



India through the eyes of foreign writers

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Abstract:

India is recognised as a land of culture and heritage. India's cultural practices and beliefs are praised and followed by many followers across the world. Indian values and teachings are considered knowledge and practice for the ideal society. Indian history showed the growth of Indians in all fields with perfection. Ancient Indian architecture and written proofs represented India as a great symbol of knowledge. Indian beauty writings were destroyed by many invaders but the same beauty was preserved by the travellers. India was visited by many travellers and they studied all aspects of Indian society and culture. This paper is going to study the depiction of India and its inhabitants in the writings of foreign writers.

Keywords: travelogue, ancient India, colonies, history preservation

Introduction:

India always attracts the enthusiastic minds of explorers and scholars. Indian history is rich with all kinds of elements in the society. India due to its cultural, political, social and economic variety attracts everyone towards it. Indian influence creates a deep impact on the natives as well as visitors to the country. Indian glory was witnessed by the ancient explorers to new bloggers. India invaded many times but the uniqueness of the country remained the same. India offered unique things to the explorers and filled their thirst for knowledge by offering them a variety of knowledge. Indian universities like Nalanda, and Takshshila offered education internationally. These universities offered knowledge in many different subjects and revealed the theory to foreign students. India was the first choice for the exploration by many highly qualified scholars. Indian growth in all aspects was observed and explored by the foreigners. The pieces of evidence about Indian history are written by many travellers from the ancient era to today's modern or Gen Z era.

Indian History in Travel Writing:

Indian history is riches with amazing gems which are rarely found in the world. India as the oldest civilisation offers wonderful things to travellers. Indian political, Social, Religious, economic etc. All uniqueness attracted the visitors. Indian Historical shreds of evidence and description are found in many travellers few listed below.

Travellers in Ancient India

Megasthenes

Megasthenes died in 290 B.C.E. and He was Greek historian, Indologist, diplomat and explorer. He is considered the first person who described India in written form to the Western

world. He wrote 'Indika', and India under Chandragupta Maurya. He was an ambassador for Seleucus I to the Chandragupta Maurya in Pataliputra.

He explained the geographical surroundings of India. He was amazed by the majestic look of the Indian elephants. Indians used metals for many uses. Indians grew wheat, rice, sesame, phosphorus, and millet. Indians drink liquor made of rice. Indian warriors never burn farms or cut trees after the attack. Indians had no foreign colonies. Indians wear golden ornaments and golden thread muslin. Indians well skilled artists. He found two major philosophies Brachmanns and Sarmanes. Foreigners were treated very respectfully and honourably.

Deimachus:

He lived during the third century BCE, in Greek Plateau. Antiochus I Soter sent him as an ambassador to Bindusara Fa-Hien (337-422 BCE)

The fa-Hien name also written as Faxian; Fa-Hsien was a Chinese Buddhist monk. He spent 10 years in India. His primary intention was to study Buddhist scriptures in India. His journey was recorded in *Foguoji* or *Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms*. He took many Sanskrit scriptures to China and translated them into their language. He came during the time of Chandragupta II.

Travellers in Medieval India

Hiuen Tsang (6 April 602 – 5 Feb 664)

He came to India in 630-645 A.D. from China. His primary intention was the exploration of Buddhist places to learn the principles of Buddha. He studied at Nalanda University and stayed 14 years in India. He witnessed the Harshavardhana rule and political and religious changes in India. He noticed the impact of Buddhism on Indians and their religious beliefs.

Al-Beruni (973 – C.1050)

Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmed al-Biruni was a Khwarazmian Iranian polymath of the Islamic Golden Age. He wrote '*Taḥqīq mā li-l-hind min maqūla maqbūla fī l-'aql aw mardhūla*' also known as 'Kitab al-Hind'. He was the jewel in the court of Sultan of Mahmud of Ghazni. Kitab Ul Hind primarily focused on the Indians' faith and beliefs. He highlights the major parts of Indian sacred books. He praised Indian philosophy. He studied the Indian religious teachings of India from 1017 to 1030. He compared Indian philosophy with Greek scholars.

About Indian Hindus he said, Indians considered that the invaders harmed the beliefs of the religion. Locals tried to boycott the invaders. For him Indian society was cast-ridden. Indians practised sati, child marriage and Jauhar. Indian states are divided into small parts and many quarrels between them. In India, Brahmins had the right to the religious decisions. Justice depends upon the witness and oath. Serious crime criminals were amputated. King was not the owner of the land but still, he took 1-6 of the produce. He hates the superstitions of the Indians and their implementers.

Marco Polo (1254- 8 Jan 1324)

He was a Venetian merchant and explorer. He travelled to Asia between 1271 and 1295. He served in the court of Kublai Khan and travelled to India as his diplomatic mission. In 1292 and 1294 he reached the southern part of India Tamil Nadu and Kerala. At Tamil, he met Tanjore's Tamil Pandya. About the rich Indian fabric, he stated, 'The climate is so hot that all men and women wear nothing but a loincloth, including the king- except he is studded with rubies, sapphires, emeralds and other gems'. He also mentioned the Indians' love for Betel nut leaf. He praised the strong beliefs of the Jain monks and their non-violence philosophy.

Ibn Battuta (24 Feb 1304- 1369)

Ibn Battuta was a Maghrebi traveller and explorer. He arrived in India in AD 1333 by crossing the Hindu Kush Mountains and the Indus River. He came during the Tughlaq dynasty, and Muhammad Bin Tughlaq appointed him as a Qadi (Judge) in the Royal court. He stayed for seven years in India. He took care of Qutb al-Din Mubarak's mausoleum. He noticed the remarkable post service in India, a horse courier was stationed every four miles, and a foot courier was stationed at every mile. He noticed the prevalent custom 'Sati'. He mentioned slavery, the slave market and Muslims with four wives. The bazaar was the major hub for sellers to expand their business. Indians mastered cotton cloth, muslin, silk, brocade and satin. Indians trade with both West and South Asia. Indian land was so fertile that it could produce three crops of rice in a year.

Indian royal family preferred to eat 'Chapatis' with roast meat, Sambusak (Samosa), and chicken with bread-rice. Halwa and almonds pudding was also preferred with Sherbat before meal and barley water after meal. Chanderi betel nut leaf was very popular. Dogiri was renamed Daulatabad by Tughlaq and Marathas ruled the region. Marine activities of the Delhi rulers dominated the coast line.

Abdur Razzak Samarqandi (7 Nov 1413- Aug 1482)

He was born in 1413 in Herat (now Afghanistan). His father was Qazi in the Persian ruler Shah Rukh, Timurid Dynasty. He works as the ambassador of Shah Rukh. In 1441 he came to India to Court of the Zamorion of Calicut for a year-long diplomatic mission. The Deccan India was ruled by the Bahmani Empire. He noted his journey in 'Matla-us-Sadain' or 'The Rise of Two Auspicious Constellations and the Confluence of Two Oceans'. He visited the Vijayanagar Empire under the rule of Devraaj II. About the Dev Raya, he stated, 'tall man with an olive complexion, sitting in a forty-pillared hall surrounded by the Brahmins. About Vijayanagar city, he stated, 'a prosperous city governed by a capable king, filled with temples, gardens and palaces. At the Hampi, he noticed the rivulets and streams through the cut stone.

Duarte Barbosa (1480- 1 May 1521)

He was a Portuguese writer and officer in India between 1516-1517. He wrote 'book of Duarte Barbosa'. He worked at the Cannanore factory as a scrivener. He worked for King Narasimha Tuluva of Vijayanagar. About the city he mentioned, 'Vijayanagar is fenced with strong ramparts and by a river as well, on the further side of a great chain of mountains, here always dwells the king Narsyngua, who is heathen (Hindu) and is called Rayen (Raya). King allowed the freedom to all and Barbosa noted, "Great equity and justice is observed by all, not only by the rulers, but by the people to one another'.

Native had a diamond mine and they traded it with Pegu (Burma) and Ceilam (Ceylon). Pepper was brought from Malabar (Kerala). About the appearance of the natives, he stated, "They are tawny men, nearly white. Their hair is long, straight and black; on their heads, they carry small turbans and wear some silk on brocade capes, they wear their rough shoes on their feet. They wear many rings set with precious stones and many earrings set with fine pearls in their ears. Women wear leather shoes well embroidered in silk; their heads are uncovered and the hair is tightly gathered into a becoming knot at the top of the head, and in their hair, they put many scented flowers.'

Jean- Baptiste Tavernier (1605- 1689)

He was a French gem merchant and traveller. He visited India six times between 1630 to 1668. In 1638 he visited the diamond mines of

Golconda, during the reigns of Mughal Emperor Shah Jehan.

Francois Bernier (25 Sep 1620 –22 Sep 1688)

He was a French traveller, historian and physician. He wrote 'Travels in the Mogul Empire'. He reached Surat in 1658 A.D. He worked for Mughal Prince Dara Shikoh as his physician. He lived in the royal court of Aurangzeb for 12 years. In his book, he mentioned the Mughal's political intrigues, the strategies and methods of warfare and the tactics to capture the throne.

Travellers in Modern India

E.M Forster (1 Jan 1879- 7 Jun1970)

Edward Morgan Forster was an English author. He stayed in India between 1912-13 as the Private secretary of Tukojirao III, Maharaj of Diwas Senior. He closely observed the political, cultural and social activities in India. The Indians' freedom struggle and the conflict between the British Raj. He Wrote ' A Passage to India' a novel in 1924. The novel primarily focuses on the friendship between the British and Indians. The clash between Hindus and Muslims. It also explored the post-colonial and decolonization studies.

Octavio Paz Lozane (March 31, 1914 – April 19, 1998)

Lozane was a Mexican poet and Diplomat. He arrived in India in 1962 and stayed in India for six years and he wrote ' In Light of India', a work based on his experience in India. About his work, he said, "I'm not writing a memoir. These pages, although they touch on autobiography, are an introduction to my attempts to answer the question that India poses to everyone who visits it."

Paz tried to show India's ancient Hindu roots. About the caste system in India, he stated, ' the caste system is central to understanding India and its rooted in a particular view of the cosmos a without beginning or end, running in an eternal circle of birth, death and rebirth without leaving the circle of return". In India, he found 4000 casts, 4 major Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. He also focuses on the two major religions in India and their causes of the conflict.

Dominique Lapierre (30 July 1931-2 Dec 2022)

He was a French author. He wrote a Novel 'City of Joy' based on his experiences in Calcutta. The novel is based on the real slum Anand Nagar, Pilkhana (Howrah), West Bengal.

Sir Vidiadhar Suraj prasad Naipaul (17 August 1932- 11 August 2018)

V.S.Naipaul was a Trinidad-born British Writer. His father emigrated from Uttar Pradesh, India to Trinidad. He was raised in Trinidad without the memories of India. He wrote semi-autobiographical travelogues based on his visit and stay in India. He wrote the trilogy on India, "An Area of Darkness' (1964), "India: A Wounded

Civilization (1977), and India: Millian Mutinies Now (1990). An Area of Darkness was the most criticized book of Naipaul, he mentioned the poverty and corruption of India in the sixties. The book was banned in India due to its negative portrayal of India. India: A Wounded Civilization, based on his third visit to India, is more focused on the history, religion and Social Structure of India. India: A Millian Mutiny Now, this book focuses on the Indian attitude and the Indian way of life. The book also includes glimpses of the Mutiny of 1857 and this book shows an optimistic view towards India and Indians.

William Benedict Hamilton Dalrymple (20 March 1965)

He is India-based Scottish historian, broadcaster and critic. He visited India on 26 Jan 1984 and in 1989 he again visited Mehrauli and stayed for 15 years. He wrote many books based on his travel writings to India. 'City of Djinns: A year in Delhi (1993), based on his six years stay in Delhi. This book focuses on the local characters of India. He shared the experiences of locals like Puri Family, the driver, the customs officer, Raj survivors, and eunuch dancers in Delhi.

This book also focuses on the 1857 mutiny, the Partition massacre 1947, and the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, 'The Last Mughal, The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi 1857, was about the tragic end of Last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. 'Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India, was about the different characters from India with unique histories and backgrounds. Other works on Indian history and inhabitants like, The Age of Kali (1998), White Mughal (2002), Koh -i- Noor: The History of the World Most Infamous Diamond (2017), The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company (2019), The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World (2024).

Conclusion:

India taught many lessons to all eager minds. Indian history is still giving lessons to other countries. Indian political, social, religious and economic strategies were always praised and adopted by many countries. India as a culturally rich country accepted other religions without any hesitation.

Indians know their non-violence policy. From the beginning of history, many incidents were shown by the historiographers. Indians' teachings of non-violence and respect for the guests are unique qualities of India. Indians accepted the culture of the invaders also either Muslim or Christian. Indians were beautifully portrayed by foreign travellers. India's many hidden historical aspects can be studied by the notes of the writings of the travellers.

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