

Periodic Research

Orientalist Projects in Kashmir



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Abstract

Edward Said Classical work 'Orientalism' published in 1978, as critique on orientalism, created a mood for systematic methodological suspicion about western images of non-west. Sadian Framework expanded the meaning of orientalism and from there developed a larger and more generalized critique of Colonial Discourse of all sorts which further attempted to understand the nature of colonial power based on production of knowledge through project of scholarly linguistic discourses, visual arts and other scientific discourses. Through this production of knowledge they elicit mute obedience, hegemonies, control the subject and legitimize their rule by this deliberate construction. This inseparable connection between power knowledge was elaborated also by Michal Foucault about the fine meshes of knowledge and its disciplinary and normalizing power.

The impact of Sadian framework and perhaps more profoundly of Michal Foucault, has stimulated a new interest in Colonial discourses as well as in the close details of the work of governmentality----the management of the colonized subjects.¹

He argued that knowledge is generated by discourses, and knowledge is an instrument of power. Hence, the fine meshes of knowledge and its disciplinary and normalizing power shape values and ideas in society. The Sadian and Focaudian framework has inspired much valuable research.²

Keywords: Orientalism, Power/Knowledge, Colonial Knowledge Production, Geo-Political, Colonial Discourse Analysis, Post Colonial Theories, Archaeological Enterprise.

Introduction

Exploring much of south Asia's past through generations of European scholarly endeavor began with William Jones and the Asiatic society of Bengal. This created immense Colonial archives of 19th and early 20th century in India through the mass of administrative files and reports, surveys and census operation reports, and scientific and social research. These were source material which was impossible to find in earlier times. Thus the term Orientalism referred to the kind of modern European knowledge about Asia, used to connote a highly respectful attitude towards the culture and religion of ancient and classical era. From the mid 18th to late 20th century the term was applied to the study of language, literature and culture of the orient.³

However, the meaning of orientalism was vastly expanded after Edward Said in his book orientalism (1978) acknowledged and added two other style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinctions between the orient and occident, thus constructing the western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the orient. Orientalism in this sense is an overarching discourse about the orient as the 'other' of Europe and its dominant position. This inseparable connection between power and knowledge was elaborated most strikingly by Michel Foucault.

Objectives of the study

1. To explore the orientalist project in the region of Kashmir.
2. To understand the implications of the colonial literary project in Kashmir.
3. To analyze the value of the visual colonial discourse which made the region of Kashmir as a desired territory and also an arena of geopolitical conflict in the post colonial era.
4. To evaluate the outcome of the Colonial archaeological enterprise on political, ethnic, religious discourse of Kashmir.
5. To study as to how the diverse forms of Colonial projects processed the major shifts in the trajectory of political cultural and religious discourse of the region.

Review of the literature

To substantiate the arguments of the paper, the survey of literature both at pan-India level and of regional level of our concern reflects that a very few historians have explored the oriental projects and their implications in Kashmir.

Ananya Jahanara Kabir's *Territory of Desire; Representing the valley of Kashmir*. 2009, talks about how Kashmir was so intensely desired. portrayal of the region of Kashmir through 19th century Colonial modern discourse of visual arts, travelogues, visual cultural apparatus- photographs, literature and souvenir created imaginative construct for the region as a fantasy of paradise on the earth. Thereby intensely desired territory- leading to post colonial violence, international power struggle and cause of the geopolitical conflict. She has offered an innovative approach to understand the complex and protracted conflict for the region by emphasizing that history should not merely to be viewed through the lens of high politics and international relations.

Michel Foucault 1980, *Power/knowledge; Selected interviews and other Writings 1972-77*, edited by Colin Gordon, New York, pantheon books. The work forcefully suggests that knowledge is generated by discourse and is an instrument of power which shapes values and ideas of society. Even the so called hard facts, so central to history writing –were expressions of specific power configuration. Foucault conceives power as something that is not solely embodied in the state but which exists in diverse form at various levels and flows everywhere. His arguments give insight for the proposed paper.

Edward Said's *Culture and imperialism New York, vintage books 1993. And 2001, Orientalist, Western Conceptions of the Orient*, 1978 (first publication) New Delhi, penguin books. It was Said's Orientalism which explored the process through which the west constructed the image of orient as its 'other'. Critiquing Western cultural productions as an overarching discourse, deeply involved in colonial domination. This work initiated the analysis of colonial discourse and evolved in to post colonial theory. Said derives from Foucault's idea on discursive formation and regime of power to argue that the representation of orient through literature, History and art was aligned with actual politics and was constructed for the imperialist project of conquest and domination. Moreover, Culture and art played a crucial role in legitimizing and sustaining the colonial regimes. These ideas provide insight to explore the orientalist project in Kashmir.

Mridu Rai's *Hindu Rulers and Muslim Subjects*, 2012, permanent black, New Delhi, illustrates how the paramount British power tried to seek fresh grounds of legitimacy to rule in the new phase of colonial rule in India and asserts how the colonial enterprise of archeology in the late 19th century influenced the public discourse, religious sensibilities which sharpened religious identities and communal divide in the region.

Chitralakha Jutsi. *Kashmir's Contested Past*, oxford, 2014, has explored the scholarship of

the colonial historical project with new historical method to understand the past and thereby the present. Kashmir great potential for contributing to the knowledge about India's classical past through its Sanskrit manuscript was widely acknowledged in the orientalist circles,. And the first systematic colonial search for Sanskrit manuscript and orientalist Endeavour turned to explore and conduct research on Sanskrit literature and language produced knowledge which has brought hegemonic version by inserting Indian texts in to Eurocentric cultural narratives. Hence converting local knowledge in to colonial knowledge for addressing larger audience. These works provide insight for the understanding of the proposed topic.

Content of the Study

Foucaultian and Sadian framework resulted in a systematic questioning of canons and archives previously considered more or less objective. Such extension has helped to bring out linkages and layers of power relations within works of western literature, scholarship and colonial documentation. The value of such work undoubtedly exposed the deliberate construction by dominant colonial power knowledge regime comprising of European scholars and administrators and Indians trained in such a way which need to be confronted to go beyond many such orientalist constructs. Moreover, Sadian and Foucaultian turn has inspired much valuable research and helpful in overcoming the inadequacies and simplification of earlier historiography that preceded Post- Colonial turn.

Hence Initial application of Sadian idea to Colonial India had suggested one way flow of power knowledge and the colonized middle class educated Indians derivative discourses. However, the idea of derivative discourse quickly recognized as most vulnerable part of Saidian readings. As the Indigenous inputs were vital to the more complicated historical narratives, it was recognized that early orientalist scholarship was immensely dependent on indigenous literati and translators - mass of Indian collaborators and subordinates. C.A. Bayly has made an impressive study of colonial knowledge relating it to already operative pre-colonial information networks.

Hence, in recent years Said's theory had been criticized and had seen the emergence of debate over the nature of Colonial knowledge – those forms and bodies of knowledge that enabled the European colonizer to achieve European dominance over their colonized subjects around the globe. The core of the debate is the two opposing evaluations of the role played by the colonized subjects in the production of colonial knowledge. One position hold that the role of the colonized was negligible – at most permitting some of them to serve as passive informants, providing raw information to the active European colonizers who produced the new knowledge by the raw data of indigenous local society according to their perception. In contrast, the other holds those indigenous intellectuals in reality contributed actively to the process through which the colonial knowledge was thus produced through a complex form of collaboration between colonizers and

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colonized. Although this debate has focused primarily on one colonial context- that of British India – it has important ramifications for the broader history of colonialism and is complemented by contributions relating to other areas of European colonialism.

This paper would try to explore the forms of Orientalist knowledge production projects in Kashmir. However, there was little initiative for the colonial knowledge production due to Kashmir's status as a princely state. This process created an encounter between British and Indian intellectual practices which conditioned the emergence of the new practices of perceiving history. Though the Indian intermediaries were excluded and kept at bay from inclusion into a global scholarly community. This new trajectory built through colonial scholarly linguistic, visual and scientific discourses not only has inspired much valuable research but also helped to bring about major shifts in the understanding of the nature of colonial power based on production of knowledge.

The outcome of the project radically altered Kashmir's narrative and political culture. This project reveals the variety of ways in which idea of history, literature; religion and nation were defined in relation to each other.

The recent research work of the literary scholar- *Ananya Jahanara Kabir's "Territory of Desire"*, examined the Colonial Project of knowledge production in visual arts of Kashmir's landscape through modern mechanism, which is the root to some extent for laying the foundation of representation of the region as a territory of desire in the Post- Colonial period. She has argued that history is not merely to be viewed through the lens of high politics, international relations, and research in to official archives. Instead, she has linked the Colonial modernity discourse of visual Arts for re-inscribing intense desire for the region, falling it in to geo-political claims, conflict and violence in the Post-Colonial period.⁴

Though, the technology of visual reproduction from 19th century onwards was usually used within the British Indian Empire for the purpose of discipline, surveillance and to control the vast areas. In addition to that photography and oleographs were also used to assert regions' archaeological lineages.

Ananya Kabir in her research tried to locate the long relationships between visual colonial discourse and creation of framework of fantasy for Kashmir as paradise on earth, an appellation reputedly first coined by the Mughal Emperor *Jahangir* for this entire region of Kashmir valley.⁵ Thus the meaning of Kashmir has been produced, ordered and institutionally perpetuated through norms and knowledge of the use of visual imagery through modern technologies of photography and scholarly discourses.⁵

It started from the nineteenth century when the uses of camera in Kashmir was purely for pragmatic purposes. History of photographing the Kashmir valley, started when the British adventure photographers Samuel Bourne and John Burk in 1860, first entered the region for photographic

Periodic Research

Endeavour. This unexplored history of camera enabled the academic representation of the region and gave Kashmir's landscape a new turn due to this intense camera's gaze. This helped to⁶ construct the whole territory as desired space with a sense of fantasy -as no other place in south Asia.⁷

In 1863, *Samual Bourne* wandered in search of picturesque space and joined *Charles Sepherd's* established Studio at *Shimla*. His three Himalayan journeys from 1863, 1866 and 1869 followed the showcasing of Indian landscape and high altitude photography, which created sensation among the peer artists. It was very similar to the work of the Colonial visual documentation of ethnographic and architectural photography by historians which had begun to enjoy a great currency in India. Moreover, it had a foundational role in the modern visualization of the region.⁸

Photography as a tool for presenting reality worked in tandem with the growing adventure of Kashmir. Moreover, the longing for high altitude landscape photography as well as British and Russian struggle for control over Afghanistan and central Asia during the nineteenth century, attracted photographers of different inclination to this region. The freshness, beauty and panoramic view of Kashmir was captured. His dramatic images of the passes, mountains, towering rocks of *Zojila pass* leading to Ladakh, images of *Shikaras*, the shrine of *shah Hamdani*, the *Chinar trees* and popular avenues, the temples of *Martand and Avantipur* presented the picturesque images, romanticized the natural environment –created a distinct aura for the region. Moreover, their celebrated narrative dispatches from the Himalayas to the nascent British Journal of photography further disseminated information about this region.⁹

Additionally, the creation of photographic catalogues for commercial circulation, collection of photographs in private and National Archives also included ethnographic and architectural photographs tried to bridge the gaps between representation and reality with scientific precision.¹⁰ A likeness for Kashmir was created and accelerated through the interaction of photographers and consumers.

The value of such visual discourses-- photographs and scrapbooks arranged in thematic cluster (a large number of them survive in archives) and thereby production of knowledge was not only eyeing for commerce, but was also fruitful for British imperial ambition. Burk was also the key player in another important aspect of British adventure in Jammu and Kashmir----that was trigonometric survey. These projects suggest that though the region, not officially but indirectly part of the empire (being the princely state) was subject to its obsession. Hence were keen with the task of surveying and textualizing.¹¹

In 1868, the Archaeological survey of India sent its superintendent of new provinces- *Henry Hardy Cole* to take the archeological stock of Jammu and Kashmir. A new service of Archaeology and archaeological department was created to unearth the secrets of the past. The colonial government

E: ISSN No. 2349-9435

established this department under Alexander Cunningham but it was thoroughly revamped during Lord Curzon's tenure as viceroy with primary objective of conservation of historical monuments.¹²

This archaeological enterprise served political purpose as the significant element in the functioning of this department was to serve political utility. it was a type of legitimizing mechanism¹³ for the Colonial government. After 1857, the Colonial State focused on constructing its legitimacy on the ground while this aspect may have existed only unconsciously in the minds of the officials who uncovered and preserved India's monumental legacy.¹⁴

Till the end of the 19th century, the attitude prevailing in the society of Jammu- Kashmir region was of total indifference towards historical antiquities. It was the Archaeological enterprise of the British, initiated on the principle of preserving all historical monuments as a neutral venture reflecting the spirit of impartiality. However, paradoxically it resulted in amplification of religiously defined identities in Jammu and Kashmir.¹⁵

In 1904, the J&K princely state resolved to create its own Archaeological and research department under the government of India supervisory authority to take care of ancient monuments in its territory. However, the language of Archaeology created awareness and developed Muslim self- assertion against their princely rulers' partisan attitude. The Archaeological Department of India critiqued the reluctance of *Kashmir Durbar* to conserve its monument and enshrined as a duty of the state. At the same time its knowledge was also appropriated by *Dogra* princely rulers to legitimize their own authority as patron of Hindus.¹⁶

The *Dogra* state selective protection of Hindu shrines, exhibiting religious partisanship was to bolster their own authority as traditional Hindu rulers, and they sought their legitimacy more narrowly from the Hindu segment of their subjects. The care of state temples was the responsibility of the *Dhermarth* Trust. Muslim Shrines remained responsibility of the Muslim community. In 1886, for the repair of *Hajratbal* and *Naqsbandi Tomb* funds were provided by the *Nawab of Dacca* and thereby princely rulers were charged of neglecting Muslim religious shrines within its territory. Newspapers, press of Punjab widely read in Kashmir also highlighted and endorsed this partisanship. Similarly, the colonial government also did not appreciate this partisan attitude and intervened by defining duty of *the Dogra* State towards all its ancient monuments irrespective of religion.¹⁷

In 1910, Department of Archaeology and research was separated by the reforms under *maharajah Pratap Singh*. Trained officials looked after the Archaeology Department and research department was headed by trained Sanskrit scholars under the guard of the *Durbar*. The knowledge produced by it and by Colonial intrusion was to serve *dogra* ruler to bolster their legitimacy as patrons of Hindu learning and worship. Research department also investigated genealogical links for the *Dogra* ruler for further legitimization. Moreover, *Dogra* State using

Periodic Research

the office of the *Dermarth Trust*, in 1908, maintained two temples in the sacred town of *Puran mandal*.¹⁸

The language and Science of Archaeology created awareness about the bad condition of Muslim shrines and their sites of veneration. This awareness was used to strip away the legitimacy of the *Dogra* State to rule over them. The issue of neglect and non- preservation of those historical monuments was also seen as a symbol of suffering of the Muslim community, and their powerlessness. This issue was manipulated by the nascent political party, the Muslim Conference for mobilization of the community for protest which gradually became more aggressive.¹⁹

Earlier no one paid much attention to the extinct shrines until the Archaeological project by the Colonial government unfolded and introduced it as a conceptual device in the political arena. This was linked with the rights of the Muslim community as well as duties of the State, thus exposing the unrepresentative character of the *Dogra* State in Kashmir.²⁰

Additionally, the Colonial scholarship decontextualized the Kashmir's Sanskrit tradition for the service of colonial narratives regarding India's past. The study of *Rajatarangini* project in 19th century Kashmir Informed by the locally produced knowledge further subsumed within more universal categories. This literary project provided rich insights, while wresting it from its regional moorings, for recreating a new narratives for national audience.

By 1880s, as the Colonial Government intervention in Kashmir became forceful, stream of officials and Orientalists came to Kashmir to carry out statistical and linguistic project of unearthing Kashmir's Sanskrit text in general and *Rajatarangini* in particular and through it its past, also of India's classical past. Further, knowledge production through Sanskrit tradition of Kashmir as a repository of India's Aryan past, was institutionalized by the *Dogra* ruler *Ranbir Singh* (.1858-85). He through series of measures such as establishment of *Raghunath Temple Pathshala* and library where Sanskrit manuscripts from within and outside Kashmir were acquired and kept. In addition, translation of several Sanskrit text in Hindi were also done under his patronage.²¹

These colonial projects were assisted by the native informers – the Kashmiri pundits, well versed in Sanskrit, Kashmiri and Persian who provided access to these texts and also interpreted it in the wider context. They got lucrative source of employment for this. The systematic colonial search for Sanskrit manuscript was led by Sanskritist- *George Bhuler* during *Maharajah Ranbir Sing's reign*.. The native group of Kashmiri pundits assisted him in this project, transformed the local knowledge in to colonial knowledge or in other words transformed the text of *Rajatarangini* from regional to a national narrative.²²

Moreover, H.H. Wilson's partial translation of the text published in Asiatic researches in 1825, established the idea that *Rajatarangini* of Kashmir possessed a connected narrative of the past unlike any other region. Hence, project was to translate it rather than to re- write History of the region. Thereby,

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created a link between History of Kashmir and narratives of Ancient Indian History. As Kashmir History provided a valuable insight in to the character, habits of the colonized. So through that knowledge, Colonial State could adopt necessary measures suitable to control and rule over them. As the celebrated *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* produced by James Todd, the idea of *Rajputs* emerged as a distinct nation whose past could in the larger context could be linked with the Indian Nation²³ The other two colonial officials worth mentioning in this respect are Alexander Forbes in the case of Gujarat and Edward Gait in the case of Assam, both of them did research on the histories of their respective regions.

The orientalist project launched in the wake of *Bhuler's* tour in Kashmir and later culminated in the production of Stain's edition and translation of *Rajtarangini*. Bhular was a noted Sanskritist, professor of oriental language at *Elephinston College* Bombay. *Maharajah Ranbir Singh* played a crucial role in introducing *Bhuler* to prominent indigenous scholars who acted as guide, translator and interpreter during his travel for collection of authentic manuscripts. During his tour he acquired wide range of manuscripts -24 Kashmiri Sanskrit manuscripts and established the status of Kashmir as repository of Sanskrit learning,²⁴ resulting in nationalization of Kashmir's Sanskrit tradition. *Buhler's* interest in *Rajtarangini* was what it could reveal about the history of India.

Further, M.A Stain developed interest in Sanskrit under the guidance of orientalist Buhler .He accepted the offer of the post of Registrar, Punjab University and Principal of oriental college Lahore. He came to India in 1887 and after reading Buhler's report he undertook the project and started searching for the original manuscript of *Rajtarangini* and place of its origin. He dismissed its all *Devanagiri lipi* copies as corrupted. According to Stain *Rajtarangini* had to be read not merely as historical narrative but rather a repository of a regional culture Stain's translation was not so much to establish chronology of Kashmiri past but to synchronize it with Indian History and to investigate Kashmir's geography, popular tradition and history in a more connected fashion. Hence, regional histories drew on folk tradition, indigenous forms of the recording of the past created regional colonial archives in the process. H.H Wilson and Buhler took note of the importance of Kashmir history and its utility for reconstruction of the narratives of the India's' past.²⁵

Conclusion

Thus, with these forms of knowledge production, the Colonial government consolidated the structure of power and perpetuated their rule. This project reveals the variety of ways in which idea of history, literature and religion and nation were defined in relation to each other. Colonial visual literary archaeological and historical project collaborated with the native informant networks for producing knowledge were deeply political in nature and recreated the vision loaded with their own concerns to

Periodic Research

restructure and legitimize diverse layered political and social agendas in the present.

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E: ISSN No. 2349-9435

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