



RESEARCH PAPER

**Orientalism and its Relevance to Colonial Sources of South Asia:
An Analysis**

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: September 14, 2019	<p>This paper focuses on the discourse of <i>Orientalism</i> that was started with the book of Edward Said <i>Orientalism</i>. According to <i>Orientalism</i> the Europeans had no right to write a history of East because they observe East as others and they do not understand the true nature of Eastern culture. Therefore, according to Said, they distorted the history of Orient. Here this article specifically throws light on Orientalist discourse presented in British colonial sources on South Asia. For facilitating the understanding, discussion on indo-Orientalist sources are dichotomized; one group comprising sympathetic writers and the other consisting of writers who observed India with antipathy. This article will explore how Eurocentric colonial sources on India established stereotypes while at the same time brought overlooked past of this country to the pages of history. Because in the case of India these outsiders actually preserved of its history and brought ancient past into broad daylight. Although these writings of Europeans are not free from the Euro-centric approach still they had credit to preserve the past of India</p>
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Introduction

The Orientalism is actually about stereotypization of the East by the West but at the same time it is not only about creating stereotypical image of East. It also has many folded and multidimensional causes which work behind the creation of these stereotypes. Edward Said concentrated mainly on French and British Orientalism of nineteenth and early twentieth century, and eventually he discussed contemporary American Orientalist literature regarding Middle East. About his concept of Orientalism, Said says "My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence - in which I do not for a moment believe - but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic

setting" (Said, 1978, p. 204). He further explains "My contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the west, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness... As a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge. (Said, 1978, p. 273).

Said analysis of Orientalist discourse draws on various academic and non-academic sources relevant to Middle East. Jukka Jouhki says that Said categorized, Orientalist literature into three categories titled as academic Orientalism, General Orientalism and Corporate Orientalism. Academic Orientalism is produced by teachers and more specifically researchers. General Orientalism is produced by "a large mass of writers (of prose, poetry, political theory etc.) like Hugo, Dante and Marx have accepted the East-West distinction as a foundation in their theories, themes and descriptions of the Orient and its people." Finally, Corporate Orientalism, this is the way Europe has ruled the Orientals, and also how the Orientals have been stated about, reviewed and taught institutionally.

Said explains Orientalist literature under two themes (Jouhki, 2006) manifest and latent. Manifest has been comprised of "the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology etc." However latent "Orientalism has been more stable, unanimous and durable mode of thought." (Jouhki, 2006, P. 34) Latent orientalism consists of the aims and ideas working behind the Oriental literature and manifest orientalism is the depiction of these ideas.

Indo-Orientalism

During second half of eighteenth century British were busy in political conquests of the India, as in 1757 the Battle of Plassey and in 1764 in the Battle of Buxar were fought. And then in 1765 East India Company obtained Diwani rights in Bengal. British were snatching the rule of India from Muslim so till this time they were more interested in two topics- history of Indian Muslims and East Indian Company in India. Subsequently, in 1769 Robert Orme (1728 - 13 January 1801) was appointed as a historiographer of British East Indian Company in India and he worked on this designation till his death in 1801.

Orme's two works are *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan from the Year 1745* (Orme, 1803) published in 1764, then *Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire, of the Morattoes and of the English Concerns in Indostan from MDCLIXI.* (Orme, 1659). Orme studied Indo-Muslim chronicles of medieval age and wrote a brief outline of the Muslim ruling dynasties in India from the attack of Muhammad bin Qasim in 712 up to his time. The second work of Orme mentioned above contains a concise account of Ancient India, in which he gave the following remarks: "The Indian have lost all memory of the ages in which they began to believe in ...a thousand deities...the history of these gods is a heap of the greatest absurdities." (Sreedharan, 2000, p. 387) From here the discussion on

ancient India was started into colonial sources but ancient India did not come into lime light until and unless Warren Hastings personally took interest in it and patronized Indologists. After above mentioned political victories of eighteenth century, British wanted to give a ruling policy that would be easy to implement on local society. To fulfill this task Warren Hastings (1732-1818), was appointed by the British East India Company as first Governor General of India (1772-85). From here a new era of Indo-Orientalist literature started.

Along with above mentioned political interests, these officers were also inspired by Europeans ideological movements. In the second half of eighteenth century, the colonial writers of south Asia were affected by Scientific Revolution, which promoted rationality. Simultaneously, they were inspired by scholars of enlightenment movement who were sympathetic towards other cultures. More specifically, they were inspired by Voltaire's idea that "India and China had invented nearly all the arts before Europe possessed them." (Sreedharan, 2000, p. 388). Then the ideas of Romanticism which gave sanctity to non-European civilization also left imprints on these scholar-cum-administrators.

Resultantly, Hastings patronized a new subject of Indology. Indologists scientifically studied the indigenous culture through local narratives. It is a branch of philology but Indology more specifically deals with India, as it is a combination of 'indo' and 'logy'. Said's focus was Middle East so he occasionally referred Orientalist discourse on India but he discussed these Indologists and their contributions specifically.

The mechanism of Indology was that first the East Indian Company officers achieved linguistic proficiency in vernacular languages then translated the literature of these languages into English. These literatures helped them to understand the society and culture of India. According to Tomizawa "...inaugurated this principle and promoted the study of India as a means to rule the country according to India's own culture and systems. It is in this context that the Orientalists began their studies of India, and it is thus only natural that their work had a pro-Indian bent from the beginning." (Tomizawa, 2013). As Hindus were in majority so focus of this group was Hindu literature but Muslim rule in India was also studied. Finally, these Indologist tried to bridge the gap between occidental culture and oriental culture by proving similarities. But in this process Indologist also time-to-time pointed out the contemporary superiority of Great Britain over all other culture and through this, these officers tried to justify the British domination over India. Most significant Indologist of this era was Sir William Jones, but before his arrival, a group of young officers was working in Bengal on Indological studies. Prominent figures of this group were Nathaniel Brassey Halhed (b.1751-d.1830), (Halhead, 1771) Charles Wilkins (b.1749 -d.1836), and Francis Gladwin (b.1744- d.1812). Then Christopher Hagerman Halhead was well versed in Sansikrat and Bangla language, and at the age of twenty-three he wrote *Gentoo Laws* which was published in 1776. Two years later in 1778 he also produced *A Grammar of the Bengal Languages*. In these books Halhead also followed

same classical discourse of that time of British Imperialists power (Hagerman, 2013). The Charles Wilkins came to India in 1770 and here he was fascinated by Sanskrit, which he mastered. His passion for Sanskrit dragged him close to Hastings. He translated *Bhagavad Gita* in 1784 but his second work, translation of *Hitopadesa* was published in 1787 two year after the resignation of Hastings from India. He also translated the institute of Manu. (Said, 1978) Nevertheless, Gladwin, from same group of Indologist, got expertise in Persian language and wrote *History of Hindustan* in 1783, it covered the reigns of Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb. Another work in his credit is *Institution of the Emperor Akbar* this is basically abridged form Abul Fazal's *Ain-i-Akbari*. Gladwin was more interested and fascinated by Mughal history in India (Sreedharan, 2000).

The last but not least Indologist Sir William Jones (1746-1794), who had become well known Orientalist in 1783, founded Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784. He translated *Shakuntala* (1789), *Gita Govinda*, *Manusmrti* later published under the title of *The Institutes of Hindu Law*. He compared European with Indian and found similarities between Aryans of both places. On this ground, he gave justification of British responsibility to lead India towards progress and modernization. According to Said, such services 'later made him undisputed founder of Orientalism' in India.

Above mentioned Indologists built high opinion about early Hindu civilization but at same time advocated necessity of slow change in India under British hegemony to modernize Indian society to meet the contemporary challenges. The rule of Hastings ended in India due to Edmund Burke (1729-1797). Burke was a famous statesman and conservative thinker. He was also one of Hastings' friends in the Fox group of the Whigs. Both were famous "Orientalists," sharing a pro-Indian attitude. However, from 1786 to 1788 Burke filed a case against Hastings in which he put twenty-two charges on Hastings but the groundbreaking charge was that Hastings abused his authority as Governor General and misruled India.

But on other hand persons like Macaulay and Jonathan Duncan (1756-1811) appreciated Hastings a lot. Jonathan Duncan the Governor of Bombay from 27 December 1795 until his death on 11th August 1811, proved himself to be an administrator like Hastings. He followed Hastings in revitalization of Hindu learning and philosophy. Later on Macaulay (1800-1859) wrote essays on Clive and Hastings and portrayed them as heroes. Then he wrote *Rulers of India* which was edited by W. W. Hunter. All these works were good examples of biographic studies.

After Hastings, from 1785 to 1793 Lord Cornwallis was the Governor General of India. Cornwallis was very conscious about his policies, as he knew about Hastings' end. After Cornwallis, John Shore came to India as governor-general. He was backed by missionaries so this governor general was not

sympathetic towards Indian culture but even during this reign Jonathan Duncan continued with his ideas to promote pro-Indian literature in Bombay.

Other officers along with Indologists, during eighteenth century, working on India were Henry Thomas Colebrook (1765–1837) and William Robertsons. Colebrooke was inspired by Voltaire's ideas about India so he wrote in the favour of Indians and Robertsons, a Scottish historian, wrote *Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India* (Robertson, 1835) published in 1792 (Brown, 2009). He also founded Royal Asiatic Society in 1823. (Said, 1978) In addition, Friedrich Max Muller was a British philologist (born in Germany) who specialized in Sanskrit (1823-1900). Being a pro-Indian, he coined the term "our Aryan brother" for Indians which also supported Indologists' findings. As century turned, Fort William College was founded in 1800 that played a prominent and significant role in preservation of vernacular languages. Sreedharan mentioned, first work on Ancient India came out of this college in following words:

...a teacher of college and chief pundit of the Supreme Court named Mrtyunjay Sharma, prepared a historical text in Bangali which was published in 1808. Leaving aside the legendary kings who lived in the *Satya*, *Treta* and *Dvaparayugas* for more than eight lakh years, it referred to the royal dynasties during the four thousand nine hundred and five years which had elapsed since the beginning of the Kali age. One hundred and nineteen kings sat on the throne of Delhi during the first four thousand two hundred and sixty-seven years. (Sreedharan, 1978, p. 424)

In the start of the nineteenth century another prominent Orientalist was Horace Hayman Wilson (1786–1860). Wilson came into limelight from 1805 to 1834 as prominent critic on Mill. (Mill will be discussed in upcoming pages in detail.) He said Mill's work killed all sympathies between rulers and the ruled. Actually, Mill made a comparison among Ancient India, Muslim India and British India but Wilson said such comparison could not be drawn between governments of different times (Sreedharan, 1978). He translated Rigveda under the title of *Rig-Veda-Sanhitá* and also wrote *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*.

Nevertheless, most prominent figure of nineteenth century, who had sympathetic views towards India, was Mountstuart Elphinstone (b.1779, d.1859). (Elphinstone, 1839) He was from Scotland and he joined East Indian Company in 1795 and later he served as Governor of Bombay from 1819 to 1827 (Britannica, 2013). His book *History of India* (Elphinstone, 1841) was his biggest contribution and this book was taught in Haileybury, a college for training of civil servants. Elphinstone had high opinion about early Hindu civilization but he also supported the idea of introducing slow change in India by British Raj. Major drawback of this work was his emphasis on Alexander's invasion. Elphinstone assumed that India's foreign trade was conducted by the Greek and the Arabs...Indian must have

borrowed most, if not the whole, of their culture from the Greeks (Sreedharan, 1978).

To prove this hypothesis he intentionally skipped the achievements of Chandragupta Maurya and Asoka. In spite of this, he led the foundation of cultural history of India and wrote another significant work titled as *History of Hindu and Muhammadan Indian* (Elphinstone, 1866). This book was started in 1834 and this book was first work after his resignation from governorship of Bengal in 1827. After Elphinstone, his three disciples, Duff, Erskine and Tod also made a considerable addition to Indo-Orientalist historiography. Alike Elphinstone, James Grant Duff (1789-1858) was also from Scotland and he was such trustworthy to Elphinstone that he handed over his documents on Peshawar to him. Duff wrote *A History of the Marathas*, in three volumes. Then William Erskine (1773 - 1852) another Scottish historian, made his major contribution as translation of *Babur Nama* in English under the title of *History of India under Baber*, (Erskine, 1894) besides this he wrote *History of Hindu and Muhammodan India*. Finally yet importantly in this group was James Tod (b. 1782 - d. 1835). He joined East Indian Company in 1799. He worked as Political Agent in Rajasthan (1812-1823) but resigned in 1823 due to declining health. Tod, among the disciple of Elphinstone was marked by exceptional merit due to his masterpiece *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (Tod, 1920). This work was based on his extensive research on Rajasthan during his service. He gave details of different tribes and castes of Rajasthan along with geographical, topographical...etc. details of this area. He wrote many research articles in Asiatic journal but his second famous work was his second book *Travels in Western India* that is also considered as a genuine input on Indian culture. In this second work he described many Jain religious places.

Last work in this category was consisted of various parts in which a variety of Persian historical documents were translated by Sir Henry Miers Elliot (1808-1853) and John Dowson and published under the title *The History of India as Told by its own Historians* (Elliot, 1867) Originally, this work was published in eight volumes. Both writers worked on this project from 1867 to 1877. As Mill attacked on Hindus and promoted Muslims, conversely Elliot targeted Muslims in preface of his work. Still he did not attack Indians with severity but kept sympathetic tone.

Antipathy of Indo-Orientalism

In nineteenth century, another group of Orientalist researchers was emerged. These researchers did not write about India with sympathy but antipathy. Before going to historians of this category one should know about the ideological settings of that time which affected them. In nineteenth century ideas of race superiority or white races were superior to Blacks /Yellows were prevailing. As Lord Rosebury (1847-1929) Prime Minister (r. 1894-95) of England said 'what is empire but the predominance of race'. Similar concept of race superiority intensified during nineteenth century with the emergence of Social-Darwinism in which the Darwin's idea-survival of fittest was applied on social life.

As Europeans had defeated non-Europeans so they concluded it in the light of Social-Darwinism that they were better that's why they won. Such ideas provided the rich soil for implantation of 'White Man's Burden' theory. Moreover Said mentioned Lord Cormer (1841-1917) Evelyn Baring until 1892 who believed that British were dominating so they should dominate and orient should be dominated. He served in India for three years and Egypt for twenty five years.

After Cornwallis, John Shore became Governor-General (r. 1793-98). Until this time historians and indologists had proven that change should be introduced in the India by legitimate rule of British Raj. Now major question was how change should be brought? To find out the answer of this question Shore sought the help of his friend Charles Grant (1746 - 1823). Finally, Grant came up with solution in his work *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain*. (Grant, 1813) The suggested solution was the promotion of Christianity and Western education, for appropriate change in India. Obviously, this solution was suitable for British Government and this solution served the interests of missionaries who were at the back of Shore and Grant (Sreedharan, 1978). Missionaries had already started their preaching in India and they were highlighting the religious superstitions and social abuses of Hinduism like practice of *satti* to promote Christianity and criticize the Hinduism. Actually, Shore and Grant were serving British and missionaries so their opinions were not neutral and reality based but shaded.

James Mill was considered biggest name of Orientalist produced by British in nineteenth century, who painted the picture of India with the colures of antipathy (Mill, 1882). He was a father of John Stuart Mill. James Mill, Scottish philosopher expounded Bentham's utilitarianism. He also compared occident with orient like William Jones but the difference was that Jones was sympathetic whereas Mill criticized India. However, in depth by doing comparison both were actually trying to give justification of the British rule in South Asia. James Mill wrote his book *The History of British India* (Mill, 1817) from 1806 to 1818. In this five-hundred pages account, Mill applied Benthamian utilitarian to India, suggesting radical alteration in this country. Mill worked on Indian revenue, law, art, literature and religion but said India got maturity in all these fields by passing stages. As from Hindu rule to Muslim rule was better so British rule would be the best for India. This book was text book at Haileybury College from 1805 to 1855. Actually, Mill had reached to conclusion before starting his work so he did not utilized work of Indologists/Orientalism but depended on travel accounts, lawyers work and missionaries literature. Therefore, his work was biased and was written to serve specific proposes. From here the movement of demand for radical change in India by colonial writers was started.

James Tallboys Wheeler (b.1824 - d.1897) was also administrator-cum-historian. He blamed Brahman priesthood for Indian failure as well as criticized Muslim rule. He wrote a comprehensive account on Indian history, titled as

History of India from the Earliest Times, (Wheeler, 1874) he also wrote *European Travelers in India* (Wheeler, 1856) in collaboration with Michael MacMillan.

Then a group of lawyers came forward and worked on India. As James Fitzjames Stephens (1829–1894) was law member in India from 1869 to 1872, like Mill he did not have liking for Indian culture. He was against the Whig liberal sentiment, later voiced by John Bright and criticized British violence on India to maintain rule. Stephens wrote *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (Stephen, 1874).

Henry Maine (1822–1888) was British jurist and legal historian who pioneered the study of comparative law, notably primitive law and anthropological jurisprudence. As law member in India 1861- 1869, he promoted common racial theory but to support British rule, he wrote *Ancient Law* (1861). Then Alfred Lyall, (1835 - 1911) (Durand, 1913) was against the liberal and sympathetic ideas of Burke at same time he also worked against John Seeley. Seeley said the expansion of England as a colonial power was a miracle whereas Lyall proved this was result of a process of development which was started under Elizabeth I (1558 to 1603). He gave two series of collection of articles in Asiatic Studies (1882-1889), set of lectures the *Rise and Expansion of British Dominion in India*. (Lyall, 1894) Both Maine and Lyall believed that there was absence of institutions so British should bring change.

William Wilson Hunter (1840 - 1900) accepted the notion of Aryan brotherhood but said India could not progress due to its cast system which marked a line between conquerors and conquered. Hunter was harsh to Muslims and promoted and praised Britain rule by calling it a paternal authority to India. His most famous works were *Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868) and *Indian Mussalman* (1876). He furthermore edited *Rulers of India and Imperial Gazetteer and History of British India*.

Vincent Arthur Smith, (1848-1920) too had pragmatic views. He was sympathetic to Ancient India and said that to solve the problems of modern India it is necessary to know its past. At the same time to unite India and train them in good manners it was necessary that British should govern it. More specifically he said British should work to finish the evil of Oriental Despotism. His major works were *Early History of India* (1904), *Oxford History of India* (1919), *The History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon*. Sreedharan observed "...trailing the other British administrator-historians, Smith took pains to prove that endemic political chaos was the normal political condition of India. The inability of the Indian to unite and rule themselves made the permanence of British rule absolutely necessary. They were constantly remained that freedom had never dawned on their native land." (Sreedharan, 1978, p. 427)

Afterwards William Harrison Moreland (b.1868- d.1938) was a pragmatic economic historian. He observed no disunity in the revenue system of India. As he said Ancient revenue system of India was adopted by Muslims and later on this

system was transferred to British. But he criticized Aurangzeb for destroying Indian economy so what British inherited was a legacy of loss from which British rescued India. *Agriculture of the United Provinces* (Moreland, 1904), *Revenue Administration of the United Provinces* (Moreland, 1911), *Akbar's Land Revenue System* (Moreland & Ali, 1918), *India at the Death of Akbar* (Moreland, 1920), *From Akbar to Aurangzeb* (1931), *Agrarian System of Moslem India* (Moreland, 1929). Afterwards, Marxist nationalist criticized Moreland's methods to analyze India.

Conclusion

All these documents were recorded from the Eurocentric prospective and for the European audience so these sources were following a specific pattern, a pattern which suited to authors as well as the audience/readers of these documents. At same time this pattern served the interests of author's sponsor—Imperial powers. That's why whether it a sympathetic writer or writer using antipathy to narrate India, at last reached to the same conclusion that British rule in India was necessary and justified. Nevertheless, after all these drawbacks and loopholes of colonial writings on orient, still no one can deny the contribution of above-mentioned Orientalists who dug out the past of India from myths and brought it in lime light. Even all later writers of India utilized these colonial sources and eventually these Orientalist accounts provided the base to Indian Nationalist movements and paved the way for independence.

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