

*‘A comparative study on styles, techniques and themes between two categories (On spot and Stay at home) of depictions on India by the British artists of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries’*

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I am Joyee Roy from India, *an alumni of ITP, 2011*, have experience of around 23 years in two different museums (*Victoria Memorial Hall and Rabindra Bharati University Museum*) of national importance of Kolkata is a recipient of The BM ITP Research Support Grant 2022-23 to pursue advance research on *‘A comparative study on styles, techniques and themes between two categories (On spot and Stay at home) of depictions on India by the British artists of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries’*.

It was already mentioned earlier in ITP blog that as part of ITP summer programme, I visited Prints & Drawings Study Room of the British Museum and found few drawings and paintings on Indian theme by J.M.W. Turner and George Stubbs- two authorities of British art of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries who never went India. That experience increased my curiosity about how they depicted India without be there and why they did it? Thus, Prints & Drawings Study Room of the BM influenced me to choose my research topic in future.

I pursued initial study based on secondary sources (books, journals etc.) in India through different libraries after receiving the grant during April 2022. But it was an obvious need to examine the primary sources and therefore, I was in London from October 2 to 13 in 2022. In my time there, I was able to find out required primary sources in the Prints & Drawings Study Rooms of the British Museum. Also I accessed the Anthropological library of the BM as well as the reading room of the British Library. I discussed my topic with the curators of South Asian Department of the British Museum and received their significant comments. I examined mostly the paintings on India done by ‘At Home’ British artists, who never visited this vivacious country.

Art Historian, Emma Roberts complained that *“drawings made in India, and sent to England to be engraved, are subject to much deterioration in the process from the negligence of persons wholly unacquainted with the peculiarities of the country, to whom they are entrusted.”*



110 a, b. Capt. Thos. Pridmore. Decoyed Elephants Leaving the Male Fastened to a Tree. 1805. Original sketch and colored lithograph. Walter Collection.

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Photo taken from the book 'British Drawings in the India Office Library, vol.I by Mildred Archer

In the above painting it may be observed that the significant difference between sketch and the painting depicted on the basis of this sketch. The sketch is more realistic and moreover so many figures have added in the paintings. Tremendous fear of the elephant can be seen in the sketch only. Moreover, the plants depicted later in the painting are more likely English flora and fauna.

But this is not the only reason. The noteworthy facts that I found out through my studies are as follows:-

- i. The reason behind the depiction of Indian subcontinent by 'At Home' British artists probably because for engraving or print, or perhaps for a patron interested to this subject matter.
- ii. The reason for deterioration of the depiction by 'At Home' artists because probably they made their own versions from the British perspective though

most of them got hold of drawings, sketches by artists or stories told by eyewitnesses who had witnessed these events.

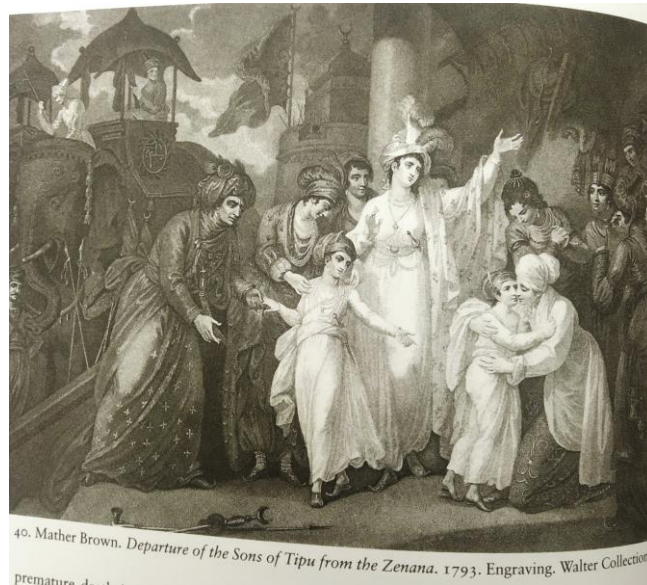


Photo taken from the book 'British Drawings in the India Office Library, vol. I by Mildred Archer



In the above paintings there are no reflection of tremendous fear, frustration in the body language of both mother and sons when they are de-touching forever probably. The artist was bound to follow British perspective to showcase this painting is very soft mood as if a very normal thing is going on!

iii. Not only the British perspective inherent in them but sometimes due to follow blindly their patron's perspective is one of the reason of deterioration.

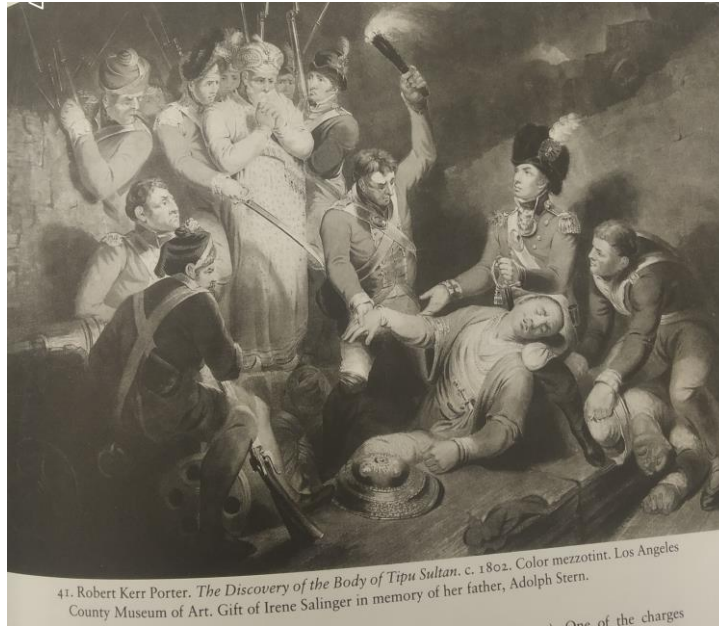


Photo taken from the book 'British Drawings in the India Office Library, vol.I by Mildred Archer

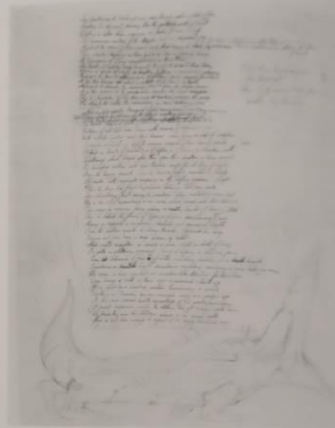
The depiction of above painting probably was to please the patron, to show the generousness of British Raj as there is no sign of relief in the eyes of British rulers after defeating the 'Indian Tiger' Tipu Sultan

- iv. In some cases, maybe they have to mind the demand of art market of the then England by inserting British perspective and features in Indian landscape.
- v. In spite of these limitations, there was huge demand of competent professional '*Stay at Home*' British artists sometime more than 'On Spot' British artists regarding depiction of India.
- vi. There is exception also. Eminent scholars Hermione de Almeida and George H. Gilpin mentioned in the Part seven- '*Elegies to an Indian Renaissance*' of the book '*Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the prospect of India*' about 'Blake's Prophecies against Empire'. They mentioned, "Like Hodges and Zoffany, William Blake also condemned war and the dangers of empire, but he had a more radical view of his role as an artist than did these Royal Academy painters."

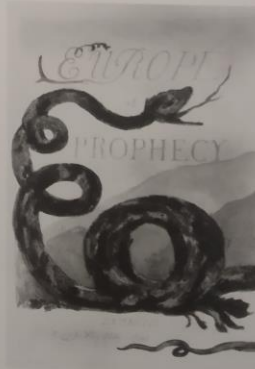
Asia and took hope from stories about Tipu Sultan, allied with revolutionary France, and still resistant to Cornwallis in India. In *The Song of Los*, Blake imagines the arrival in Asia of the idea of revolution as personified by a character named Orc:

The Kings of Asia heard  
The howl rise up from Europe!  
And each ran out from his Web  
From his ancient woven Den,  
For the darkness of Asia was startled  
At the thick-flaming, thought-creating fires of Orc.<sup>19</sup>

In *A Song of Liberty*, the joyous conclusion to his prophecy *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake proclaims exultantly, 'Empire is no more!' He imagines the collapse of all empires, Asian as well as European, as they follow the pattern of the great rout of Satan and his angels from Heaven in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, falling in their defeat simultaneous with the spoils and debris of their conquests: 'Down rushed beating his wings in vain the jealous king; his grey brow'd councillors, thunderous warriors, cur'd veterans, among helms, and shields, and chariots horses, elephants, banners, castles, slings and rocks. ... Falling, rushing, ruining!<sup>20</sup>' In a final illustration for *A Song of Liberty*, Blake envisaged the end of empire as an image of monarchy cast out and exiled. George III is satirized in the form of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar who, according to the account of the prophet Daniel, after a career of conquest went mad and ate grass. Blake shows the monarch to be a dispossessed and terrified madman like King Lear but still wearing his crown, and he is shown as he devolves, naked and on all fours, to the state of an animal. The exiled king dwells in an oppressive and dark cave. And in another version, a large watercolor done in 1795, Blake intensified his caricature. (Fig. 153) Here, Nebuchadnezzar has grown long talon-like nails on his hands and feet and a great mane of a beard. The king has now lost his crown, perhaps in acknowledgment of George III's loss of authority to the Prime Minister Pitt (or perhaps as a rare expression by the artist of political tact). But with his flesh partly torn away to expose muscle and his uncut nails, George III as the apotheosis of Nebuchadnezzar resembles not so much King Lear as a sadhu or Hindu ascetic priest. (Figs 112 & 113) And he is fearful where they are resigned. In an age when the King of England was thought mad, and Tipu Sultan the Tiger of Mysore barely survived British ambitions in India (in a version of Zoffany's *The Death of the Royal Tiger* (Fig. 147), Blake's watercolor illustrates how the very institution of monarchy is under siege – it is a metamorphic creature more monstrous and more scared than the devolving animal described in the poem, a freak of nature that impossibly embodies forms of both the lion of British royalty and the tiger of Tipu Sultan's Mysore kingdom. This freak of nature, a cross-species that theorists of miscegenation would later call a tiger or tigron, would also necessarily be as sterile as a mule – a prospect not lost on Blake.



151. William Blake, *The Four Zeas (Vain)*, Manuscript Page 70, c.1797-1807. Pencil Drawing with Watercolor, British Library, London



152. William Blake, *Empire a Prophecy*, Plate 2, 1794. Colored Etching, Glasgow University Library

William Blake, *Europe A Prophecy*, Plate 2, 1794, coloured etching

- vii. Another dimension is that the indirect impact of Indian subcontinent changed colour palette and theme of the paintings by the artists of both categories extensively. The sober English canvas gradually changed and became vivacious and lively under the impact of Indian bizarre climate during British Raj.
- viii. Regarding comparison between two categories artists, there is no doubt that as per the artistic value, the visualisation of Indian subcontinent by 'At Home' artists are sometime more significant in comparison with the 'On Spot' artists though those are less truthful. The proved reason is that who were not being able to establish their professional career in England at that time, they only moved to India or other oriental countries, which were under British Raj in that period to find their fate there. Therefore, it may be said that the second grade British artists came India for professional reason.
- ix. Moreover, one very interesting thing I was able to find out that, sometime 'On Spot' English artists also depicted few paintings without visited these particular places of India similar like 'At Home' artists. There are few paintings on 'Sanchi' (*The Great Stupa, a Buddhist Monument at Sanchi is one of the oldest simple*

*hemispherical brick structure built over the relics of the Buddha, situated in Raisen district, Madhya Pradesh of India, and an important monument of Indian Architecture. It was originally commissioned by the Mauryan emperor Ashoka the Great in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. discovered in 1818) by Thomas & William Daniell, which were depicted without being there anytime on the basis of secondary sources. Therefore, we may consider these paintings of 'Sanchi' by T&W Daniell similar as depiction by 'At Home' artists.*

There were a good number of English artists who acquired a reputation for the 'translation' of water colours made in India. The professional well established English artists of 18-19 centuries, who presented India with their visual presentation by staying at home, are:-

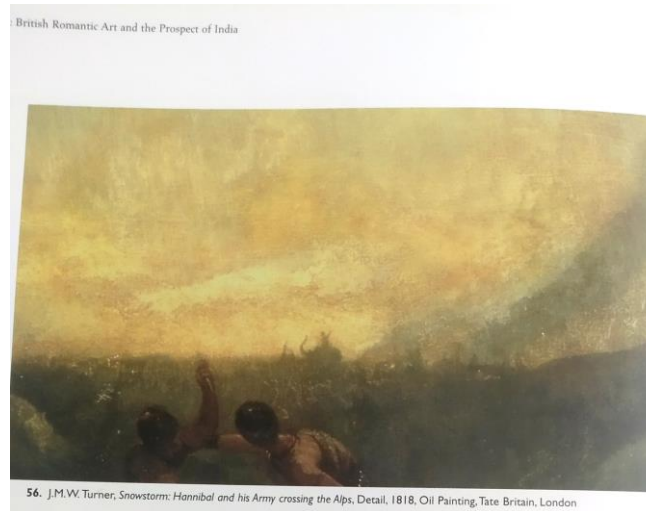
Cotman, Cox, Prout, Copley Fielding, Richard Simkim, J.M.W. Turner, T.Allom, G. Cattermole, H. Melville, C. Bentley, S. Austing, W. Pursur, D. Roberts, Mather Brown (American but professionally well established in England), Herbart Lyndon, George Lambert, Samuel Scott, George Stubbs, J.M.W. Turner, Henry Warren, Samuel Howitt, William Cowen, H. Melville, Fisher and William Blake.

Among the above mentioned well established professional 'At Home' artists of England, I have chosen to examine the depiction of three pioneer English artists of the romantic era: J.M.W. Turner, William Blake and George Stubbs. They depicted 18-19 century India and its habitants without making a visit there. Moreover, the indirect impact of Indian subcontinent changed their colour palette as well as the theme of their paintings extensively.

### J.M.W. Turner:-

The British Library possesses a volume, '*Hindustan, the shores of the Red sea and the Himalaya Mountains, illustrated (London 1845)*', containing many engravings of the Indian scene. The original sketches were made on spot by Commander Robert Elliot, R.N., and Lieutenant George Francis White; they were re-drawn and prepared for engraving by outstanding professional 'At Home' English artists such as Cotman, Cox, Prout, Copley Fielding and J.M.W. Turner, as well as by lesser known artists like T. Allom. G. Cattermole, H. Melville, C. Bentley, S. Austin, W. Pursur and D. Roberts. I am pointing out about this volume as this is the volume where, one of the great English artists J.M.W. Turner (23 April 1775- 19 December 1851) first used mysterious Indian yellow to depict India's vibrant colourful landscape with luminous light. Afterwards vibrant Indian yellow became an indispensable feature of Turner's palette even to depict English landscape and seascape also. The turn of the 19th century was a time of great change for European countries. Even as they expanded their influence in colonies around the world, new technologies, such as the steam engine, were transforming lives at home. One of the greatest artists to record these changes in Britain was the painter JMW Turner is best known for his use of unusual colours to depict light in striking yet ephemeral tones. Turner was a great and inventive colourist. His work from the beginning to the end of his life, the early works are quite dark and sombre, but the later works are full of colour - brilliant yellow, red, blacks, crimsons, and blues. Even if he hadn't been to somewhere like India,

he lived in a place where a lot of people had and they were bringing back descriptions of a more colourful place than England, which was smoky and dark and dull and raining all the time. People were coming back to this England with memories of a place that was full of colour. Likewise, under the influence of India's bizarre climate, the canvas of other English artists became interesting. Both the 'On Spot' and 'At Home' British artists on Indian scenes transformed their canvas and palette from pale to vibrant, grey to colourful.



Not only from the perspective of colour and light, but also in respect of subject matter, it may be mentioned that later paintings of many famous 'At Home' English artists became changed enormously after their indirect interaction with Indian subcontinent during the British Raj.

As for example, based on what he was told by eyewitnesses - Turner did four watercolours of the battle between Tipu Sultan and the British East India Company around 1800 with an Indian setting. 'The Fortress of Seringapatam, from the Cullaly Deedy Gate (1800)', watercolour and graphite on paper and one other painting were exhibited in the Tate exhibition, 'Turner's Modern World', during March 2021. David Blayney Brown, co-curator of *Turner's Modern World*, commented: "It will probably be a surprise to many people that Turner's interest in contemporary events reached as far as the war with Tipu Sultan in Mysore. He never went to India, but he got hold of drawings by artists who had witnessed these events and made his own versions. Of course, his British perspective reflected in these paintings, depicting a conquest and a victory. I think it is somehow fitting that one of these watercolours is now with an Indian collector where it will be interpreted in a different light." Art collector Nirmalya Kumar purchased third one. Kumar said, "Given its vast Turner collection, for the Tate Britain to borrow a Turner from me is a delightful compliment for a passionate collector."

The Tate has provided a history of *The Fortress of Seringapatam* painting owned by Kumar. It said: "In the second half of the 18th century, buoyed by a decisive victory at the Battle of Plassey (1757) in Bengal, the East India Company sought to consolidate its interests across India through a carefully calibrated combination of military and diplomatic

activity. “Over a period of 33 years between 1766 and 1799, the Anglo- Mysore Wars were among the most protracted and significant of Britain’s numerous imperial campaigns. Fought across the peninsula of south India, the four wars led to the ultimate overthrow of the kingdom of Mysore (ruled by Hyder Ali until 1782, and subsequently by his son, Tipu Sultan) by the East India Company and its allies, but not before considerable British humiliation in the second Anglo-Mysore War of 1780-84. “It is unknown how *The Fortress of Seringapatnam* ended up with the royal family of Pudukkottai, whose ‘Maharaja’ gifted it in 1960 to Douglas Barrett (1917-1992), keeper of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum. Since circa 1975, it had been in private collections until January 2014, when it was acquired by Nirmalya Kumar from Sotheby’s New York.”

Fourth one is ‘*The Siege of Seringapatam*’ (5 April- 4 May 1799), a city of southern part of Indian subcontinent and renowned as a capital of Indian ruler Tipu Sultan, who was known as the ‘*Tiger of India*’ during British Raj in India. This was the final confrontation of the fourth Anglo-Mysore War between the British East Indian Company and the Kingdom of Mysore. It is a watercolour, gouache and graphite on paper, which the Tate purchased in 1986. Kumar mentioned “Turner may have intended these watercolours for engraving, or perhaps for a patron like William Beckford who acquired the plunder from Tipu’s palace, including the Sultan’s hookah for his mansion, Fonthill Abbey. Turner was working for Beckford when he painted these watercolours, a time of heightened patriotic interest in Britain’s imperial, military and economic status.”

When Turner painted these, paintings of India were quite popular as On Spot English artists, Thomas and William Daniell had very successfully published their set of 144 aquatints on India called *Oriental Scenery*. Kumar said that over the decades, the four “India” paintings that Turner did “were mistakenly attributed to William Daniell (1769-1837), only in the mid- 1980s, when one was offered for sale at Christie’s, they were recognised as Turner originals.”

### George Stubbs:-

George Stubbs, an English artist with expertise of animal anatomy, especially horse anatomy, painted wild or exotic animals (*Indian Chitah/ tiger*) by witnessing directly but Indian flora and fauna as background of this painting by knowing indirectly (from eye witness or secondary sources) about Indian subcontinent and its habitants.



**Willaim Blake:-**

In Thomas Pennant’s ‘*Indian Zoology*’ (1790) and William Daniell’s ‘*Interesting Selections from animated Nature*’ (1807-12), Blake saw in myriad variety the animals of India and Asia, even as he learned of the dazzling array of gods and goddesses in Hindu mythology and saw their intriguing visual representations in Richard Payne Knight’s ‘*A Discourse on the worship of Priapus and its Connection with the Mystic Theology of the Ancients*’ (1786)’ and Edward Moor’s profusely illustrated ‘*The Hindu Pantheon*’ (1810)’. From works such as these the artist learned of the possibilities for creating strange, erotic and sometimes metamorphic creatures that could embody his ideas. (‘*Art and the prospect of India*’, Author, Hermione de Almeida and George H. Gilpin)

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160. Edward Moor, Vishnu and Lakshmi on Garuda, 1810. Drawing by M. Houghton after Moor, engraved for *The Hindu Pantheon*. Beinecke Library, Yale University

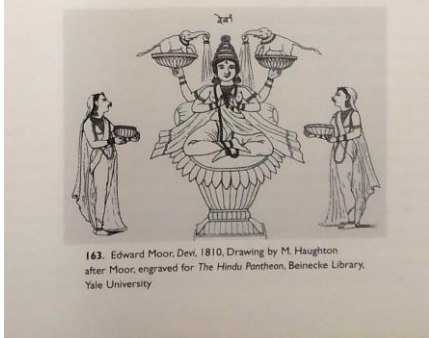
141. William Blake, *Jerusalem*, Plate 28, c. 1804-20. Colored Etching, Beinecke Library, Yale University

navel of Vishnu; Brahma's birth, meanwhile is attended by Vishnu's two wives, Lakshmi and Satyawama. (Fig. 158) Blake borrows from Moor's representations to create a disturbing final plate for the first chapter of *Jerusalem*. In the chapter, Los's initial artistic efforts to save his nation have left it more enslaved by the goddess Vala than even before. The 'Giant Form' of Albion embodies the state of the nation, and in the final plate we see him pictured as a tortured prisoner and victim of human sacrifice, with his entrails being torn out through his navel and rolled up into a ball by three female priestesses representing the cruel fates of Blake's age. (Pl. 53) These fates or priestesses of Vala symbolize the despotic materialism and 'natural religion' that has permeated, enslaved and disembowled English culture. In deriving his plate from the images that represent a benevolent act of creation, Blake is being both ironic and original in his use of Moor's *Hindu Pantheon*.<sup>38</sup> In a later plate used in Chapter Four of *Jerusalem*, after Los's battle to maintain his imaginative vision has begun to liberate the long suffering Albion, Blake restores the original positive meaning of the Hindu myth of creation. In it the artist Los and his inspiration and mate, Enitharmon, sit together naked in a tropical sun like Adam and Eve in Eden before the fall. (Fig. 159) Los's relaxed pose, with his head against his arm, matches that of Vishnu calmly watching the birth of Brahma, and Enitharmon is at his knee in the role of Lakshmi. Instead of entrails being pulled from the navel of a body, we see Enitharmon pulling vines of ripened grapes from Los's heart and loins, a sign of renewed love and passion in their awakening and now creative world. Vines with ripened grapes are a recurring motif in Blake's illustrations, as we know, and they serve as his English equivalent of the Indian lotus plants that are associated with Vishnu's creative power in Hindu mythology and with the enlightened vision of Hindu doctrine.



But Leg, who is the Vedic Form of strong Urthona  
 Wept vehemently over Albion where Thames currents spring  
 From the rivers of Beulah; pleasant river soft milk-purged stream  
 And the roots of Alligons flow enter the Soul of Urthona  
 For he saw before his Furnaces clothed in sackcloth of hair  
 In glowing pain dividing him from his Emanations  
 Their fluid forms condensing into Satyas & Angles & Angels  
 Translucent the Furnaces of Beulah & Emerald immortal  
 And Seven Hills each within other incomprehensible  
 In the Vedic Form of Leg, the Furnaces, the Angel Heart  
 The Furnaces, the Seven Hills, the Disposition, terrible things  
 Like seven burning furnaces ranged from South to North  
 Here on the banks of the Thames Leg builded Golgotha  
 Outside of the Gates of the Human Heart beneath Beulah  
 In the midst of the rocks of the Alps of Albion in form  
 He builded it, in rage & in fury, it is the Spiritual Fourfold  
 London, continually building & continually destroying  
 In eternal labour; laid the hammer & laid the nails  
 On Death thunder incessant ground the Hammer, Coaches of  
 The Ivory-towers, Furnaces of Albion, and round the walls four  
 For the protection of the Twelve Emanations of Adams Sons  
 The Mystic Union of the Emanation in the Lapis, Stones  
 From divided from his Emanation is a dark Specter  
 His Emanation is an ever-weeping melancholy Shadow  
 But who is made recipient of Emanation, they march  
 In the Pattern Furnace, among the Funeral Urns of Beulah  
 From Surrey Hills, thro Italy and Greece, to Helicon vale.

162. William Blake, Jerusalem, Plate 53, c.1804–20, Colored Etching, Beinecke Library, Yale University



163. Edward Moor, Devi, 1810, Drawing by M. Houghton after Moor, engraved for The Hindu Pantheon, Beinecke Library, Yale University

On the other hand, a large number of British professional artists made illustrations of India on spot by staying in Indian subcontinent. Tilly Kettle, Thomas & William Daniell, James Wales, William Simpson, George Chinnery, William Havell, James Moffat, Colesworthy Grant, Commander Robert Elliot R.N., Lieutenant George Francis White are few of them. Among the above mentioned well established professional 'On Spot' British artists, I have chosen to examine the depictions of Tilly Kettle, Thomas & William Daniell and James Wales. They depicted 18-19 centuries India and its habitants on spot.

Thus, I found many interesting and unknown aspects related to my topic and hopefully will be able to find out more by accessing archives and libraries of my country. Also, I am trying to find out the similar aspects in different oriental countries by connecting and sharing thoughts with colleagues of ITP. I had arranged two online meetings with ITP colleagues and friends Meltem Ari of Turkey, Sanjeevani of Srilanka and Aprille Tizam of Philippines on 30<sup>th</sup> December, 2022 and with Rasha Ali of Egypt, Rika Nortje of South Africa and Saadu Hashim of Africa on 18<sup>th</sup> January. After the discussions, I was enriched with the

thoughts and knowledge that we shared with each other. I found similar aspects in their countries which I am looking for. Though Eileen Musundi of Africa unable to join in online meeting but afterwards provided related information available in the collection of her museum. Also, I received contacts of museum professionals of different countries from them from whom I received related digital resources with information to form a concrete shape of my study. *(Please watch the short film based on these two zoom meetings)*

Thus, I am able to add different aspects in my research topic with the help of vast ITP global network and definitely it would benefit the wider ITP network as well as general scholars. I am looking forward very much to access the resources of different oriental countries not only through online mode but on spot once by receiving another grant. The final outcome of my research definitely would be a good and meaningful publication shortly.