

Indology and Indologist: Conceiving India during Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is about the brief introduction of the major names in the field of Indology in the specified centuries of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Further focus is on the inclusion of only British indologist to make it more precise in its subject matter. It would be argued that Indology as a discourse emerged with the change in policies by the authorities of East India Company and British Government. Earlier one genre of indologist comprised those missionary personalities, which were in India with missionary purpose and for that purpose; they had studied the languages and culture of India to familiarize with the proselytizing needs. In the swift next period another genre came into front with the newly acquired understanding of India as a land of those Hindus who had been noble savages and needs to be freed from the clutches of in-between invasion which had corrupted their soul. Then, the main exponents of indologist came into who propagated the immaculate justification of colonialism with scientific and comprehensible study of Indian subcontinent. All those different types of indologist were confined to the late eighth and nineteenth centuries. Thus, this research paper would try to present the life and works of only those indologist who fell in those described categories.

Kew Words: **Indology, British Government, East India Company, Hindu, Indian, Sub-continent**

Introduction

Indology is the study of India. It is also called South Asian studies. This specified study of India began with strong religious connotations with subsequent transformations in respect of its purpose. Thus, manifold objectives emerged with the changes it went through. Earlier one genre was pioneered by the British missionaries in the 18th century, comprising mostly British priest-scholars. They translated Sanskrit texts and tried to construct the history of Hinduism. In that initial period of Indology, they had tried to conceive Hinduism as a carrier of 'noble savage which was in need of evolution scientifically. According to the parameters of western civilizations. However in the later interpretations when colonialism was at its full swing with broader political purpose, it was replaced with new interpretation which rendered the equivalence to the Aryan invasion of

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India with the Muslims invasion. By that later interpretation, the project of colonization was justified by constructing various historical justifications.

Background

Indology as discipline and subject came into being in the eighteenth century. However, its roots dates back to the period of Greek linking with India during Maurian Empire. When, a Greek ambassador of the Greek king Seleucids Megasthenes (350–290 BC) had composed four volumes of his book on the region called now India. By the coming of 19th century, Indology as an academic subject emerged. The Asiatic Society was founded in Calcutta in 1784, *Societe Asiatiqu* founded in 1822, the Royal Asiatic Society in 1824, the American Oriental Society in 1842. Systematic study of Sanskrit literature became possible with the efforts of all those indologist during the period from 1800s to 1870s. This school of thought has started to study the various features of Indian sub-continent with all of its details in respect of language, culture and sociology. Its main contribution was in the domain of detailed studies of the textual traditions of the Indian cultures and religions. However, one possible classification would provide some facilitation in order to understand the transformation in the domain of Indology by differentiating Classical Indology from Modern Indology. According to that difference classical Indology had its focus on Sanskrit along with other languages from the Vedic civilization. However the later Indology seemed to have its relevance with the study of Indian politics and sociology with broader Indian perspective.

Indology had a primal relationship with the project of colonialism. In the 18th century, Indian subcontinent was observing the worst of its times. The Moghul Empire was passing through its degeneration. That kind of situation was supposed to allow the natural progress of vernacular knowledge in order to ascertain the nature, history and character of languages, culture, and other social aspects of the society. Portuguese and the Dutch who were the first who were maneuvering their intention with full swing to capture the land and space of India. When the French and the British coming on the scene tussle for the colonial subjugation of India started to undermine the socio-political atmosphere in the already fragile India. That situation came to a detrimental point in the year 1757 when the strongest British East India Company won at the Battle of Plassey. And after that British ascendancy of the subcontinent started with full of its vigor with the help of treaties and annexation.

At first, colonial authorities had not shown any interest in proselytizing. However, evangelists and clergymen were critical of that policy. Thus, there was a pressure on company authorities to change that policy. “But with expansion in the colonial projects, that policy had seen paradigm shift. The Liberal party felt the gradual necessity of introducing western standards and values into India. The Rationalists had a more radical approach. Their belief was that reason could abolish human ignorance. Now it started to patronize proselytizing activities

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among the indigenous Indians. For that purpose opening of Christian missionary schools and translations of the Bible into Indian languages were the principal efforts made under the patronage of the British government in India, to impart to the natives a knowledge of Christianity." In that particular and historical contexts, need for expertise in Indian culture, religion and languages get its space. Thus, we would observe that different indologists coming and propagating their teachings and made studies according to their ideological requirements. In the following paper, different indologist are being introduced with their particular contribution in the field.

William Carey (1761-1834)

William Carey was considered by scholars as the pioneer of the oriental studies in the western scholarship. He also founded the Baptist Missionary Society. His major works were about making a comprehensive compilation of grammars and dictionaries of Punjabi, Marathi, Sanskrit, Bengali, and Telugu. His next contribution towards the domain of Indian studies was prorogation of Christianity in the southern regions of Indian subcontinent. He remained involved in that mission enthusiastically throughout his life. All of his efforts and works were later given the title of 'Church Sanskrit' as his main purpose was to transform Sanskrit language as a successful carrier of Christian proselytizing activity. In later life, he trained a number of 'Christian Pandits.'(Nettles, 2005) By the time of his activities, East India Company was not favoring proselytizing activities in areas of its jurisdiction. Thus, the officials of Company detested his activities. Despite the abhorrence of East India Company, he kept continued his policies and activities. Lest Company had to officiate a charge against him as a political danger for colonial policies of East India Company. However, Carey had got the permission for their campaigns without government approval. (Pennington, 2005)

Alexander Duff (1806-1878)

Alexander Duff was first indologist from Scottish origin. He was also the first Missionary who was sent by Church of Scotland to Bengal. His purpose of coming in Bengal was twofold. First was his intention to establish school and colleges in Bengal and second was his personal endeavors in which he intended to influence government officials to make policy decision about various projects. His main identity this regard was to provide a broad base for establishing the Indian education system. (D H Emmott, 1965)

He was second indologist who dedicated his life to spread Christianity in India. For that purpose, he studied indigenous Indian culture, religions and languages in order to understand the feasibility of proselytizing activities in specified areas of southern Indian regions. Most particularly Bengal had become his main targeted area where he converted various big families into the fold of Christianity. He founded the Scottish Church College, in Calcutta. His naming

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objective about the establishing such colleges were that he wanted to convert as many as possible Hindus into Christianity. And from that purpose his established network of colleges and other institute served him truly. He also placed emphasis on learning Christianity through the English language in those schools and colleges. His policies got remarkable attention among the elite classes of the Bengal. (Nettles, 2005)

William Jones (1746-1794)

William Jones was the first person from Great Britain who learnt Sanskrit. He was also first in the field of Indology due to his new contribution in the study of Indian culture and religions. His main identity was his expertise about the internal connections between the languages of European origins and of Indian origins. His proposition resulted into the innovative concept of Indo-European languages. In his early career, he was closely associated with Henry Thomas Colebrook and Nathaniel Halhed. He founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784. That institute became the leading body for the upcoming time to study Indian subject at broader level. He worked there as a translator and translated a number of Sanskrit texts into English. In that particular job he did translated many important works of Indian ancient texts into English language.

His research on the origins and structure of Sanskrit was of innovative nature. According to his research Sanskrit language had wonderful structure and was more profound than the Greek, and other contemporary languages. Owing to this research comparative linguistic discipline started. William Jones also propounded the racial division of the Indian people. Later on that idea was adopted by British administrators to facilitate their rule. He had come up with another assertion which found a connection between Indian and Egyptian civilization. According to this study that in the pre-historic times, Egyptian priests had migrated and settled down in the Indian subcontinent. Another addiction to this assessment by him was that he concluded that the chinees race is essentially Hindu belonging to the Kshatriya caste. He died in Calcutta on 27 April 1794. (Cannon, 1964)

Horace Hayman Wilson (1786-1860)

Horace Hayman Wilson is famous for his excellent contribution in the domain of Sanskrit Studies. After receiving his education from England he joined the medical services of East India Company in India. Here he was appointed as the secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal from 1811 to 1833. While in Asiatic Society, he had compiled dictionary of Sanskrit to English for the officers of East India Company. Soon he returned to England and joined Oxford University in 1833 as a professor of Sanskrit and after four years he was also appointed the director of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1837. In that duration, he translated the Visnu Purana, Rig Veda into English and also wrote many a books on the investigation of the Vedic religion and culture. One of his acclaimed works was about the nature and

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history of the Hindu religion. In that work, he had developed many studies on the same topic, which were published later named “Lectures on the Religious and Philosophical Systems of the Hindus.” Along with that, he also edited many eastern texts from the classical Vedic period.

Opinion of Wilson about the Vedic religion was of contradictory nature. He proclaimed that British government should not indulge in the conversion activity. His major contribution towards the understanding of the Vedic religious system was that the existing religious practices of the Hindus could not be considered as a concentrated and compact system. He extended his thesis that the actual and practical system of Vedic religion was of heterogeneous nature comprising various and incompatible parts. He also presented the theme of the replacement of Vedic religion with Christianity. That theme was of utmost controversial nature. Another controversial opinion by Wilson was about the true historical nature of Vedas and puranas and tantras. He stated that Vedas are not divine books and written by human authors. His second opinion is that the puranas are modern. However he maintained their unauthenticity. He posed such a challenge to award prize money of two hundred pounds, in case anybody refutes his claims on those works. (Lopez, 2016)

Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765 –1837)

Colebrooke is another orientalist of English origin. His basic field of scholarship was of mathematician. Colebrooke is considered as the first great scholar in Sanskrit studies. After coming to India he got a job in the accounts department of the east India Company. There he got a position in the Board of Accounts in Calcutta. As an expert in accounts he propounded the idea of free trade between Great Britain and India. His calculated advice, however, could not get much attention in the Board of Directors of the company. Later on he shifted his attention towards the cultural and religious studies of the vernacular system. Due to his keen interest in the indigenous customs, language and history, in the year 1805, he was appointed as a professor of Hindu law and Sanskrit in the famous college at Fort William at Calcutta by the orders of Lord Wellesley. In 1807, he was made president of the Asiatic Society at Calcutta. Royal Asiatic Society was also formed at his intentions in London in the year 1823.

During his long stay at India he developed very mature studies which were quite innovative and contributory at the time. His studies of the origins, history and grammar of Sanskrit were of pioneer nature in many ways. He also edited and translated various old texts from the classical period of the Vedic period. He also completed the translation of *Manusmriti* which was a major monograph of Hindu Laws. These books were about the laws of inheritance in the ancient times of Vedic civilizations. Due to the translation of those two monographs, modern scholarship came to know about the fundamentals of ancient Vedic laws in that particular regard. He also wrote some noteworthy articles on the traditional

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religious rituals of Vedic origins. His works on the detailed introduction of Vedas in English had been considered as the standard work. (Rosane, 2011)

Sir Charles Wilkins (1749 –1836)

Main reason behind the fame of Sir Charles Wilkins was that he was the first scholar who translated the *Bhagwad Gita* into English. He was an English Orientalist, and one of the founding members of The Asiatic Society. His second mark of identity was that he invented first typeface in Bengali Language. His earlier training was in the domain of printing and book publications. In 1770 he went to India and joined East India Company. He not only learned different vernacular languages from India but also involved in designing of the first type for the printing of Bengali books. First Bengali typeface book was published under his supervision. Due to that initiative he is known in history as the "Caxton of India". After doing works in Bengali he also produced typefaces in other languages such as Persian. Due to this kind of expertise he was appointed as a translator of Persian and Bengali in the Press Department of East India Company. He successfully translated a Royal inscription in *Kutilan* text from the ancient times.

After that time, he moved to Banaras, where he started his next project of translating the Mahabharata. However, he translated only a part of that great epic book. His version of Bhagwat Gita was published in 1785. According to this version Gita was written to encourage a form of monotheism among the Vedic practices by detesting polytheism. He was very fond of learning about other religions particularly religions of subcontinent had become his main area of study. In one of his detailed accounts, he traced the history of Sikhism in Bihar. He was also a keen observer of the history of Islam in the subcontinent. He wrote many accounts ascribing the rise and spread of Islam in the various regions of the subcontinent. During his sixteen years stay in India he visited various mystic shrines of Muslim Sufis. In the later period of his life he started working on developing a font for Devanagari script. In 1808, he published his Grammar of the Sanskrit Language. (Shamboo, 2001)

James Mill (1773 –1836)

James Mill was a Scottish historian and philosopher. It is interesting to note that he never set foot in India, he writes at length about the history, culture, and religions of India. His major identity was writing the monumental History of British India. In 1818, The History of British India was published. The book caused a comprehensive transformation in the way of governance in India by the authorities of East India Company. This voluminous book had been considered as a classic for the colonial authorities and colonial justification. Those books denounced the Indian culture and civilization. It exhorted the civilizing mission of the British colonialism for India. He was the first writer who divided the Indian history into three phases: Hindu, Muslim and British. That classification resulted long term

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impact on the following historiographical practices in the Indian subcontinent even after the independence of Indian in the year of 1947.

According to Mill, the Muslims were far ahead in terms of wealth and other social privileges in comparison with Hindus. Mill furthers his comment that Hindus had developed qualities of slaves and eunuchs under the rule of Muslims. It is not strange to know that James Mill was not able to speak any Indian language. However his works on the languages and cultures of India approved fundamental in many ways for the generation of English officials who were governing colonial India. Mill's History of British India was greatly influenced by the famous French missionary Abbe Dubois's book Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies. (Terrence, 1992)

Horace Hayman Wilson (1786 –1860)

Wilson was another indologist. After studying medicine, he came to India in 1808 as assistant-surgeon and joined British East India Company. He had an impressive command over the subject of metallurgy which helped him to get a job in the mint of Calcutta. After some time he developed his interest in the languages and cultures of India. Due to his deep rooted interest Colebrook had recommended him to be appointed as secretary of Asiatic Society of Bengal in the year 1811. In 1813, he published the Sanskrit text with free translation in English rhymed verse of *Kalidas*, the *Meghaduta*. Another work of significance was his Sanskrit-English Dictionary (1819). As a medical practitioner, he was much interested in the local medical system. He started studying Ayurveda. He not only compiled the textual contents of Ayurveda but also tried to update its practicability by incorporating many new practices in it. (Shamboo, 2001)

Wilson was perhaps first indologist who acknowledged the wide scale presence of art and theatrical performances since ancient times in subcontinent. In one of his accounts, he suggested that the drama and storytelling of ancient India was of finest level. He also wrote some other monographs, for the education of the officials of East India Company. On the orders of British Government, he wrote the description of the First Burmese War, a Review of the External Commerce of Bengal, a translation of Vishnu Purana (1840), and a History of British India from 1805 to 1835. He died in 1860.

Thomas Babbington Macaulay (1800-59)

Thomas Babington Macaulay is known for introducing English education in India. He stressed on the need to implant Christianity to provide civilization to the Indian people. He spent his whole career studying local cultures, languages and religious practices of Indian civilization. In 1838 in a special session on India's Supreme Ruling Council, Macaulay stated that it was the sole duty of the west to impart knowledge to the local society. He was of the opinion that Indian had no system. Thus, it is our duty to elevate their society out of that chunk of darkness. He stated

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that during his stay in India he could not find a single orientalist who could proclaim to have sufficient knowledge about the Indian culture and society. According to Macaulay, in that situation, it was the duty of the British authorities to render maximum role while spreading education and making them a civilized society. Commenting on the idolatry in Bengal, he stated that if our educational reforms would prevail, it would take not more than thirty years to eras that heretic practice at least among the respectable families of Bengal. He wanted to transform that station without inculcating any religion conversion. (McCully, 1966) He was not in favor of broad base proselytizing. Rather to him, it was the natural outcome of the education system, which would bring transformation in that domain also.

He believed that western knowledge could turn the natives into a far more civilized nation. What he was desiring could be placed in his own words that colonial master should strive for creating a generation which should be, "India in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, in intellect." (Warrington, 2014) For the implementation of his ideas, Lord Macaulay stressed the colonial authorities arrange such interpretation the Vedic scriptures which could bring transformation in the domain of Indian culture and civilization could be put into actualization. (McCully, 1966)

Dr. John Muir (1810 –1882)

Muir was born in Glasgow in the year 1810. He went to India in the year 1829 to join the services of the East India Company. In the year 1853 he left the Indian Civil Service and joined the University of Edinburgh as a professor of Sanskrit. His remaining life was only about the study and research of native Indian languages and cultures.

His main work was about the early Vedic religion, Sanskrit and people of India. He remained involved in the study of the most important source texts of Indian cultural and religious history. He also completed many English language translation of those texts. His earlier seminal works about the origin of caste system in ancient. He substantiated that in the Vedic age, no caste system was existed. The second volume of this series was about the history of the early races in India. The third volume was on the Vedas in which he elaborated the ideas of their history of the Vedas while looking at the different works of the Indian authors. Volume four was a comparison of the Vedic and later period of Indian history. The fifth and final volume was published in 1870 and was on the Vedic mythology.

Another important work by Muir was about the authenticity of Christianity in comparison with Hindu religion. However, he also presented his novel thesis that both religions could perform compatibility. The main purpose behind writing that book was to bring some commonalities between those two religions. He was of the opinion that through this way Christianity could get its social value in native social setup. However his ideas proved wrong as this book became controversial in India

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and faced harsh criticism and a counter movement from the side of Hindu scholars. (Powell, 2010)

Edward Green Balfour (1813 –1889)

Edward Green Balfour was another Scottish indologist. His main mark of identity was that he introduced the studies of environment in India and European universities. After arriving India in 1836, he got a job at a European Regiment at Madras and Bombay infantry. Then he also served at Ahmednagar. In short span of time he was promoted and became, in 1850, government agent at Chepauk. During his stay with his assignments, he got proficiencies in the languages of Hindi and Persian which assisted him a lot in his later academic pursuits.

After coming to India in the mid nineteenth century, he got indulge in establishing museums at various places in India. He established various museums and zoological gardens at Bengal and Madras. He also propounded the concept that public health has deep connections with the forest conservations. He produced various argument about the close working of eco system in respect of human health in the larger context of Indian geography. He published a Cyclopedia of India. In 1866, he started the Bangalore Museum in the state of Mysore. He was very interested in the vernacular languages and got excellence in a few languages to study their origins and other relevant researches. (Grove, 1995) He also translated many Persian works into English. In 1850, he published Gul-Dastah. He also set up a Mohammedan Public Library in Madras. Another prominent contribution by Balfour was the publication of The Encyclopedia of India and of Eastern and Southern Asia, Commercial, Industrial, and Scientific. It was first published in 1857. Balfour openly held anti-colonialist sentiments.

Robert Caldwell (1814 –1891)

Robert Caldwell was Irish by birth and he came to India in 1838. Main identity of Robert Caldwell was that he was the first indologist who presented this thesis that south Indian belt is altogether different from the rest of main land Indian sub-continent. Before Caldwell it was considered that South Indian languages were affiliated to the Indo-European language family. However, Robert Caldwell rejected that thesis and suggested that Dravidian is separated from other Sanskrit-affiliated languages in Subcontinent. He was missionary who engaged in proselytizing activities. Main thrust of all of his works was to gain highest level of knowledge about the southern Indian belts, which could facilitate proselyting missions. His famous work was about the Dravidian family of languages. At Madras, he got proficiency in Tamil language in order to spread his conversion mission.

His main thrust for the proselytizing was on the members of the Tamil-speaking community. Caldwell considered the Chunar Community of Tamils as separated from the mainstream Hindus thus he decided to convert that specific

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community as an easy target. He asserted that the Brahmanical Aryans colonized the indigenous Dravidians. (Bergunder, 2011) He was very interested in archaeological research. When he was at Tirunelveli, he did deep work on the local history and archeology of Tirunelveli. He studied all the available sources of Sangam literature in his search. This work resulted in his book *A Political and General History of the District of Tinnevely* (1881), published by the Government of the Madras Presidency.

Alexander Cunningham (1814 –1893)

Sir Alexander Cunningham was a pioneer in Indian historical research in archaeology. He started his career as a British army engineer but later on, he changed his profession by adopting the discourse of Indian Studies. He was very interested in the archeology of India and its history. In the year 1861, he got an opportunity to be part of archaeological survey department of India. He wrote numerous books and monographs. From 1841 to 1848, he had been at various engineering assignment at different places in subcontinent from Oudh to Laddakh. He also played his expertise in the border demarcation during and after the Anglo Sikh wars in Punjab.

After doing professional life, he started his major works in the discipline of Indology. His first main work was about the Aryan Architecture, which was published in 1848. He was deeply indulged in the ancient history of India. He wrote an article on the relics in the Manikyala Tope. In 1854 he tried to compile the history of Buddhism on the bases of architectural findings during his excavations. According to his studies, India was generally divided into numerous petty chief ships. To the other body it would show that Brahmanism had been modified throughout the course of times.

Viceroy of India, Charles John Canning, appointed Cunningham, archaeological surveyor to the government of India. After his retirement in 1865, Cunningham returned to England but soon came back in 1870. Lord Mayo re-established the Archaeological Survey of India and appointed Cunningham its director-general. Cunningham returned to India and produced twenty-four reports about the excavations at Taxila and gaur. He retired from the Archaeological Survey in 1885 and returned to London where he died in 1893. (Jayapalan, 2008)

Monier Monier-Williams (1819 –1899)

Monier Monier-Williams was a British indologist but born and brought up in Bombay, India. His work “*Hinduism*,” was very important because it was the first work which introduced the word Hinduism as a nomenclature. After getting education in England, at the East India Company’s college, he became Boden Professor of Sanskrit in Oxford University. His main works were to translate the Sanskrit texts from ancient India into English so that his fellow countrymen could get facilitation in service of East India Company. In 1870, he wrote a book named

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“*The Study of Sanskrit in Relation to Missionary work in India.*” That book was aimed at promoting Christianity as a rational replacement of the Vedic scriptures. Another major work was ‘Sanskrit-English Dictionary. Later on, he established an institution in Oxford University with the purpose of disseminating knowledge about the Indian religion, culture and philosophy. That institute had served a lot to newly recruited officers of the East India Company, which were to be appointed in Indian subcontinent.

Williams proposed that Christian evangelism would be only way to counter Islam. In this works, the word Hinduism was first bor the time and coined used. This works ad introduced he term Hinduism for the first time. (Sastri,2001)Monier Williams founded the “Indian Institute” in 1883, with the purpose of providing a training ground for the aspirants of Indian Civil Service. He supported academic research into Indian culture. He was a best authority on the ancient texts of Vedic times. (Kaltz, 2013)

Conclusion

Early Indologist had provided many minute observations and studies about the native languages, peoples and histories. They had, however put together such range of Indian studies, which were replete with many contradictions and biases, racial inferiority depiction and stereotypical presentation of the natives in many ways. In that respect, religion stand at the most significant premise of all of their treatment. In that particular treatment, they had shown double-pronged misperception. At the first place they presented native religions as the most peculiar religions by making it different from the other religions of world. At second place, they had traced different sorts of unfounded associations with the culture, languages and religions of natives. That established conception was followed by the critique on the natives languages and religions on the pretexts of Christian prejudices. By that, early indologists had shown their strong scientism’s on the previous antiquity of native’s textual tradition in comparisons of Old Testament. That kind of criticism was totally speculative and unfounded.

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