CHAPTER III

British Romantic Women Poets and the Orient
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This chapter critically examines the works of some British Romantic women poets, namely Emma Roberts, Anna Maria Jones, and Felicia Dorothea Hemans who had interest in the Orient. Among these three women poets, Emma Roberts and Anna Maria Jones visited India and depicted in their works with what they had witnessed: the social, cultural and religious spectrum of contemporary India. Felicia Dorothea Hemans's dream to visit India was never materialized, but she portrayed Indian social customs in her poetry through her dynamic imagination. Some of the poems written by these women poets abound in the Oriental material and reflect their genuine interest in the Orient.

Of these three British Romantic women poets, let us consider first the works of Emma Roberts. In 1828 Roberts visited India for the first time along with her married sister Laura Henrietta Roberts and brother-in-law Robert Adair McNagten. She had many experiences during her stay in various parts of India. She depicted her lively experiences in the volume of her poems, entitled Oriental Scenes, Dramatic Sketches and Tales, with Other Poems. She published this collection of poems in Calcutta in 1830 and dedicated it to her life-long friend, Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838). The poems in this volume which reflect Roberts's perception of the Orient are discussed below:
A Scene in the Dooab

This poem displays Roberts’s observations on the decaying nature of Indian Islam and its institutions and the state of Hindu religion in the Dooab (the land between the two major Indian rivers – the Ganges and Jamuna) located in the upper provinces of India. In this poem Roberts notes that the mosque (a place where Muslims offer their prayers and discuss the religious and cultural aspects of Islam) has been in a dilapidated condition over the years and various kinds of birds use it as their resting place. She points out that the existence of the mosque in India symbolically recalls the faded power and glory of Muslims. She presents a negative image of the Muslims when she states that after conquering the Indian soil they had killed thousands of natives by their sharp swords. The following lines reflect her notions about the religious outlook of Muslims:

They brought their faith from distant lands,

They reared the Moslem badge on high,

And swept away with reeking brands

The reliques of idolatry.

(A Scene in the Doaab, 29-32)

There was the Hindu custom of sati (burning alive the widows with their dead husbands in the funeral ceremony). But after the influence of Islam, this social malpractice decreased gradually. The British eliminated it altogether. Roberts points to this heinous practice thus:

The frantic shrieks of widowed brides
From burning piles resound no more,

Nor Ganges' desecrated tides

Bear human offerings from its shore.

(A Scene in the Doaab, 37-40)

Roberts presents another cultural strand of the Oriental life by an allusion to 'the bright Zenana's hall' (a place reserved for Muslim women and girls). She notes the Oriental women celebrating their joyous hours in the Zenana and the golden colored light of the lamp which reflects their beauty and sanctity. In addition, she points out that the maiden appears in the 'Zenana's hall' in order to perform the song related to the cultural heritage of the Orient. She compares the eyes of the maiden with that of gazelle (a deer like animal found in Orient):

The maiden's song, the anklet's bells

So sweetly ringing o'er the floor,

And eyes as soft as the gazelle's

Are heard, and seen, and felt no more.

(A Scene in the Doaab, 53-56)

The Bramin

This poem demonstrates Roberts's observations on the religious-cultural traditions of the Hindus in India. At the beginning of this poem Roberts gives an account of the serene atmosphere which prevails over the shore of the Ganges river. She notes also the presence of pagodas there, which both enhances and diversifies the
scenic beauty of the river. She points out that the river is decorated by the ‘terraced stairs’ of marble stones. These stairs go step by step down into the river:

Ganges’ sacred waters spread

Their wastes below – and crowning that green height

In graceful beauty, with its marble dome,

And terraced stairs, descending flight by flight.

(The Bramin, 4-8)

Roberts depicts Hinduism through her representation of the Hindu religious figure, Brahman. The Brahman holds the highest position in the Hindu socio-religious hierarchical order. He performs religious duties. Roberts focuses on the caste system of Hinduism, pointing out that the Brahman occupies the highest position in the caste system. He has mastery over the religious scriptures of Hinduism, Vedas and spends all his time on his prayers. He imparts the knowledge of the Vedas, which form the bedrock of Hindu religion:

He ponders o’er the Vedas day by day,

Passing the silent hours in lonely prayer,

Or shading from the sun’s too fervent ray

(The Bramin, 10-12)

Roberts reports that the Brahman decorates ‘the holy shrine’ with wreathes of variegated flowers, collected from his native place. She provides further details – he
takes little food, fruit and juice offered by the devotees. The fruit, juice and grain that sustain his life are collected from a variety of exotic trees grown in the fertile land:

The Bramin’s meals are frugal – some fair tree

Yields him its fruitage, and the precious grain

Springing around in rich fertility,

The few and simple wants of life sustain.

(The Bramin, 21-24)

She draws the Brahman’s pious life in terms of the cultural aspect: he wraps the ‘triple thread’ of muslin (Persian word used for a lightweight and inexpensive cotton fabric in India) across his shoulder and the fold of this muslin reaches below his knee as part of the religious custom:

The triple thread across the shoulder tied,

Around the waist the muslin’s ample fold

Reaching with graceful flow below the knee,

(The Bramin, 32-34)

Roberts describes all the above detailed Hindu traditions which display her understanding of the Hindu culture.

Besides, Roberts gives a precise account of the surrounding atmosphere of the Brahman’s ‘dwelling place’. She spots a flock of birds, notably ‘peacocks’, ‘doves’, ‘paroquets’, ‘bulbul’, and ‘pigeons’ in the Brahman’s native place. She notes that the Brahman takes care of those birds which are wounded at the hands of outsiders.
Moreover, she appreciates the sweet-song of the bulbul that moves the Brahman’s heart:

The bulbul breathes to him its sweetest strain,

(The Bramin, 47)

In sum, the poem stands out for its local colour.

**The Taaje Mahal**

This poem explores the condition of India at the time of the Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan (1592-1666). At the beginning of this poem, Roberts describes the amazing beauty of the Taj Mahal that moved her: she calls it the ‘Empress of beauty’. She employs a series of similes to convey the beauty of the Taj Mahal:

Oh! thou wert far more beautiful than those
Fair forms of genii by poets sung,
More blooming than thine own Cashmerian rose,
O’er thy soft cheek a crimson tint was flung,
Like morn’s first flushes, or the blush that dyes
The glowing sun-sets of our eastern skies.

(The Taaje Mahal, 7-1?)

In this poem Roberts relates the story how Shah Jahan got the Taj Mahal built as a memorial for his beloved wife beside the Jamuna river, near his royal palace at Agra in Uttar Pradesh, India. The sand of this river was used for the construction of this monument. The most precious ‘pearls’, ‘gems’, and ‘gold’ were brought from different parts of ‘Hindoostan’. The following lines reflect Roberts’s interest in the fabulous wealth of the Orient and of Shah Jahan in particular:
Oh! Could the treasures of the world restore

Thy fading health, beloved one, - Shah Jehan

Countless as yon bright river’s sands would pour

The pearls, and gems, and gold of Hindoostan,

And yield his empire o’er the world to be

Master of one poor straw-thatched hut-with thee.

(The Taaje Mahal, 25-30)

Roberts appreciates the faultless architecture of the Taj Mahal while referring to the ‘rich and radiant pomp’ of Shah Jahan’s empire. Besides, she provides an account of an Oriental garden which records details of the luxuriant atmosphere around the Taj Mahal. The garden, a symbol of paradise in Islam, was an integral part of Shah Jahan’s palace. She notices also some Oriental trees and flowers, notably baubool and baylas, in the garden.

Roberts expresses her admiration for ‘the alabaster tomb’, and ‘the floor’ decorated with various colorful Oriental stones. She compares the stones with those of ‘onyx’, ‘turquoise’, and ‘lapis lazuli’ in shape and beauty. She emphasizes that the stones used in the construction of the monument display the opulence of Shah Jahan’s empire.

The Dying Hindoo

This poem portrays the death-bed scenes of a Hindu in India. At the beginning of the poem Roberts presents an account of this Hindu who lies on the shore of the
Ganges river. His heart beat slows down considerably. The gradual loss of his sense of sight and pulse puts him at the deathbed. His forehead bears the sign of his dying moment. Roberts is quite apt in delineating the condition of this dying Hindu:

He lies beside the sacred river,

His heart has lost life’s ruddy glow,

His sighs are faint, his pulses quiver,

And death’s chill damps are on his brow.

(The Dying Hindoo, 1-4)

Roberts’s description of the scene of this dying person gives an “evidence of dislocation and violence and the conviction of a morality” (Gibson 71). She draws attention to the grim rather sardonic fact that the relatives of this dying person, instead of showing any kind of humble attitude, joyfully laugh, sing, and carry on their day to day activities. Moreover, they swarm on the occasion of taking a bath in the water of the Ganges. It is a belief among the Hindus that the bath in this river cleanses one’s sins. Roberts notes this tradition performed by the dying Hindu:

He too had sought the Ganges’ shore,

And bathed within its hallowed stream.

(The Dying Hindoo, 15-16)

Roberts also points out that the relatives do not express any grief for the sufferings of this dying man. Rather, after his last breath, they throw the corpse into the river. The dead body descends into the tide of the river. The ghastly heat
sometimes appears above the surface of the water. The relatives perform their religious duty by throwing the dying Hindu into ‘the stream’s headlong current’.

**The North-Wester**

Roberts composed this poem in 1828, the year when she visited Murshidabad (now a district located in the state of West Bengal). The Nizam (a title given to the ruling prince during the Mughal empire) made this district the capital of Bengal. In this poem Roberts draws an account of Murshidabad and the influence of ‘north-west’ wind on Murshidabad.

Roberts focuses her attention on the vicinity of Murshidabad, over which the gentle wave of the ‘north-west’ wind flows. She recalls the place as the ‘gorgeous scene’ through which the Ganges flows with its ‘calm and waveless tide’. She marks the tranquil nature of the river’s course. She reports that ‘some fond maid, or anxious lover’ throws variegated lotus flowers into the river. The accumulated heaps of these flowers form a shape of a crown on the calm stream of the river.

Roberts notes some Oriental trees, notably *peepul* and *niem* around the ‘Nizam’s regal palace’. She describes that ‘the dark *peepul’s* glossy foliage’ and the leaves of the *niem* tree stir up with the gentle wave of the ‘north-west’ wind. The ‘shrubs of fragrant scent and brilliant hue’ stand out in the evening breeze:

Its marble wings up springing from the shade

By the dark *peepul’s* glossy foliage made,

The waving *niem*, the willow-like bamboo,

And shrubs of fragrant scent and brilliant hue,
Roberts points out the devastating nature of the ‘north-west’ wind. The natives gather on the shore of the Ganges and offer flowers in honour of the deities of the river-streams. But suddenly the ‘north-west’ wind appears and disperses every offering on the stream of the river. At the time of appearance of this wind the whole sky becomes dark and there is a sudden movement in the course of the river. This wind blows on such a high speed that the ‘thunder bursts’ everywhere and brings about disaster in the vicinity of Murshidabad:

The sultry air grows thick, the skies are dark,

The river swells, and now the struggling bark

Along the rushing wave is wildly driven,

And thunder bursts from every gate of heaven;

O’er tower and palace, hut, and holy fane

In frantic madness sweeps the hurricane;

And trees uprooted strew the earth; and air

Is filled with yells, and shrieks of wild despair.

At the end of the poem Roberts describes that after the wild activities of the ‘north-west’ wind the whole place becomes calm in the evening and is illuminated by the light of the ‘lamp within the palm nut’s fragile boat’. The air echoes ‘with the
Bulbul’s sweetest tale’ and is ‘filled with perfume from the lemon trees’. The streams
of the river run smooth:

The storm has passed – and now the sparkling river

Runs calm, and smooth, and beautiful as ever.

(The North-Wester, 59-60)

**The Rajah’s Obsequies**

In this long poem Roberts presents her observations on the occasion when the
local Hindus of Benares perform the funeral rites of the Rajah (a title given to the
nobleman or prince of Hindus during the Mughal rule) on the shore of the Ganges
river. She describes the presence of the ‘majestic banians’ on the banks of the Ganges.
She metaphorically equates the ‘green luxuriance’ of the banians with the ‘lofty
minarets’ which symbolize eternity. Her description of the banian tree is as follows:

And there majestic banians fling

Their green luxuriance beside

The lofty minarets that spring

With upward flight in towering pride;

(The Rajah’s Obsequies, 13-16)

She glorifies ‘the river’s sparkling wave’ on which the ‘sun pours down a flood of
light’. She emphasizes that the ‘sacred floods’ of the Ganges reflect the image of the
temples of the holy city, Benares:

Where Ganges spreads its sacred floods –
The holy city’s temples glow

Reflected in the stream below.

(The Rajah’s Obsequies, 22-24)

She also notes that the ‘sacred floods’ of the river create the ‘fertile plains’ of India.

Roberts underscores the significance of some musical instruments of Indian origin in the poem. She reports that ‘the dark-eyed maids’ celebrate some festivals in ‘the Zenana’s halls’. These maids listen to a soft variety of resonance and harmony produced by the *sitara* (Hindi word used for a musical instrument in Indian classical music). They also show their interest in hymns that glorify the notable themes and ideas of the Oriental cultures:

The dark-eyed maids hold festivals,

And listen to the soft sitars,

Hymning those sweet and gentle themes

Which young hearts picture in their dreams.

(The Rajah’s Obsequies, 31-34)

She also appreciates the melodious sounds of *dhole* (another instrument used for folk music in India) that highlights the rich variety of Indian culture.

Roberts talks of Benares (a city now located in the state of Uttar Pradesh). She marks the presence of ‘domes’ and ‘sacred groves’ in this city that adds scenic beauty to the shore of the Ganges river. She emphasizes that the doves and other varieties of birds make their nests in the green vicinity of Benares, and that the bulls which the
Hindus consider sacred roam everywhere in large numbers. The panoramic view of this city that she depicts is as follows:

Oh bright, Benares! are thy domes,

And beautiful thy sacred groves,

Where ring-doves make their blissful homes

And the white bull unfettered roves;

(The Rajah’s Obsequies, 35-38)

Roberts points out the culinary culture of the local Hindus. She shows her interest in *dal* (Hindi word used for a side-dish in Indian cuisine) which the Hindus take with rice. She notes that the Hindus take little amount of vegetables that suffices for them. Her description how the Hindus take ‘the silvery rice’ with the ‘golden dal’ and other vegetables is as follows:

Milk, and some vegetable root,

The golden *dal*, the silvery rice,

The plantain’s, or the mango’s fruit,

The Hindoo’s simple wants suffice.

(The Rajah’s Obsequies, 41-44)

Roberts adds that the Hindus swarm on the banks of the Ganges for the funeral rites of the Rajah. She emphasizes that when the Hindus set fire to the funeral pyre, a kind of scented perfume comes out from the burning pile made of cedar, rose and sandal wood:
Perfumes are burning all the while;

And they have reached the Ganges Flood,

And heaped upon the funeral pile

Cedar, and rose, and sandal wood.

(The Rajah’s Obsequies, 141-144)

After the completion of funeral rites the Hindus take their holy bath in the water of the river in order to wash away their sins. The funeral rites and holy bath performed by the Hindus represent the religious traditions of Hinduism. Roberts captures the image of the Brahman preaching over ‘human suffering’ and ‘human sacrifices’. But she perhaps detests a negative strand of Hinduism as she reports that the ghastly dead body peeps into the water of the river and spreads out bad smell over the whole place:

Yet here the river’s crystal flood

With living victims is prophaned,

And here with streams of human blood

The temple’s reeking courts are stained.

(The Rajah’s Obsequies, 51-54)

Roberts offers an image of the lower class people employed as servants at the Rajah’s court. She notes that chobedar (Persian word used in India for the gate keeper) waves the ‘silver maces’ on high in front of the cavalcade while chuprassies (another group of servants) ‘clear the way’ at the time of ‘the Rajah’s obsequies’ and keep themselves busy in swelling ‘the pomp and the parade’ at the Rajah’s court.
Besides, there are other groups of local Hindus who attend the funeral rites and pace with solemn tread.

In this poem Roberts mentions some traditional clothes and ornaments of the Orient which are worn by the Rajah's wives. She marks the 'muslin robes' of the Rajah's wives. She refers also to Syah (a loose garment) which the Rajah's wives tie at their waist. She notes that the edge of this garment is decorated with spangles. She underscores the 'shining fold' of ornee (scarf) that enhances the beauty of the Rajah's wives. She refers also to 'the glittering Bangles' that adorn the beauty of the Rajah's wives.

**Night on the Ganges**

Roberts's perception of the Orient is embedded in her poem, "Night on the Ganges". In this poem she describes the deep serenity, sanctity and tranquility of the Ganges river. The opening line of the poem -‘How calm, how lovely is the soft repose’ – is reflective of her fascination for this river. She appreciates the currents of the river that flow under 'the stream of melted chrysolite'. She admiringly represents the river as mother, thus articulating the local Hindu belief. She describes the currents of the river as lulling. She points to reflection of 'Mosques, groves, and cliffs, and pinnacled minars' on the 'silvery surface' of the river.

Roberts notes that the fresh 'evening breeze' suddenly appears in the landscape and moves the 'snowy blossoms' of 'the clustering lemon trees', thus mixing up their sweet fragrance with the balmy air. She makes an allusion to bulbul (Persian word used in India for the nightingale) whose sweet songs echo in the surroundings of the 'marble-domed pagoda'. She states that the 'sun pours down' its
'gentle rays' with 'their undazzling lustre' in 'the sparkling stream' of the river, thus drawing attention to the soothing atmosphere of the landscape.

Roberts adds 'vivid colouring' to the Orient in pointing to 'the glossy peepul' (Hindi word for a deciduous tree found throughout India), 'the bamboo', 'the mantling foliage', and 'green hill's deepest shade'. The twilight falls on the scattered leaves of 'the glossy peepul' tree and 'the bamboo' on the landscape. The 'tender radiance' of the sun also reflects an image of the 'mantling foliage' fallen 'within the green hill's deepest shade'.

In the last stanza of the poem Roberts talks of some flowers which enhance the range of the local colour. She marks that the lily flowers bloom suddenly in 'queen-like beauty by the river's brink' in the evening while 'the broad-leaved lotus' unfolds its 'roseate flowers in many a knotted link'. Moreover, she describes that 'the river's breast' offers a comforting site for 'the sultry sun' and for the 'evening's soft and tender shadows'. Thus, she captures many features of the Oriental landscape.

The Moosulman's Grave

This poem provides an account of the Muslims' grave and the Hindu temples which Roberts had visited during her journey in India. At the beginning of the poem Roberts informs that the 'lofty palms and waving mangos' grow naturally in the 'verdant glade' and 'the tall peepul spreads its grateful shade' above 'the pious Muslem's lowly tomb'. She praises the worn-out calligraphy inscribed on the tomb that does not witness any record of the Muslims except the fact the Muslims were the natives of this 'fair valley'.

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Roberts speaks of the pious Muslim who ‘planted all those clustering topes’ and dug ‘the basin of the well-filled tank’. She points to the antelopes playfully jumping over ‘the flowery bank’, and to a large number of birds flying over landscape. Thus she captures the soothing atmosphere prevailing around the grave:

The pleasant haunt of playful antelopes,

Who leap rejoicing o’er the flowery bank;

And there in flocks, besides its ample brim,

Unnumbered birds wheel round in airy rings;

And o’er its glassy surface wild fowls skim,

And stately herons plume their shining wings.

(The Moosulman’s Grave, 11-16)

Roberts depicts the local Hindu belief through her description of the temples. She notices that the Hindu devotees offer their ‘grateful prayers’ in the temples and shower blessings on the founders of those temples. She speaks of the *lotas* (Urdu word used in India to denote a small water container made of brass, copper or plastic) which the Hindus use for storing the ‘gushing waters’ of the temples, and of *ghurrah* (Hindi word used in India for a spherical shaped water-jar) which ‘a graceful female’ dips ‘in the crystal rill’. Her painstaking attention to details is remarkable:

Whose gashing waters all their *lotas* fill;

And many a graceful female form is bent,

Dipping the *ghurrah* in the crystal rill.
Roberts takes note of ‘a pillared mosque’ and ‘its modest dome’ located on the green shore of the lake. She depicts ‘the wandering fakeer’ (Arabic word used in India to denote a religious mendicant) who looks for shelter in the mosque for rest and there he recites nuzzum (Persian word used in English to signify lyrical verses) ‘from the high kiosk’. She also emphasizes that at the fall of night this fakeer ‘feeds the lamp with palm-nut’s fragrant oil’ and ‘plucks the fairy offerings of the soil’ in order to decorate ‘the altar’s height’.

In this poem Roberts mentions some aromatic flowers of the Orient. She describes that the ‘yellow champa and the jessamine’ flowers bloom in ‘the sunny land’ of the ‘Forest and hill, steep cliff, and tangled wild’ and spread their sweet perfume over the whole landscape. She emphasizes that the ‘India’s dark-browed natives’ pluck these flowers and make wreaths from them. They offer these ‘wreaths of flowers’ in ‘each holy shrine’ built on the valley of the river. They throw some ‘snowy chaplets’ in ‘the bright waters’ of the river which float along with the lotus flowers. Besides, Roberts refers to baubool (Persian word used in India to denote acacia tree) which emits golden coloured gum from its bark.

In the last three stanzas Roberts asserts that the followers of both Islam and Hinduism decorate with the ‘votive offerings’ the ‘Mosque or pagoda’ built beside the river or tank. She refers to ‘mosque or m hut’s o’ershading canopy’ which symbolically represents religious harmony in the Orient. She also refers to the ‘wide serai within the city’s gate’ which provides room for the ‘way-worn traveller’. Lastly she points out that when a traveller feels weary after a long journey over the ‘wide
and sultry realms of *Hindostan*, he ‘finds a frequent place of welcome rest’ in the
‘Mosque or pagoda’.

**Nour Juffeir Khan**

Roberts wrote this long poem during her visit to the fortresses on the banks of
the Jumna River during the Mughal rule. In this poem she introduces an Oriental tale
which provides a detailed account of her knowledge about the Orient. At the
beginning of her tale she notes that the majestic domes do not reflect the towering
pride of the fortresses, for they have been dilapidated at the command of a ‘gallant
chieftain’. Only the ‘lowly river’ flows in its calmness through close vicinity of the
fortresses, and a large number of wild animals, notably ‘prowling wolves and tigers’,
‘the gigantic bear’, the ‘fearful alligator’, and ‘the fretful porcupine’ make their
dwelling place on both the shores of the river. Roberts imagines that the ‘passing
boatman’ is able to listen to ‘*cittara*’s softer sounds’ coming out ‘from those bright
halls’ where a ‘clustering troop of graceful girls’ assemble to celebrate the cultural
ceremonies of the Orient. All the sweet sounds produced by the Oriental musical
instruments echo in the evening breeze blown over the ‘Jumna’s roseate breast’.

Roberts points out the importance of both the valleys of the river that produce
‘cotton’, ‘sugar canes’, ‘castors’, ‘indigo’, and other kinds of grain in abundance. She
notes that the ‘crested parrot’ makes its ‘sweet abode’ in the dense leaves of ‘the
clustering sugar canes’ while the ‘*nyl ghau*’ (a Hindi word referring to a wild animal
resembling a cow) ‘loves mid bushy dells’ of the river. The ‘trampling elephants’
create a ‘silvery sounding’ in the deep jungles of the landscape. Some of these wild
elephants ‘are equipped with *howdahs*’ (Hindi word denoting a seat placed on the
back of an elephant).
Roberts asserts that the chiefs who ride the ‘majestic elephants’ are attired in rich ‘Silver and silk, and golden brocade’. They wrap the ‘crimson shawl’ (originally a Persian word referring to a loose fabric) across and above their ‘breast’ and ‘graceful shoulder’. The chiefs also wear ‘the gem-starred turban’ which metaphorically represents their wealth:

And chiefs in regal pomp arrayed,

Silver and silk, and gold brocade,

The crimson shawl across the breast

Above the graceful shoulder hung,

Or sash-wise, round the shining vest,

Or o’er the gem-starred turban flung,

In all their glittering panoply,

The port – the gleaming brand –

Appear like those bright genii

Who erst had ruled the sunny land.

(Nour Juffeir Khan, 137-145)

Roberts highlights another cultural tradition of the Orient through her depiction of the *Zumeendars* (a Persian word used in India to mean the landlord). *Zumeendars* eat ‘rich *pillaus*’ (a Persian word used in India for a dish made of rice, meat or vegetables with flavoured spices) with golden coloured *kaarries* (a Hindi word used in India for a saucy dish) along with their guests. After taking meal they
offer ‘many coloured sherbets’ (a Persian word used in India for a sweetened drink or a juice of fruits with sugar) and *paan* (a Hindi word which stands for the betel leaf) to their honoured guests. Roberts thus encompasses a range of the traditions of the Orient.

Roberts talks of the ‘gushing water melons’, ‘the glossy mango’, ‘citrons’, ‘pomegranates’, ‘pistachio’, ‘grapes’, and other kinds of fruits produced on the sandy banks of the river. She marks how the traders ‘from far Thibet’ buy all these kinds of fruits at a lower rate and start selling them at a higher rate all over the country. She points also to the reflection of ‘some fair lotus’ of Delhi (now the capital of India) in ‘the Jumna’s sparkling waters’, representing the ‘domestic paradise’.

Roberts notes that the *Scindia* (a Hindi word referring to Scindia of Gwalior state) appeared as a ‘profligate licentious race’ during the reign of Meer Jah Asiph (the founder of Asif Jahi dynasty of Hyderabad). They captured the valleys of the Jumna river and celebrated ‘each night in savage glee’ after the end of the battle. They even started mocking ‘the Prophet’s holy laws’. Roberts asserts that she composes a lyrical song on such lingering, thus connecting the ‘gentle spirits’ of the Orient:

Dearest! I’ve lingered in my song,

And fain would still the lay prolong,

In fond yet idle pleasure dwelling

On bliss which cheats the listening ear,

With soothing softness only telling

What gentle spirits love to hear.
Yet I must hasten with the tale;

For when we reach yon woody cliff,

(Nour Juffeir Khan, 227-234)

Apart from the above poems, Roberts wrote some other poems notably, “Address, Spoken at the Opening of the Cawnpore Theatre” and “Spain” which contain some images of the Orient. In “Address, Spoken at the Opening of the Cawnpore Theatre” she talks about the dhole (Hindi word signifying a musical instrument in the Orient) which the professional musicians beat at the Cawnpore (now called Kanpur) theatre. She points to ‘Pagodas, minarets, and dome-crowned mosques’ presenting the Indo-Persian architecture. In “Spain” she depicts Arab Muslims who defeated the Christian and gained control over Spain. In addition, she reflects some traditions and cultures associated with the Muslims.

Anna Maria Jones recounts some of her experiences which she had during her decade long stay in India in her poems. Her poem, “Adieu to India” is reflective of her interest in India. Written in 1793, this poem relates her ‘thoughts’ swaying between India’s ‘fertile Plains’ and her indigenous valleys. In this poem she captures the image of the central position of Hinduism, with her allusion to ‘Brahma’s holy Doctrine’. She states that the Hindu doctrine prevails over the ‘fertile Plains’ of India. Her other observation is that the ‘virtuous Principles’ of Brahma bind the ‘Hindoo’s meek untainted Mind’.

As the poem advances, Jones thinks of her home country as she feels lonely after the death of her husband. She depicts her homeland thus:

I hasten to my Native Shore,
Where Art and Science blend their Lore:

There Learning keeps her chosen Seat –

A million Votaries at her Feet,

Ambitious of the Laurel Bough,

To wind about their honoured Brow.

(Adieu to India, 25-30)

In the later part of the poem Jones describes that she travelled to various parts of India as a 'solitary Maid'. At the time of her farewell she recalls the 'sacred Haunts' and the 'Streams that swell the winding Houghly's Tide'. Her reference to the Houghly (now better known as Hooghly in West Bengal) river has a contemporary touch in the poem. The East-India company came to West Bengal through the channel of this river and established the 'Seat of Commerce' on its banks. She points to 'the Mariners' who eagerly 'unfurl the Sails' and 'meet the Pressure of the Gales'. She thinks that all such impressions in India may be washed away from her heart when she will reach her home country. But only the 'fond Memory' representing 'Those Hours of Bliss, those Scenes of soft Delight' will not vanish in the 'oblivious Power of Time', rather it will go on moving her heart.

Unlike Emma Roberts and Anna Maria Jones, Felicia Dorothea Hemans did not have any first-hand knowledge of the Orient. She imaginatively depicts the social, cultural and religious life of the Orient in two of her poems – “The Indian City” and “The Traveller at the Source of the Nile”. The former is a tale of an Oriental, Muslim woman and her son while the latter articulates the twin feelings of joy and homesickness in the heart of a traveler.
The Indian City

This poem presents the tale of a mother and her son. Hemans focuses her attention on the setting of the poem. In the opening part of the poem she depicts ‘an Indian city’ which abounds in ‘pillared domes’, ‘fused in the burning sky’, ‘deep groves’, ‘vaults of the banyan’ glittering with the gold coloured leaves of ‘the plantain’, ‘white pagoda’ built up by the side of the ‘lake and stream’, and the ‘the lotus-flowers’. A ‘graceful Hindu maid’ appears like ‘the desert’s roe’ for loading ‘the water-vase from the palmy shade’ while the Brahman gets ready for prayer.

As the poem advances, one learns that ‘a noble Muslim boy’ along with his mother passed through ‘the scene of beauty’ of the ‘Indian city’ on the way to the pilgrimage to Makkah. This ‘Indian city’ is presented as ‘the stately city’ and has the gorgeous woods which are a suitable sheltering place for the ‘birds’ with the ‘starry plume’. Hemans notes that the ‘Muslim boy’ crosses ‘the brink of the shining lake’ of the city by ‘the tall canes feathered in tuft and brake’ while his mother becomes fascinated by ‘the Bramin city’s glorious bowers’, ‘the pomp of the forest’, ‘the wave’s bright fall’, and the ‘red gold of sunset’. However, for his fault of entering the forbidden city, the boy meets his death at the hands of the local Hindus.

Hemans depicts Maimuna, the mother of the slaughtered boy and the only character in this poem with a name. She notes that Maimuna neither shrieks nor feels shocked at a time when her son is killed in the Hindu dominated city. She breathlessly kneels ‘in her son’s young blood’ and raises the question -- ‘What hath befall’n thee, my child, my son?’. She bows ‘down mutely o’er her’ son’s dead body, thus letting her soul sit ‘veiled in its agony’. She utters the following words:

‘Not yet, not yet I weep,
Not yet my spirit shall sink or sleep,

Not till yon city, in ruins rent,

Be piled for its victim's monument.

Cover his dust, bear it on before –

It shall visit those temple-gates once more!

(The Indian City, 133-138)

Maimuna passes 'from realm to realm' of the landscape and lets 'her pale lips' express such word – 'Each one a spell to unsheathe the sword'. The 'Tartar', 'the dark chief of Araby', and the 'wild archer' demolish the Hindu temples in revenge for the slain of the 'Muslim boy'. Hemans uses some derogatory terms for the group of these Orientals such as 'warrior throng' and 'the avenger with foaming speed'. She emphasizes that these Muslims killed the Hindus with 'the sword' resulting in violence and a heavy toll of lives in the city. So doing, she reports the Hindu-Muslim clashes then common in the British India in her poem.

**The Traveller at the Source of the Nile**

In this poem Hemans represents a travel account with a marked resemblance to James Bruce (1730-1794), a Scottish traveler who made a journey to Egypt and discovered the source of the Nile. Yet she anticipates few misperceptions about the Orient. She depicts a traveler standing 'proudly' near the valley of 'the well-spring, deep and lone' Nile. He thinks of 'his father's hill and graves' in his imagination. He hears a 'low mysterious tone' produced from the gushing water of the river, and thinks it to be 'the song of victory' as it moves 'his heart' vehemently. He even
becomes surprised himself by the powerful torrents which meander through the ‘depths of that green solitude’ and change the course of the ‘calm fountains of the Nile’.

Hemans points to ‘a sudden change’ at the fall of night which becomes the cause of ‘the pilgrim’s glorious goal’, and metaphorically represents ‘the glow of power and pride’ at the traveller’s ‘triumph’s hour’. Supposing himself at the peak of ‘his own mountain land’, the traveller thinks that ‘thousand streams of lovelier flow’ represent the ‘wild sweet voices’ calling him to his real home. He imagines himself embarking on the ‘fearful vision’ fraught with ‘all that lay between’. Moreover, the Oriental images of the ‘Arab’s lance, the desert’s gloom’ and ‘the red simoom’ evoke the fear of death and disaster in him, conveyed in the following lines:

But darkly mingling with the thought

Of each familiar scene,

Rose up a fearful vision, fraught

With all that lay between;

The Arab’s lance, the desert’s gloom,

The whirling sands, the red simoom!

(The Traveller at the Source of the Nile, 37-42)

Hemans seems to suggest that the traveller’s joys over the victory of the source of the Nile seem meaningless to him as he decides to go back to his own home.
Works Cited


