

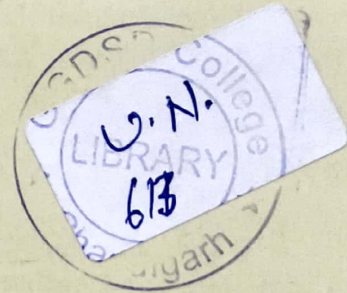


# UNIVERSITY NEWS

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## Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture (Mumbai): Its Place in the Western India School of Orientalism

K Paddayya\*

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Indological studies as an organised research endeavour have a history of about two and a half centuries. Sir William Jones, a true product of the Age of Enlightenment, rightly lays claim to their beginnings. Standing one evening on the deck of his India-bound ship *Crocodile* and facing before him the amphitheatre-like landmass stretching between the Arabian and Indian peninsulas, he underwent a mystical experience and visualized the whole tract as "the nurse of sciences, the inventress of delightful and useful arts, the scene of glorious actions, fertile in the production of human genius, abounding in natural wonders, and infinitely diversified in the forms of religion and government, in the laws, manners, customs and languages, as well as in the features and complexions of people..." (Jones 1807: 1-2). Once he reached India and assumed charge as a puisne judge of the East India Company's Supreme Court in Kolkata in September 1783, he took less than six months, aside from his demanding judicial responsibilities, to establish the Asiatic Society for initiating investigations into what he called 'Man and Nature' in Asia--whatever is performed by the former and whatever is produced by the latter. Then followed a flurry of activities by Jones himself and others relating to the study of geographical features, ancient languages and literatures, translations of ancient texts, decipherment of ancient scripts, examination of ancient art and architecture, study of ancient religions and philosophies, etc. (Kejariwal, 1988).

This investigative urge to know about the land and its people and their history soon spread to the Madras presidency. Here, too, some spectacular discoveries came up in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. These include the famous year-long foot-survey by Francis Buchanan of the people and their lifeways of the whole tract from Madras to Malabar; founding of the Madras Literary Society in 1810; pioneering discoveries of Amaravati and many other mound-bearing archaeological sites by Colin Mackenzie and his Indian assistants and their collection of a vast number of manuscripts in local languages; Mackenzie's recognition of Jainism as a separate sect; and, of course, the recognition of the Dravidian languages as a distinct family in 1816 by the Madras district collector Francis Whyte Ellis. Thomas Trautmann rightly clubbed together all these discoveries to constitute what he called the Madras School of Orientalism (Trautmann, 2009).

Was Western India lagging behind? Surely No. Sites like Elephanta, Kanheri and Ellora were already being visited and commented upon by foreign travellers in the seventeenth and

\*Padma Shri Awardee, Emeritus Professor and Former Director, Deccan College (Deemed University), Pune- 411006. E-mail: k.paddayya@gmail.com