future. (p. 59-60)

Here, the critic brings forth the idea of binary opposition executed by British travelers to define the East in general and India in particular. English people tend to take British enterprises in other countries in a positive light thinking that they are for the betterment of “others”.

Hodges glorifies the presence of British government as a protector not as an oppressor of the people in his travelogue. While describing the neighbouring landscapes and ruins around Bhagalpur, he connects the productive, peaceful and fertile landscapes with the blessings of British government, and links the beauty of the place with “the good taste of Mr. Cleveland” (p. 27). The writer, here, is not only

glorifying British colonialism in India for betterment of the country but also giving compliment to colonial masters who have good taste of beautiful things and places.

### **Conclusion**

William Hodges, thus, in his paintings and prints, presents India as ruin. Except the landscapes where the British rule has made its presence, India is still lagging behind. In his narrative, he recurrently describes Indian places such as Agra and Patna as infertile heaps of wastage; empty, barren, and desolate ruins. He realizes the immediate presence of British Empire to manage them all perfectly. He, in his narrative, persistently associates power and prosperity with British government, and thinks that the so-called ruins and depopulated areas of India be changed into fertile, fruitful and fructifying landscapes by British government. He describes *sati* custom in India as barbaric and claims the absence of this custom in British ruled areas of India thereby giving credit to British rule in excluding the evil practices prevalent in India. He praises Madras as a perfect place under the patronage and protection of English people. He also describes the ruins of Etamadpoor as formless and boundless. Implicitly, his treatment to whole India is associated with ruins. Through the rhetoric of ruin, the writer aspires and strives to justify British colonial rule over India for the betterment of India and Indian people. In other words, he favors the glorious presence of British government as a passport to transform ignominious destiny of India and Indians. It is only through paternalistic colonialism, there will be radical touch and innovative twist in otherwise ruined India.

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