

India Through the British Lens: British Perceptions of India in the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

This research investigates British perceptions of India in the nineteenth century through artwork, literature, and photography. Examining British visual and literary culture can shed light on different aspects of the attitudes towards Indian culture and the Indian people and how these attitudes changed over time. This research is bolstered by an analysis of British imperial politics and administration throughout the nineteenth century, since placing the research within its historical context provides a better understanding of the evolution of British opinions that can be seen through British art, literature, and photography. Trends in art and print culture can provide a unique glimpse into Anglo-Indian life and British opinions of the colony through the eyes of visitors and colonists. This paper examines a variety of drawings, paintings, travel accounts, memoirs, works of fiction, and photographs within the paper, supported by the use of secondary sources that explore the impact of the British Empire in India. The expectation before beginning the paper was to find evidence of unambiguous contradictions in the attitude towards India: an Orientalist fascination with elements of Indian culture and the Indian landscape clashing with British disdain for the Indian people themselves and their “barbaric” religions and ways of life. Examination of primary sources, however, suggests that this paradoxical attitude was more nuanced than anticipated and also changed over time as the British role in India evolved. British perceptions of India in the nineteenth century were multifaceted and expressed both positive and negative feelings towards the colony and its people.

Keywords: Orientalism, British imperialism, India

1. Introduction:

In 1978, Edward Said defined Orientalism as “the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice,” specifically in the case of Western examination of the East.¹ He elaborated “that so far as the West was concerned during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an assumption had been made that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West.”² Prior to Said’s definitions, especially in the nineteenth century, Orientalism was conceived of as an intellectual passion for all things “Oriental,” open to amateurs and professionals alike, so long as they were intrigued by Eastern cultures.³ This Western fascination with the East was central to Great Britain’s involvement with the Indian subcontinent throughout the nineteenth century. Over time, the British population was in equal turns intrigued by and critical of Indian traditions and the Indian people. Although initially fascinated by “exotic” Eastern customs and ways of life, the increasing population of Britons in the subcontinent contributed to a more negative opinion as British perceptions of their role in India shifted to a moralistic pursuit of reform and created an ever-widening wedge between Indians and their European colonizers that eventually erupted in the Indian Rebellion of 1857.

Said's definition of Orientalism highlighted the Western sense of cultural superiority and the romanticization of Eastern cultures, arguing that Western Orientalists depicted the East on "the Orientalist stage" for the consumption of European observers.⁴ Therefore, examining the role of Orientalism in British visual and literary culture helped to reveal certain attitudes towards India in the nineteenth century. The examination of prominent or popular works of art, literature, and photography of India offer representative views of the kinds of works being created and enjoyed by British observers in the nineteenth century. Throughout the course of this research, samples of British art and writing expressed all sorts of differing opinions and perspectives of India and the Indian people. Traveling artists and writers had different perspectives than Company officials and government administrators, who had different perspectives than the non-official Anglo-Indian population. Within this sea of variety, however, certain patterns surfaced. Furthermore, tensions and animosity towards the Indian population after the Indian Rebellion of 1857 contributed to a paternalistic view of India under the British Raj, defined by British feelings of racial and cultural supremacy embedded in the works of British artists, writers, and photographers. The works of British art, literature, and photography provide a peek into the diverse and often contradictory perceptions of India in the nineteenth century through the visual and literary culture of the British Empire.

2. India and Indian Culture as the "Other:"

The early interactions between the British and native Indians tended to be characterized by an Orientalist appeal. Company officials who lived and worked in India continuously mingled with Indians and would surround themselves with Indian decorations, clothing, and ways of life as they went about their business. Many of the features observed in British art of India reflect this Orientalist fascination with the exotic and unfamiliar. Towards the end of the eighteenth century and into the beginnings of the nineteenth, however, the social atmosphere changed as Governor-Generals like Lord Cornwallis and Lord Wellesley brought a sense of racial arrogance and cultural superiority into the Company administration with them.⁵

The East India Company charter debate in 1813 brought attention to the "barbarous" customs of India that, in British minds, necessitated missionary intervention.⁶ Up until the end of the eighteenth century, the Company officials in India had held a paternalist view of administration, in which a preservation of the native culture was preferred to any kind of active reform on the part of the British. With the new charter, however, missionaries were officially allowed into the subcontinent to undertake the work of correcting certain Indian cultural practices, like widow burning, as part of a perceived moral duty. The arrival of these missionaries created a culture of contempt and perceived superiority, often reflected in accounts recorded by said missionaries, which acted as an incentive for social reform and British isolation within India.⁷ With the rapid growth of British society in the colony, the non-official community strove to create an insular "simulated England" that could act as a respite from the necessary and inescapable interactions with native Indians in day-to-day life.⁸

The creation of another new charter in 1833 ended the East India Company's trading role and made it a solely administrative organization. This new role led to the implementation of reforms and improvements that the British undertook without much concern for how their Indian subjects might perceive the changes. For example, Rammohan Roy, a Brahmin reformer and scholar who advocated Western education, even warned the British against creating policies and passing laws without having a solid understanding of the customs and desires of Indian subjects.⁹ Heedless of this advice, the reforms only increased under the leadership of Lord Dalhousie, who began a period of modernization when he took office in 1848. Although the developments under Dalhousie were intended to improve the lives of Indian subjects as well as increase British control, they were often undertaken with little to no input from the Indian people and thus added to the resentment of British policies and the frustration that the British remained unaware of.¹⁰ Roy's warning would prove to be prophetic as tensions wound even tighter with the approach of the midcentury.

Despite the resentment brewing among segments of the Indian population in the 1850s, the British community in India was blindsided by the eruption of the Indian Rebellion, known by the British as the Sepoy Mutiny, in 1857.¹¹ The sepoys, or Indian soldiers, feared that they were being tricked into converting to Christianity through "being forced to pollute themselves with unclean animal fat" on rifle cartridges.¹² Many Hindu sepoys were Brahmins, part of the highest caste of Indian society. Consuming products from unholy animals would effectively break their caste role and cut them off from their religion and heritage. The outward Europeanization of Indian converts as a result of Christian missionary efforts had convinced many Indians that the British government was interested in replacing Hindu and Muslim identities with European ones. Thus, the sepoys saw the use of the new rifles as a way for the government to force them into breaking their caste and losing everything they valued.¹³ This fear, combined with the

friction and anxieties that had been steadily building between the British administration and the Indian people, led to the eruption of the Indian Rebellion.

The official response to the rebellion was a policy of conciliation, but the non-official community interpreted the rebellion as a reminder not to trust the natives, which led to increased tension and feelings of racial arrogance. In 1858, the British Crown stepped in and officially took hold of the colonial government after the dissolution of the East India Company, with the justification that “only enlightened British rule, not its coarse local variant, could redeem Asians... from their slough of stagnation.”¹⁴ The post-Mutiny government took on a new outlook that referenced the paternalism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but with a sense of racial superiority rather than any kind of genuine fondness for the Indian people.¹⁵ Queen Victoria’s crowning as Empress of India in 1877 strengthened Britain’s bond with the Indian princely states and served as a way to “Indianize” the British Raj and legitimize its control.¹⁶ Thus, the British perceptions of India and Indian culture transformed in the nineteenth century from an Orientalist fascination with Eastern exoticism to a paternalist system characterized by racial disdain under the British Raj. Throughout the nineteenth century, the unofficial British community in India continuously defined itself in opposition to Indians, through both contempt for native customs and fear of the unfamiliar. This sense of distance was maintained even as some British observers enjoyed idealized art and literature of the Indian people and countryside. The 1857 uprising, meanwhile, was used as evidence to confirm many Britons’ suspicions that it was not only unwise, but also dangerous to trust Indians. In the wake of the rebellion, British imperialism expanded as the British monarchy aligned itself more closely with the government in India and the empire in the East. The trends and changes in British opinions over time can be found in the works of British artists, writers, and photographers, who focused their attention eastward and expressed their impressions of India.

3. India in Fine Art:

Although British perceptions of Indian culture and people shifted throughout the nineteenth century, the India depicted in British art tended to be static and timelessly beautiful. As a place of inspiration and a land to be “discovered” by British artists and travelers, India’s countryside, people, and history were exoticized in artistic depictions that fulfilled the Orientalist “cult of the picturesque.”¹⁷ The genuine concerns or desires of the Indian people were usually glossed over in pursuit of more scenic images, often entirely ignoring calamities such as the Indian Rebellion of 1857. When such events were depicted, they were frequently cast in an impersonal light, or depicted the Indians as violent and unreasonable in the face of British attempts to restore order. Despite some realistic depictions of life in India, the majority of British artwork of the subcontinent during the nineteenth century expressed idealized views of the sublime landscapes and regarded the people of India as part of the scenery. Consequently, the image of India most commonly conveyed in British artwork is that of an ancient, exotic land to be admired by British observers.

The desire for images of the ideal “picturesque” scenery of the East, prompted by the Orientalist movement in art, was a profitable venture for British artists, who traveled to India to sate the craving of viewers back in Europe.¹⁸ Artists like Thomas and William Daniell were some of the first to travel to the subcontinent in the late eighteenth century, where they painted images of exotic Indian landscapes and architecture. In the early 1800s, some of their work was published in *Oriental Scenery*, a book that helped to shape British perceptions of India through popularizing the Daniells’ images of pristine, romanticized landscapes.¹⁹ Other British artists followed the Daniells’ lead and created picturesque works that contributed to the romantic and idealized image of India in the nineteenth century. This artistic British ideal of the Indian landscape was often at odds with the accounts of travelers and missionaries in the subcontinent, who maintained a sense of disdain for and superiority over the people who inhabited the lands that so enchanted the British imagination. However, the “cult of the picturesque” in Britain still encouraged the creation of artwork depicting new and exotic lands, even to the point of celebrating amateur sketches of the “wild and romantic” scenery of India, such as the work of Charles D’Oyly and other hobbyist artists.²⁰ The British desire for images of India was not tempered by something as trivial as the amateur or professional status of the artists who illustrated it.

One professional British artist who worked in India was George Chinnery, who created images of native Indians as well as landscapes during the early nineteenth century. His approach to representations of India was unique due to his realistic depictions of Indians in his work. Rather than producing condescending or exoticized portrayals of their daily activities, Chinnery illustrated the “vitality and dignity present in the ordinary lives of Indians” living and working in the nineteenth century through his sketches and paintings.²¹ One of Chinnery’s sketches from his time in India is a pen drawing of an Indian man carrying baskets over his shoulders to sell his goods. His back is turned to the viewer, and the loose lines of the drawing indicate a strong but still relaxed stance as he goes about his business, heedless of the presence of an observer. Other similar drawings and sketches are commonly found in Chinnery’s work and offer an example of a more respectful, candid portrayal of the Indian people, even though such a depiction was outside the

norm of British-made art of India. In addition to his sketches of Indians, Chinnery also produced finished paintings of Indian landscapes and scenery, including several images of ruined architecture nestled amongst dense foliage. His finished works more fully demonstrate the subjects favored by British artists and audiences, focusing on the wild and exotic beauty of the land rather than the everyday lives of Indian subjects. The paintings express the splendor of the picturesque through the carefully rendered details of the images and the idealized beauty of the unfamiliar landscape and architecture, thus emphasizing the Orientalist interpretation of India.

However, the mood of British artwork took a turn after the Indian Rebellion of 1857, which inspired the use of battle scenes as a way to express the nature of the “grave imperial crisis” that faced Great Britain in the wake of the uprising.²² Louis William Desanges, for example, painted heroic scenes of officers like Lieutenant William Alexander Kerr on the Indian battlefield where they earned their Victoria Crosses, thus presenting British military glory in the face of a treacherous uprising. Artistic representations of women were also a powerful way to demonstrate the distressed British response to the rebellion, as well as to allegations of rape and murder during the events of the revolt. Depicting women as the victims of Indian savagery showed the “bestial” nature of native Hindus and Muslims and incited the horror of British viewers.²³ Despite the depiction of mutinous sepoys and brave British officers in battle scenes, however, picturesque images of Indian scenery remained a source of fascination in Great Britain. The artists who illustrated these scenes, like Charles D’Oyly and ladies like Charlotte Canning, continued to draw on Indian landscapes and architecture for inspiration.

One of the better-known British artists who painted India was Edward Lear, a landscape painter who traveled the subcontinent from 1873-1875. Once in India, Lear was awed by the beauty of the colony and was determined to create a series of drawings and landscapes.²⁴ He enjoyed walking, and his wanderings often led him off the beaten path into unexplored areas. Many of the works that he created on the road were later used as guides to produce more elaborate watercolor scenes. In his own words, Edward Lear was a painter of “poetic topography” in his landscapes, which often expressed a sense of the sublime—or a feeling of splendor and awe—through dramatic illustrations of the lush Indian countryside.²⁵ By emphasizing the sublime aspects of Indian scenery in his paintings, Lear provided idealized, Orientalist images to his wealthy patrons and to British observers as a whole, who eagerly awaited the fruits of his travels in India. Lear’s work, alongside the work of other British artists, tended to express a romanticized view of the colony in a way that appealed to British desires and interests over the realities of Indian life.

4. India in British Literature:

British citizens back home in Great Britain were also introduced to the culture of India through the literature of visitors and residents of the colony. The British connection to India generated prose, poetry, and personal accounts of all kinds, which helped to create an image of India for the Britons in Europe. The writings of travelers, missionaries, and historians earlier in the century set the stage for British opinions by detailing the character and cultural practices of India. These earlier works then paved the way for novelists and other writers in the latter part of the nineteenth century to add their works to the list of writings about life in India. Anglo-Indian literature not only worked to shape British perceptions of the colony but also satisfied a growing desire in Europe for books describing what life was like in British India. Expressing both disdain for and fascination with Indian culture, British literature of the nineteenth century presented both positive and negative perspectives of India based on interactions between the British community there and the vast and multicultural Indian population.

Travel accounts were some of the most popular literary works about nineteenth-century India. The account of Emily Eden, who journeyed across northern India between 1837 and 1840, was one of the better-known accounts describing the Indian countryside during the nineteenth century. Although reviewers found little “useful knowledge” of topography or administration in her account, Eden’s book was commended for its representation of the “picturesque appearance of Indian life” and its ability to present “a series of pictures true to life” that created a vivid visual image in readers’ minds. Eden’s account evoked not only a sense of wonder over the ancient ruins of the Indian countryside, but also a deep sense of melancholy for the “inevitable passage of time” that she believed would ultimately lead England to the same fate of past glory that India represented.²⁶ Her account provides a clear picture of the British tendency to cast their own perspectives of India onto what they perceived as a passive, static, idealized country, much as visual artists highlighted their perceptions of the exotic beauty of the landscapes around them.

Other travel accounts also provided an idea for the British in the mother country about what life was like in India. Much like works of Orientalist art, the influence of travelers’ journals contributed to the sense of curiosity about India and the notion of the “gorgeous East.”²⁷ The descriptions of “picturesque antiquities” in the journals of visitors to the subcontinent paralleled the romantic quality of the Daniells’ aquatints and watercolors, which had been prominent in Great Britain since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In addition to works that emphasized the ideal

and picturesque qualities of the Indian landscape, there were also works that were more critical of both India and the Indian people. These writers, who were often travelers or historians, sought to convince British opinion-makers and legislators back home of India's backwardness and inferior nature. The works of historians like Mountstuart and J.D. Cunningham, for example, contributed to the literary attempt to shape British opinion back home in favor of continuing Western involvement in India. In this way, certain works of British literature reflected the attitude of reform movements as well as the European paternalism that was more common in the middle of the nineteenth century. Whether deliberately seeking to influence British opinions or not, the publication of literature about India contributed to a British interest in promoting Western ideas throughout the colony.

The writings of missionaries were an example of other popular accounts that demonstrated the British belief in their duty to transform the savage culture of India.²⁸ The Reverend Charles Acland wrote *A Popular Account of the Manners and Customs of India* in the 1840s, which provided glimpses of Anglo-Indian life but also demonstrated the author's disdain for the Indian people. In one section, in which Acland is relating a visit to the ruins of homes in an ancient village, he describes the native Indians nearby as "absolute savages" living in houses made of mud and "miserable thatch." In keeping with the British assumption that contemporary Indians had lost the knowledge and wonders of their ancient civilizations, Acland suggests the Indians he saw must have greatly "degenerated" or else must not be related to the same race that built the majestic ancient village.²⁹

Around the midcentury, amidst the creation of artwork and literature about India, interest in the Eastern colony created an increasing demand in Great Britain for works describing Anglo-Indian life and the experiences of living in the Indian subcontinent.³⁰ After the events of the Indian Rebellion, British administrators and soldiers alike took the opportunity to write books on history or administration, and some even wrote their memoirs. Other works and personal accounts in the nineteenth century also provided a description of British life in India. William Sleeman's *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*, which was first published in 1844, gave an anecdotal account of Indian life from the perspective of a Lieutenant Colonel in the Bengal Army. Sleeman discussed varied topics, from the religions of native Indians to famines to descriptions of the countryside, providing a more paternalist view than the works of critical authors like Charles Acland.³¹ Captain Bellew's *Memoirs of a Griffin; or, a Cadet's First Year in India* also combines a series of stories (both fact and fiction) to create a book detailing the experiences of a "griffin," a young man newly sent out to British India to "encounter the toils of the civil, or the dangers of the military service in [Great Britain's] Eastern possessions."³² A review in the *Illustrated London News* described the book as "successful" in providing "an amusing picture of the Griffin's reception, adventures, and mishaps, with a distinct view of Indian life" both inside and outside the colonial government.³³ In sharing a perspective of British life in India, *Memoirs of a Griffin* humorously expressed both a view of India as inferior to Europe and satisfied the market desire for Anglo-Indian works in Great Britain.

Although these jaunty tales of military and administrative exploits were popular examples of British literature about India, perhaps no Anglo-Indian author was as well known as Rudyard Kipling. In the words of a book review from the *Illustrated London News*, "everyone who has lived in India, though he may not be given to literature, has heard of Mr. Rudyard Kipling."³⁴ His works simultaneously satisfied the market desire for books about life in India and explored the lives of Anglo-Indians in a way that was particularly convincing to Britons, as Kipling had been born in Bombay and spent his early years living in India. One of Kipling's most influential works was *Kim*, a book published between 1900 and 1901 about an Irish orphan growing up in the colony. Although the bustling nature of Indian life is described with a tone of delight in Kipling's work, his imperialist mindset is also evident. As the "Friend of all the World," Kim is capable of blending in amongst the tapestry of cultures around him, but he is still a sahib—a white man—and he uses this duality to aid him in his adventures throughout the Indian subcontinent.³⁵ Set in the context of the Great Game, Kim's eventual involvement with the British government's network of spies brings the imperial power of the British in the nineteenth century to life within the exotic backdrop of India, thus providing a rich narrative to British readers that still emphasizes the distance between British perceptions of themselves and of the Indian people. Ultimately, *Kim* presents a lovingly rendered look at the communities in British India while still representing the imperialist Victorian belief in the mission to provide structure to the "fascinating but uncivilized non-white natives."³⁶

5. British Photography in India:

With the arrival of photography in the mid-nineteenth century, British amateurs and professionals alike captured images of Indian landscapes, architecture, and people to familiarize themselves with the colony and present exotic photographs to European viewers. From archaeological and anthropological reasons to simply fulfilling the British desire to see India without having to travel, the work of British photographers served multiple purposes as they traveled throughout the subcontinent. The camera became a valuable tool and an "indispensable travel aid" for the British in

India as photography both satisfied the European desire for Orientalist images and contributed to the imperial aims of the British government.³⁷

Although Louis Daguerre first patented photography with his invention of the daguerreotype in 1839, the process and equipment were too unwieldy to use while travelling until the 1850s.³⁸ Photography began to take off in Great Britain when Henry Fox Talbot patented a process that he called calotype in 1841, which allowed for the creation of photographic negatives and permanent images, but required long-term exposure. By 1848, a calotype photographer named F. Schanzhofer had opened a studio in Calcutta—perhaps the first such studio in India—which popularized the use of calotypes by both amateur and professional photographers. In 1851, Frederick Scott Archer created the collodion process, which significantly reduced the necessary exposure time for landscape photographs. Whereas the calotype process could take up to seven minutes for an image to be fully developed, the collodion process could take less than a minute. However, collodion photography also required a darkroom and a large variety of chemicals and equipment to develop the images. As a result, early photographers in India had a choice between the faster collodion process and the less complicated calotype process.³⁹ After Talbot let his patent expire in 1854, different photographic processes opened to the public, and the development of new methods proceeded even more quickly than it had before. As a result, travel photography became especially popular as access to photographic equipment and techniques increased. With new opportunities to see true-to-life images of foreign lands, Europeans and Britons in particular clamored for photographs of “exotic places and people,” especially of India.⁴⁰ As photography became more easily accessible and European demand for photos of exotic locales increased, photographers journeyed to colonies like India in search of scenes to satisfy their audiences. The British government itself is also the source of many photographs of India, as official surveys and projects worked to document the significant places, people, and monuments of British colonial holdings. One of the earliest prominent photographers in India was Major Linnaeus Tripe, a soldier photographer whose position in the British military gave him the opportunity to record India and the actions of the East India Company in an official capacity. His work in the military earned him the title of official photographer for the Madras Presidency in 1856, and he contributed to British administrative projects and took a series of architectural photos around Madras and southern India during an archaeological survey in the late 1850s and early 1860s.⁴¹

The amateur Samuel Bourne was perhaps the most notable of the travel photographers who went out in search of artistic “foreign views” to satisfy British audiences.⁴² In 1863, he made his first expedition into the Himalayas alongside thirty assistants who helped to carry his equipment. During his subsequent trips, Bourne sought to take photographs that depicted the picturesque nature of the Indian landscape.⁴³ One such image is *The Spiti Valley, Evening*, which was taken around 1865. Bourne’s composition centers the diagonal split of the valley across the center of the image, providing the viewer with an enduring impression of the sheer size of the mountain range. There are no smudges or blurred areas, and the visual arrangement of the photograph recalls the picturesque landscapes created by Orientalist artists.⁴⁴ The photo is representative of much of Bourne’s work, which was known for its clarity and high-quality development. He understood the visual components that went into creating a striking image, and his photographs reflect that understanding through their artistic quality. Bourne was thus able to present a somewhat romanticized view of the Indian landscape and evoke “feeling[s] of reverie” that recalled the goals of Orientalist painting and would have appealed to his British audience and their interest in Indian exoticism.⁴⁵ His photos, like *The Spiti Valley, Evening*, indicate an interest in representing the splendor and majesty of India, recalling the goals of earlier visual artists rather than the more practical or utilitarian approach to photography seen in photographers like Tripe. Thus, Bourne and Tripe represent distinct approaches to photography in India, but through their images viewers (both in the nineteenth century and today) can still appreciate the unique landscapes and architecture of the subcontinent.

In addition to photos of the Indian landscape, photography also opened up new opportunities to record images of the Indian people in a way that had never been seen before. Just as the British government conducted official surveys of Indian architecture and landmarks, photographic studies of the various ethnic groups in India were a way for the administration to evaluate and exhibit the diversity of the vast colony. In the nineteenth century, ethnography, or ethnology, was a branch of anthropology that studied the “Natural History of Man” and the racial distinctions therein.⁴⁶ J. Forbes Watson and J.K. Kaye were commissioned to compile an ethnographic study of India, which was published by the India Museum in eight volumes between 1868 and 1875. The work featured over 400 photographs by over fifteen photographers, which documented the various castes and ethnicities of the native Indian population. Such ethnographical studies became very popular amongst British viewers and photographers alike, and official photographic surveys, as well as posed studio portraits taken by individual photographers like Samuel Bourne and William Johnson, became very common in the 1860s and afterwards.⁴⁷ Although the ethnographical descriptions were often somewhat dehumanizing, the classification of Indian peoples attempted to present the ethnic diversity of the subcontinent in an understandable way that would reinforce the British foothold in India through categorizing and studying their colonial subjects. Photography thus acted as the first artistic vehicle that really attempted to focus on

the Indian people themselves, and especially the ethnic diversity therein, rather the landscape around them. The descriptions of said photographs and ethnographies tend to be objectifying, giving off the sense of looking at a museum exhibit rather than describing a living people. For example, one description of a Smartha Brahmin from Watson and Kaye's ethnography uses the photograph of a scribe and defines the subcaste as a whole as "frequently very able men, and of much use in state or other service; thoughtful, persevering, industrious, and faithful."⁴⁸ The description, while certainly praising Smartha Brahmins for their broad skill at administrative duties, is more fitting for describing a zoo exhibit than a group of unique, distinct people. Due in part to this dehumanizing approach, however, the explanations themselves are a useful method of evaluating British feelings of superiority over and fascination with the native Indian population. The creation and popularity of the ethnographies produced during the Raj sheds light on the distantly paternalistic and observational approach that Great Britain took to the Indian subcontinent and its people, especially in a post-Rebellion India that was held firmly under the British Empire's thumb. British ethnographies, unique among the works of other photographers in India at the time, are thus an important part of studying the British perceptions of India, especially as they grew more common during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

6. Conclusion:

British attitudes towards their Indian colony in the nineteenth century were diverse and multifaceted. The earlier period of Company rule was characterized by an Orientalist fascination with Indian culture that gave way to an impression of racial arrogance and cultural superiority with the arrival of Christian missionaries and non-official colonists in the first half of the nineteenth century. After 1858, the British Raj regarded India as a land in need of paternalistic British guidance, performed more out of a sense of moral duty than out of a genuine desire for what was best for the Indian people. During these changes, however, Britons in India and Great Britain alike broadly admired elements of Indian culture, at the same time that native Indians and certain aspects of Indian life were looked down upon.

British artwork of India generally reflected tenets of Orientalist art—it focused on the "sublime" in the Indian landscape and tended to emphasize the exotic grandeur of architectural ruins and dazzling images of Indian scenery. The Indian people, when they appeared in landscapes, were often treated as accessories to the scene to add exotic flavor and context to the image. Although there were some exceptions, artistic representations of Indians tended to visualize them as something to be observed and studied rather than understood on an equal level. Likewise, British literature about India more commonly discussed the shortcomings or moral inferiority of the Indian people. Much of the British writing on India in the nineteenth century was intended to provide a glimpse into the daily events of Anglo-Indian life, which was often isolated from the activities of Hindus and Muslims. The work of Rudyard Kipling is one of the premier examples of British writing that acknowledges the massive diversity of the Indian subcontinent while still promoting the imperial aims of the British Raj. British photography was also a tool used in Great Britain's imperial mission. Its role in ethnographical surveys and archaeological studies illustrates the priorities of the British government at the same time that travelling photographers fulfilled Orientalist sensibilities by recording scenes of the Indian landscape and of life in India. A better understanding of the nuanced quality of British opinions towards India can reveal the extent to which the British Empire prioritized their own interests over that of India in the nineteenth century.

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 - 7 Edwardes, 95-96.
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