

# Poetics and Politics: Sir William Jones and the Debate on Aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century

Let you and me therefore be Philosophers now and then but citizens always; let us sometimes observe with eagerness the satellites of Jupiter but let us incessantly watch with jealousy the satellites of the King.

(William Jones's letter to Lord Althorp, dated 13 November 1777.)

It seems probable that the chief ingredients of poetry were originally animated expressions of human passions, of joy and grief, love and hate, admirations and anger, sometimes pure and unmixed, sometimes variously modified and combined.

(William Jones, 'Essay on the Arts, Commonly called Imitative', 1772.)

Thomas Maurice, the famous antiquarian of the eighteenth century, once said that to know 'Jones was to know the whole literary world'.<sup>1</sup> Sir William Jones (1746-1794) in fact knew most prominent men in all walks of life — literature, drama, arts, law, university, politics, diplomacy and others; he knew David Garrick, Joshua Reynolds, Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, Edward Gibbon, John Wilkes, Edmund Cartwright, Charles Fox, Lord Ashburton, Lord Shelbourne, Count Reviezki (the Hungarian diplomat and Orientalist), Schultens (the Dutch Arabist), Benjamin Franklin and others. Jones also frequented the salons of Mrs Montagu, Lady Lucan and Mrs Vesey who, according to Horace Walpole, used to collect 'all graduates and candidates to fame, where they vie with one another, till they are as unintelligible as the good folks

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Maurice, *Memoirs of the Author of Indian Antiquities*, London, Vol. 29, pp. 139, 819-20.

at Babel'.<sup>2</sup> Lady Spencer of Althrop Park and the duchess of Devonshire were his friends.

By April 1783, when Jones set out for India, he was already an important figure in England in the eighteenth century. He was an established Orientalist. He translated a number of Arabic and Persian manuscripts into French and English and wrote two dissertations on Oriental poetics, one in English and the other in Latin. Then there was *Moallakat or seven Arabic poems which were suspended on the temple at Mecca* (1782) and *The Mohammedan law of Succession* (1782).

William Jones was also an eminent lawyer; his life appears along with the lives of Coke, Blackstone and Mansfield in the legal histories of England. His *Speeches of Isaeus* and *An essay on the law of Bailments* are still considered as two outstanding works in comparative law. Edward Gibbon was awed by Jones' scholarship: 'He is perhaps the only lawyer equally conversant with the year-books of Westminster, the commentaries of Ulpian, the Attic pleadings of Isaeus and the sentences of Arabian and Persian Cadhis.'<sup>3</sup>

Jones was a minor political thinker who was described by Horace Walpole as 'a staunch whig, but very wrongheaded'.<sup>4</sup> Joshua Tucker, Dean of Gloucester, called him a 'Leveller'.<sup>5</sup> Both were right. Jones was closely connected with the Parliamentary Reform Movement, supported the American Revolution and hailed the French Revolution. His book, *Principles of Government*, was one of the most influential books of the movement for parliamentary reform. The radicals in the Society for Constitutional Information found that many of their ideas — for example, the active participation of the citizens in state affairs and people's choice in the formation of the legislative branch of government — were echoed in this pamphlet, and what is more, it was put very clearly. The book went through nine editions and received unprecedented publicity in 1784, when Mr Fitzmaurice, the sheriff of Flintshire, prosecuted Rev. William Shipley, dean of St Asaph, a friend

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<sup>2</sup> Horace Walpole to Lady Ossory, 14 January 1781, *Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (ed. W. S. Lewis), Vol. 29, Oxford, 1944-55, p. 36n.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (ed. J. A. B. Bury), London, 1896-1900, Vol. VI, p. 296.

<sup>4</sup> Horace Walpole to William Mason, May 1780, *Correspondence* (ed. W. S. Lewis), Oxford, 1944-55, Vol. 29, pp. 33-6.

<sup>5</sup> J. Tucker, *A sequel to Sir William Jones, Pamphlet on the Principles of Government in a Dialogue between a Freeholder in the county of Denbigh and the Dean of Gloucester*, London, 1784, p. 15.

and then brother-in-law of Sir William Jones, for publishing a seditious pamphlet. Thomas Erskine, the radical lawyer, successfully arrested the judgement against Shipley and this was celebrated throughout the country with bonfires and illuminations.<sup>6</sup>

He was already an established poet, had published a number of collections of poetry and his *A Persian Song of Hafiz* appeared in many collections of English poems in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

So, by 1783 Sir William Jones was already a famous man. A fellow of the Royal Society, an honorary member of the Danish Royal Society, and a member of that exclusive club of Samuel Johnson, who met regularly at The Turk's Head in Soho. The Orientalists sought him out for his scholarship in Arabic and Persian languages, the legal profession respected him for his profound knowledge of comparative law, the reformers found in him a radical spokesman, Sir Joshua Reynolds sought his criticism of the early drafts of his annual discourses to the Royal Academy. Burke asked his views on Fox's India Bill and the ladies of the salons enjoyed his company and poetry. But he took keen interest in everything from the history of Nadir Shah<sup>7</sup> to the accounts of James Cook and Hunter's lectures on anatomy.<sup>8</sup> He was after all a man of the eighteenth century — an encyclopaedist.

It is conventional in textbooks on the history of ideas to identify the eighteenth century with the Age of Reason. However, Horace Walpole had a different view; writing in the middle of the century he said: 'A century had now passed since Reason had begun to attain that ascendant in the affairs of the world to conduct which had been granted to men six thousand years ago.'<sup>9</sup> This is not an accurate statement and the historians of ideas rightly place the Age of Reason in the eighteenth century before the French Revolution. But in one sense Walpole was right, for much of the groundwork for the eighteenth century *Aufklärung* was already prepared in the seventeenth century. The cult of Reason was based on Newtonian physics and Lockian psychology; Newton had shown that the existing myths were not in accord with scientific facts and Locke said

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<sup>6</sup> S. N. Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones: A Study in Eighteenth-Century British Attitudes to India* (first ed.), Cambridge, 1968, pp. 53-6.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>8</sup> Letters to Lord Althrop, 13 November 1776, 3 November 1779 and 1 January 1780, Spencer Papers.

<sup>9</sup> Horace Walpole, *Memoirs of the reign of George II*, Vol. II (ed. Lord Holland), London, 1846, p. 278.

that ideas were not innate but derived from experience. The Scientific Revolution had shown that man can shape his own destiny and the voyages and discoveries proved that the knowledge of the ancients regarding the shape and nature of the earth was very limited.<sup>10</sup> European intellectuals began to question the validity of Christianity, the chronology of Genesis and its doctrine of Revelation and there arose a new faith: Deism.

The universe worked according to the laws of nature, but the creator had an important part to play. Newton's astronomy provided the basis for the deistic 'theology'. Nature worked like a clock and the creator was the clockmaker who had set it to work at the beginning, but subsequently it worked according to its own laws. If the law of gravity held the physical world together, then the law of Reason kept the moral world together. The *philosophes* divorced ethics and philosophy from Christianity and tried to demonstrate that natural morality based on the law of Reason was far superior to Christian morality.

Similarly, the political ideas of the Enlightenment were based on the assumption that human institutions can be justified if they are based on Reason. The *philosophes* were passionately against what they considered irrational institutions, and developed an exaggerated view of the power of the legislators to shape the future of the world. To most of them, the ideal Constitution was a 'mixed state' which found its expression in the English Constitution. Montesquieu used it as his model for the theory of the separation of powers and Voltaire was inspired by it.<sup>11</sup>

They were no democrats. They were rather contemptuous of the ordinary people, their 'superstitions', beliefs and their inelegant way of life. They upheld the institution of private property, which in their mind was closely related to human liberty and the prosperity of the whole community. If Hobbes's *Leviathan* represented the fear of disorder and anarchy, it was shared by the Rationalist philosophers. They would agree with John Locke that 'the great and chief end' of men's uniting into Commonwealths and putting themselves under government 'is the preservation of property'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *Origins of Modern Science*, London, 1949, pp. 166-74, cf J. D. Bernal, *Science in History*, London, 1954, p. 253.

<sup>11</sup> R. Shackleton, *Montesquieu. A Critical Biography*, Oxford, 1961, pp. 298-9.

<sup>12</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises in Government* (ed. P. Haslett), Cambridge, 1960, Sec. 124.

Reason also dominated their idea of history: what Collingwood<sup>13</sup> once called 'the historiography of the Enlightenment'. The historians of this school were mostly interested in the civil society — manners and customs of the people, in the elegant enlightened and rational periods of history as against the 'darker', 'gothic' and 'feudal' periods of history.<sup>14</sup>

The poetics of the period was dominated by what is called neo-classical criticism. The aim of neo-classicism was to discover 'rules' and 'laws' of literature and literary creation. They found that the ideas of Aristotle and Horace were 'founded upon good sense, and sound reason, rather than on authority'.<sup>15</sup>

Aristotle believed that 'the creation of poetry generally is due to two causes, both rooted in human nature. The instinct for *imitation* is inherent in man from his earliest days; he differs from other animals in that he is the most imitative of creatures, and he learns his earliest lessons by imitation. Also inborn in all of us is the instinct to *enjoy* works of imitation'.<sup>16</sup>

To the neo-classicist Aristotelian 'imitation' did not mean copying, nor photographic naturalism, but rather representation; it merely said that the poet made something which was not nature itself but which represented nature. Neo-classicists had no time for the mystic visionary poets to whom poetry would be only a symbol or sign. Rather the poet should reproduce reality by his art. As Paul Hazard pointed out, 'The rules are nature still, but nature methodised. No barren formula, as the work of the Pope himself bears witness.'<sup>17</sup>

This is why they were more interested in 'taste' — trained taste based on experience and knowledge, the doctrine of *décorum*, propriety and diction, often 'nature' and not 'general nature', the principles and order of nature. Bad taste, ugliness, the low and the mean were forbidden in the Arts. So Thomas Rymer, who took Horace's rules to their logical extreme, and condemned Shakespeare's *Othello* for showing the death of Desdemona for 'a woman never loses her tongue even though after she

<sup>13</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford, 1961, pp. 76-8.

<sup>14</sup> For such treatment of history see Sir William Jones, *Works of Sir William Jones*, (ed. Lord Teignmouth), London, 1807, Vol. 12, p. 512.

<sup>15</sup> John Dryden, *Essays*, as quoted in R. Welleck, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950, The Later Eighteenth Century*, London, 1970, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *On the Art of Poetry*, in T. S. Dorsch (ed. and trans.), *Aristotle/Horace/Longinus*, London, 1988, p. 35. Italics are ours.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Hazard, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (trans. J. Lewis May), London, 1965, p. 237.

is stifled' or for showing Iago as an ingrate and scheming man for 'soldiers are honest and straightforward'.<sup>18</sup>

In politics they condemned the 'feudal system', 'its organised brigandage' as some of them called it, but the *philosophes* ignored the proletariat, the city working classes and the hungry peasants in the country. They were interested in the respectable people, not in the riff-raff. A citizen's worth was measured by the amount of property he owned; *Encyclopédie* said '(it is) always his property that he derives the right to be represented'. So literature made some approaches to a middle class public whose distinguishing marks were possession of wealth, good taste and virtue.<sup>19</sup>

Poetics and politics were indeed related. If in their politics the *philosophes* were anti-democrats, in their poetics they were elitist. Poverty, hunger, violence and sex, the real ingredients of the life of the ordinary people, were not subjects of their arts. 'Realism' yes, but this was philosophical realism of Locke and Descartes, closely related to bourgeois individualism. Philosophical realism had profoundly influenced novels, but the novel was a new genre in the literary scene in the eighteenth century. There again 'imitation of nature' was not forgotten.<sup>20</sup>

Jones was a child of his century. He grew up in a family where Locke and Newton loomed large. William Jones, the father, was a mathematician, a Fellow of the Royal Society, a close friend of Isaac Newton, Samuel Johnson and Edmund Halley. After the death of the father, the mother looked after the child and probably used John Locke's book on education. She abandoned corporal punishment and 'to his incessant importunities for information on casual topics of conversation which she watchfully stimulated, she constantly replied, read and you will know'.<sup>21</sup>

It is no wonder that Jones could quote Shakespeare and Grey's fables from memory at the age of four. Born in an age of child prodigies, he

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Rymer as quoted in Welleck, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Hazard, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-9.

<sup>20</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, London, 1987 (2nd ed.), pp. 12-13.

<sup>21</sup> John Shore, Baron Teignmouth, *Memoirs of the life, writings and correspondence of Sir William Jones*, London, 1804, p. 13.

was no exception; as junior boy at Harrow he could write *The Tempest* from memory from the first line to the last.<sup>22</sup>

He was educated at Harrow and University College, Oxford. He excelled in Latin and Greek, composed verses imitating Virgil and Sophocles. He was charmed by the ancient literature and inspired by the ancient wisdom. 'From my earliest years I was charmed with the poetry of the Greeks; nothing, I then thought, could be more sublime than the odes of Pindar, nothing sweeter than Anacreon, nothing more polished or elegant than the Golden Remains of Sappho.'<sup>23</sup>

His two other heroes of the ancient world were Demosthenes and Cicero whose works he read through once every year. He imitated the life of Cicero. A typical day in London included a visit to Parliament, meeting friends at Alice's Coffee House at Westminster Hall, where the lawyers and the members of Parliament met regularly, a call to Lady Spencer's house at St James' Place and an hour's study of law at Temple, where he had chambers: 'Thus have I passed my day and thus did Cicero at my age pass his.'<sup>24</sup>

He learnt Arabic and Persian at Oxford, not from his tutors but from Mirza, a Syrian whom he had brought to Oxford from London. By 1768 he had mastered both these languages.

His political theories were based on Locke and Cicero, taken to the extreme. He had faith in social contract, Anglo-Saxon liberty, a parliamentary system based on franchise for property owners and limited monarchy. He was against the aristocracy who represented the 'feudal', 'Gothic' and 'Norman' dark period. Jones, like the Levellers of the seventeenth century, took the Lockian doctrine that 'every man has a property in his own person' to the logical extreme. Jones argued that a man is independent if he is capable and willing to use his labour, since labour is the source of property: 'I consider a fair trade or profession as valuable property; and an Englishman who can support himself by honest industry, though in a low station, has often a more independent mind than the prodigal owners of large estate.'<sup>25</sup>

He was a liberal but not a democrat. He loved 'demos', hated 'mobs' and 'the rabble'. In 1780, during the Gordon riots, Jones was not

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to Count Reviezki, n.d., as published in Shore, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>24</sup> Letter to Lord Althrop, 23 April 1773, Spencer Papers.

<sup>25</sup> Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. 8, p. 508.

hesitant to take up arms against the 'mob' to defend the Englishman's liberty and property. Like most of his fellow radical whigs, Jones wanted a state controlled by armed 'citizens' (propertied men) protecting liberty and property against tyrannical kings, lazy aristocracy and the 'mob'. He was 'wrongheaded', for he had no training in the art of politics. He failed miserably when he wanted to stand for the parliamentary seat of Oxford.

To start with, Jones was, in his poetics, a neo-classicist. His 'An Ode of Petrarch', 'Laura', 'An Elegy from Petrarch' and 'Arcadia' show marks of the eighteenth-century neo-classical spirit.

Ye clear and sparkling streams!  
(Warm'd by the sunny beams.)  
Through whose transparent crystal Laura play'd;  
Ye boughs, that deck the grove,  
Where Spring her chaplets wove,  
While Laura lay beneath the quivering shade;  
Sweet herbs! and blushing flowers!  
That crown yon vernal bowers  
For ever fatal, yet for ever dear;  
And ye, that heard my sighs  
When first she charm'd my eyes,  
Soft-breathing gales! my dying accents hear.  
If Heaven has fix'd my doom,  
That love must quite consume  
My bursting heart, and close my eyes in death;  
Ah! grant this slight request, —  
That, here, my urn may rest,  
When to its mansion flies my vital breath.<sup>26</sup>

In a significant footnote Jones defended the song against Voltaire's criticism of Petrarch; Voltaire thought that the song was irregular and without rhyme. To Jones, however, 'the stanzas were perfectly regular and the rhymes very exact'.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> 'An Ode of Petrarch to the Fountain of Valchiusa', in A. Chalmers (ed.), *The Works of the English Poets*, Vol. XVIII, London, 1810, p. 463.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

His rather popular poem 'Caissa or the Game of Chess' was written in imitation of Ovid and he planned to write an epic, in classical fashion, called 'The Britain Discovered'. In his *Poems* he was still faithful to the classical standards: 'I am convinced that whatever changes we make in our opinions, we always return to the writings of the ancients as to the standard of the taste.'<sup>28</sup> Even in India he had not abandoned his classical taste; consider his 'Hymn to Narayena' which was, at least in parts, inspired by Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

Spirit of Spirits! Who through ev'ry part  
Of space expanded and of endless time,  
Beyond the stretch of lab'ring thought sublime,  
Bad'st uproar into beauteous order start,  
Before Heav'n was, thou art.<sup>29</sup>

He thought that 'the first stanza of the hymn represents the sublimest attributes of the supreme being, and the three forms in which they most clearly appear to us, power, wisdom and goodness'.<sup>30</sup>

It should not be forgotten that at the very moment of triumph of the *Aufklärung* there developed a movement based on essentially hostile principles and as Cobban had called it, a 'definite revolt against the existing trend of ideas'.<sup>31</sup> This was true for poetics as well as politics.

In the poetics, the second half of the eighteenth century saw a gradual shift of emphasis from style to feeling, from decorum to emotion. Edmund Burke, the high priest of the Romantic Revolt, attacked the prevailing Aristotelian concept of imitation; in his *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime*, Burke discarded imitation: 'poetry and rhetoric do not succeed in exact description so well as printing does; their business is to affect rather by sympathy than imitation, to display rather the effect of things on the mind of the speaker of others than to put a clear idea of things themselves.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> William Jones, *Poems consisting chiefly of translations from the Asiatick languages*, Oxford, 1772, p. vi.

<sup>29</sup> *The Works of Sir William Jones*, Vol. XIII, p. 305.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>31</sup> Alfred Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the Revolt against the Eighteenth Century*, London, 1960, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> René Welleck, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950: Later Eighteenth Century*, London, 1970, pp. 111-12.

Many modern scholars have considered Jones as a precursor the Romantic movement. It is easy to detect a love for the simple life, a yearning for the primitive and a search for the noble savage in his early writings on the Arabs: 'Arabia, I mean that part of it which we call Happy, and which the Asiatics know by the name Yemen, seems to be the only country in the world in which we can lay the scene of pastoral poetry; because no nation can vie with the Arabians in the delightfulness of their climate and the simplicity of their manners.'<sup>33</sup>

To him the chief ingredients of poetry were rich 'natural' allusions and 'animated expressions of human passions, of joy and grief, love and hate, admiration and anger, sometimes pure and unmixed, sometimes variously modified and combined'.<sup>34</sup> Jones thought that imitation could not be the source of poetry and music. Even if it was true, in Muslim countries, he argued, both sculpture and paintings are forbidden by law and no kind of imitation much admired, yet there 'the pleasing arts expressing the passions in verse, are so enforcing that expressions by melody are cultivated by a degree of enthusiasm'.<sup>35</sup>

He had already said about Arabia, 'there is hardly an elegy, a panegyric or even a satire, in their language which does not begin with the complexities of an unfortunate or the exultation of a successful lover'.<sup>36</sup>

These two essays are outstanding contributions to the history of English criticism. Jones connected Arts with feelings and nature and more importantly, he was closer to Herder and Leopardi than to any one of his eighteenth-century contemporaries, since he installed lyric as the centre of poetry.<sup>37</sup>

His poem, 'A Persian song of Hafiz', which first appeared in his *Grammar* and was later published in his *Poems*, gave Jones a place among the poets of England. It was undoubtedly a forerunner of the Romantic movement. It had all the qualities, subjectivity, emotion, reference to uncommon names and faraway places which appealed to the Romantic poets like Southey and Byron.

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<sup>33</sup> William Jones, 'An Essay on the poetry of the Eastern Nations' in *Works*, Vol. X, p. 329.

<sup>34</sup> 'Essay on the Arts commonly called imitative', in *Works*, Vol. X, p. 363.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> 'An essay on the poetry of the Eastern Nations', in *Works*, Vol. X, p. 339.

<sup>37</sup> R. Welleck, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

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Sweet maid, if thou would'st charm my sight,  
And bid these arms thy neck infold;  
That rosy cheek, that lily hand,  
Would give thy poet more delight  
Than all Bokhara's vaunted gold,  
Than all gems of Samarcand.<sup>38</sup>

A similar Romantic trend could be noticed in his other occasional poems 'to the nymph of the Spring' or 'The damsels of Cardigan'.

No longer then pore over dark Gothic pages,  
To cull a rude gibberish from Neathen or Brooke,  
Leave year-books and parchments to grey-bearded sages,  
Be nature and love, and fair woman, our book.<sup>39</sup>

It would, however, be wrong to portray Jones as a Romantic poet. In the same volume in which he published his 'Persian Song', he published his 'Laura', 'An Elegy from Petrarch'. It would be natural for a man of Jones's temperament to be attracted towards the uncommon and towards a mode of life entirely different to that of Europe. But he would not share the same enthusiasm for the 'spiritual' India as some of the nineteenth-century Indologists had. He was no lover of 'the irrational', nor did he think that the most 'happy and free' Arabs were to be emulated by the Europeans. He had already read Rousseau's works and found them 'wonderfully absurd'.<sup>40</sup> His love and sympathy for the Arabs was shared by Gibbon, a man who could hardly be called 'Romantic'.

It is not easy to draw a clear line between the men of the Enlightenment and those of the Romantic movement, especially in their attitudes towards non-European cultures. It was Candide, the hero of Voltaire's famous novel, who went in search of happiness outside Europe, but his creator had no urge for the 'primitive'. On the other

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<sup>38</sup> Chalmers, *op.cit.*, p. 500.

<sup>39</sup> Chalmers, *op.cit.*, p. 460.

<sup>40</sup> Letter to Lord Althorp, 10 May 1772, Spencer Papers.

hand, modern research has shown that Rousseau was no such 'primitivist' as his English followers took him to be.<sup>41</sup>

So, although he had advanced new ideas on art and literature and some of his poems were no doubt forerunners of the Romantic movement, his literary opinions and tastes were, for the most part, of the eighteenth-century world. He may be described as Burke has been described, as 'a classicist who appealed to nature before the rules'.<sup>42</sup>

If the Renaissance had discovered Man then the Romantics discovered Nature. The slogan, 'go back to Nature', had strong political implications; the followers of Burke, Wordsworth and the Lake poets harked back to the past for harmony between man and nature and between man and man. They loved nature, tradition and history, deeply mistrusted sudden changes and revolutions. Such changes, such activities were not natural. A generation later the Romantics were revolutionaries, particularly Shelley. All Romantics revolted against the mechanical view of men and reason in the eighteenth century and looked to feelings and nature to redress the balance. But they parted company for they had different political programmes.

Jones, for the most part, was an eighteenth-century man of Reason. He was, however, attracted towards feelings and nature. But he could not share Burke's political views, being an ardent reformer as he was. The political implications of Jones's Romanticism was both conservative and liberal.

This complex personality, the product of romanticism on the one hand and a classical training on the other, found in India an echo of his own being — on the one hand simplicity, natural beauty and fascinating strangeness, and on the other a highly complex and well-cultured civilisation.

Most scholars, writing about the history of Orientalism, have assumed that Orientalism was closely linked with medievalism and was an offshoot of the Romantic movement. The men who harked back to the Middle Ages in search of what they called the 'lost harmony' between man and nature also looked for guidance to 'spiritual' India.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> A. O. Lovejoy, 'The supposed primitivism of Rousseau: discourse on inequality', *Monthly Philology*, Vol. XXI, pp. 15-88.

<sup>42</sup> Donald Bryant, *Burke and his Literary Friends*, Washington, December 1939.

<sup>43</sup> A. Aronson, *Europe looks at India: A Study in Cultural Relations*, Bombay, 1946, p. 9.

India provided an escape from the spiritual narrowness of Europe. James Mill, Jeremy Bentham and other rationalists had turned their backs on the East. They indeed had an interest in India, but that was confined to the improvement of British administration in that country; they had no time for Eastern wisdom or Eastern simple life.<sup>44</sup>

There was also a group of English officers who were inspired by the works of Burke and Rousseau, who were eager to defend Indian institutions and block the process of Anglicisation of Indian administration. Men like Munro, Malcolm, Elphinstone and Metcalfe. They shared their love for nature, respect for tradition, contempt for artifices of civilised societies. They loved nature and the natural order in India, village communities, sturdy peasantry and paternalistic rulers. Politically, they were conservatives and imperialists, wanting to create an India of peasants and enlightened rulers of British origin.<sup>45</sup> But Jones was neither a precursor of them nor of James Mill.

In India, Jones developed a passion for Botany. He observed numerous Indian plants and tried to classify them according to the Linnaean system. This study of botany was not merely to satisfy the curiosity, but was stimulated by his deep religious feelings: 'though we have read the works of the learned and eloquent Barrow with many other excellent theological discourses yet we find a more exquisite lecture on the being and attributes of God in every flower, every leaf and every berry than can be produced by the real wisdom and eloquence of man. The sublime doctrine of final causes [is] nowhere so beautifully proved and illustrated as in the plants of the lakes or forests when their different parts and uses of them are minutely and attentively observed.'<sup>46</sup>

So nature is to be studied carefully and preserved; the animals brought to Jones for preservation had to be set free in the rocks and woods unless they could be tamed and protected.<sup>47</sup> He preferred to live away from the city and crowd. Most of the year he lived in Alipur, five miles away from the city where he spent his evenings reading 'Italian

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<sup>44</sup> C. H. Philips (ed.), *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, London, 1960, pp. 217-29.

<sup>45</sup> Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians in India*, Oxford, 1959, pp. 8-25.

<sup>46</sup> Letter to Lady Georgiana Spencer, 24 October 1791, Spencer Papers.

<sup>47</sup> Jones, 'Discourse on Asiatick History, Civil and Natural', *Asiatick Researches*, Vol. IV, p. 13.

poetry with Anna Maria' and was 'literally lulled to sleep by Persian nightingales'.<sup>48</sup>

In autumn he lived at Krishnager in the heart of nature where he built a cottage 'entirely of vegetable substances'. Here he spent most of his time with the Brahmins discussing literature, philosophy, and mythology and telling them about the latest scientific discoveries from Europe as told him by Joseph Banks in his letters.<sup>49</sup>

The life in this cottage was idyllic and must have seemed to Jones like that of the golden age of fable. 'I wish your ladyship could see us in our charming cottage; it would bring to your mind what the poets tell us of the golden age; for not to mention our flocks and herds that eat bread out of our hands you might see a kid and a tiger playing together at Anna's feet. The tiger is not so large as an ox, he is suckled by a she-goat and has all the gentleness (except when he is hungry) of his foster mother.'<sup>50</sup>

This pastoral life reminds one of the hermitage of Kaṇva, the foster father of Śakuntalā, heroine of Kālidāsa's famous drama. He had already read *Śakuntalā*, and by 1788 had translated it into Latin and then into English. In 1789 it was published in Calcutta.<sup>51</sup>

No doubt the simplicity of Śakuntalā, the love of nature, in the play charmed Jones, but he ascribed greatness to the drama more for its style and decorum. Such style was the result of a highly complex and cultivated civilisation. He thought that it was produced at a time when the 'Indian empire' was in its full vigour.<sup>52</sup> He used the drama to proclaim that India had a civilisation which was equal to that of ancient Europe. This was the reason he purposely chose to avoid passages describing Śakuntalā's swelling breasts. The same sense of decency prevented him from translating the 'too bold' or 'too luxuriant' parts of the erotic medieval mystic poem, *Gīta-Govinda*.<sup>53</sup>

He had already shown that Indians and most Europeans sprang from the same origin; their languages were derived from an original extinct

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<sup>48</sup> Letter to Charles Chapman, 26 April 1784, as published in Shore, *op.cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>49</sup> Letters to Joseph Banks, 25 February 1788 and 28 September 1788, Dawson Turner Collection, Vol. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Letter to Lady Georgiana Spencer, 8 October 1787, Spencer Papers.

<sup>51</sup> *Sakuntala or the fatal ring: an Indian drama by Calidas*, translated from the original Sanskrit and Pracrit, Calcutta, 1789.

<sup>52</sup> *Op.cit.*, pp. iii, iv and ix.

<sup>53</sup> Jones, 'On the Mystical Poetry', *Asiatick Researches*, Vol. III, p. 183.

language; and the Hindus, Greeks and all pagans worshipped the same gods under different names. Indian astronomy was not borrowed from the Greeks, but belonged to their common ancestors. Indian music had attained the same standard as that of the Greeks. He showed that India had excelled in arithmetic, geometry and logic. He thought that it was possible that Aristotle based his system of logic on Brahmanic syllogisms. Hindus could boast of three discoveries: the decimal scale, the game of chess and the science of grammar.<sup>54</sup> The two aspects of Hinduism which attracted Jones most were the conception or the non-duality of God and the human soul as explained by Śankara in his commentary on the Vedānta and the transmigration of the soul. The idea of rebirth appeared to Jones more 'rational' than the Christian idea of the future State: 'I am no Hindu but I hold the doctrine of the Hindus concerning a future State to be incomparably more rational, more pious and more likely to deter men from the vice than the horrid opinions inculcated by the Christians on punishment without end.'<sup>55</sup>

But, when all this was said about the greatness of the Hindu civilisation, its beautiful literature, sublime religion and highly complex metaphysics, Jones did not go so far as to say, as James Mill thought he did, that India was better than Europe. No doubt he maintained that the Indians and the Arabs were more original in literature than the Romans had been, yet they were no better than the Greeks.

In fact, to Jones, Asia flourished in the sphere of imagination only, whereas 'reason and taste are the grand prerogatives of European minds'.<sup>56</sup> Asia had no conception of freedom: 'if every reader of history would open his eyes to some very important conclusions which flow from the whole extent of it, he would not but remark upon the constant effect of de'spotism in benumbing and destroying all those facilities which distinguish men from the herd that grazes; and to that cause he would impute the decided inferiority of the Asiatick nations, ancient and modern, to those in Europe who are blest with happier government.'<sup>57</sup>

To Jones, the greatest achievements of human wisdom were embodied in the British constitution. Significantly, the second plan of his proposed epic poem, *Britain Discovered*, which was to be written in

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<sup>54</sup> Jones, 'On the Hindus', *Asiatick Researches*, Vol. I, p. 428.

<sup>55</sup> Letter to Lord Althrop, 4 September 1787, Spencer Papers.

<sup>56</sup> Jones, 'The Second Discourse', *Asiatick Researches*, Vol. I, p. 407.

<sup>57</sup> Jones, 'On Asiatick History', *Asiatick Researches*, Vol. IV, pp. 7-8.

praise of the British constitution, gods and heroes from India came to pay homage at the nuptials of Britan (Royalty) and Albion (Liberty).<sup>58</sup> This love for the British constitution and a sense of the superiority of Europe in the fields of science and law were dominant emotions in Jones's mind, as was the romantic fascination which the exotic had for him. Poetics and politics were indeed related.

It is significant to note that Jones modified his Whig philosophy to suit the Indian situation; the central theme of his ideas, the protection of the individual, his person, property and freedom, was still valid. In India an ordinary Indian was denied political freedom (for Indians cannot be ruled by the 'Laws of Athens'), but he should have the freedom to enjoy the fruits of his industry — 'Descendable Property' and his religious beliefs.<sup>59</sup> So the purpose of the British government in India would be best served by 'promoting the security of the right of property to the natives, who by their cheerful industry, will enrich their benefactors and whose firm attachment will secure the permanence of our Dominion'.<sup>60</sup>

If in his correspondence during the Gordon riots one could detect his distrust of 'the mob', ordinary people, then he was equally distrusting of ordinary Indians: 'In our servants in the common seamen frequenting our port, in the petty workmen and shopkeepers of our streets and markets, there live the men who, to use the phrase of an old statute, sleep by day and work by night, for the purposes of gaming, debauchery and intoxication.'<sup>61</sup> Jones treated his Pandits and Munshis with great respect, but denied them political freedom. He distrusted ordinary Indians.

Two important ideas of ancient Indian aesthetics reached Europe long before the translations of Pānini and Bhārata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*; this was largely through the translations of Sir William Jones. They were the ideas of *rasas* and *bhāvas*. In ancient Indian dramas there is an imitation of all actions of the world, but the essential part of this are the emotions (*bhāvas*). There are eight *bhāvas*: love, humour, energy, anger, fear, grief, disgust and astonishment. They were not conveyed

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<sup>58</sup> 'Britain Discovered' in Shore, *op.cit.*, pp. 416-89.

<sup>59</sup> Letter to William Shipley, 5 October 1786, as published in Shore, *op.cit.*, p. 285.

<sup>60</sup> Jones, *Alsirajiyah or The Mohammedan Law of Inheritance; with a commentary*, Calcutta, 1792, p. xiii.

<sup>61</sup> Jones, 'Charges to the Grand Jury', 10 June 1787, *Works*, Vol. VII, p. 25.

directly but through the art of acting which created eight corresponding *rasas* (aesthetic experiences). This emphasis on the emotions struck a chord in the minds of the Romantics in Europe who were shifting the emphasis from Reason to feelings.<sup>62</sup>

To Wordsworth and Coleridge poetry and poets had a mystical role. To them 'the poet was a philosopher'.<sup>63</sup> In India too the word *kavi* can mean both a poet and philosopher. In Sanskrit poetics the word (*vāca*) reveals the unseen through the seen using language of metaphor and links the transcendent with the transient. The poet, *Kavi*, establishes communion between the worlds of men and gods. Wordsworth would have agreed and he was a Romantic conservative.<sup>64</sup>

So here is a man who was a son of the European enlightenment and a precursor of Romanticism who had 'discovered' a great civilisation in India, language, grammar, philosophy, music, mathematics, drama and poetry; discovered nature in India and Indians' love of nature, and accidentally Indian poetics. Yet he upheld an authoritarian rule for India. Colonialism was indeed related to Orientalism, poetics was not free from politics.

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<sup>62</sup> T. Stcherbatsky, 'Theory of Poetry in India' (trans. by H. C. Gupta), in *Indian Studies Past and Present*, Vol. X, Calcutta, 1969, pp. 291-5.

<sup>63</sup> R. Welleck, *The Romantic Age*, London, 1970, p. 185.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131-50.