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## The Politics of Mapping: A Critical Analysis of *The Happy Valley: Sketches of Kashmir and the Kashmiris*

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### Abstract:

The paper aims to study the colonial mapping of Kashmir in William Wakefield's *The Happy Valley: Sketches of Kashmir and the Kashmiris* (1879) written during the colonial era. The travelogues of the colonial era which were produced by the 'occidents' about the 'orients' often played a role in the colonial discourse and helped in the expansion of empire. The paper will be analyzed from a postcolonial perspective.

**Keywords: occident, orient, colonial discourse, travelogues.**

With the establishment of British East India Company on 31<sup>st</sup> of Dec. 1600, Europeans especially British found their way into the Indian Empire. The company whose initial motto was to trade with India, soon found it as a veritable jewel and started to disperse the trade in different parts of the country in order to expand and invade it. Many British officials belonging to different professions visited India; if some visited for its salubrious climate others were forcefully sent to report about the land. William Wakefield (b 1840-), Medical Officer in the British Army belonged to the latter category of travelers. In his *Our Travels in India* (1878) he writes:

In the summer of 1873, as I had received the appointment of Staff-Surgeon in the Island of Guernsey, both myself and wife not unreasonably formed hopes of a residence there for some little period. But unfortunately. . . after a most pleasant tenure of my appointment for five months, a telegram received on the afternoon of the 12th December curtly told me to hold myself in readiness to embark for India with the 13<sup>th</sup> Hussars, and that the troop-ship to convey that regiment was to leave Portsmouth on the 8th of January. (1)

Wakefield like a true occident feared East and its horrors, because of the stereotypes which were associated with East, for instance 'occidents' often considered East filled with diseases, and its people were considered lazy, cunning, treacherous and so on. So he says:

Not being over anxious to go to the East, my first thought was to proceed to London, to ascertain if any change in our movements could be effected. Any hopes we had formed as to an alteration in the order received were quickly dispelled, however, shortly after my arrival at head-quarters; for an interview with the Director-General, the head of my department, made it plainly apparent that, unless I chose to resign the service, the original order must be obeyed, as the only alternative that could be offered me was to proceed to the Gold Coast, and take

part in the Ashantee war, then in progress. Having no ambition to distinguish myself in that malarious region, of the two evils I chose the lesser. (2)

Such writers often had preconceived ideas about the land being visited. Wakefield also had some preconceived image of East in his mind when he visited the place. During his stay in India, he along with his wife visited Kashmir in 1875. Kashmir has attracted various invaders, traders, travelers, tourists, explorers, scholars, intellectuals and many more since ages, because everyone found something to satiate their quest. Wakefield did not write about the valley of Kashmir in *Our Travels in India* though he writes in the book that he would deal with the topic of Kashmir separately. Although his stay in the valley was short, yet we find a detailed account of the landscape of valley. Many writers who visited before and after Wakefield attempted on the social life of Kashmiris, their apparels, culture, and religion. But Wakefield, contrary to his predecessors wrote a detailed account of the geography of the land.

With the publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said, texts of the colonial era which were written by the colonizers were re-read and were accused of Eurocentric perspective. Said launched a new phenomenon, which was 'postcolonial studies'. Many critics advanced Said's studies and added different aspects to the theory. Mary Louis Pratt and David Spurr are such critics. David Spurr identifies twelve rhetoric modes which are present in the colonial texts in his *The Rhetoric of Empire* which are:

1. Surveillance
2. Appropriation
3. Aestheticization
4. Classification
5. Debasement
6. Negation
7. Affirmation
8. Idealization
9. Insubstantialization
10. Naturalization
11. Eroticization
12. Resistance

However, these modes operate differently in different situations. Of interest to this paper is 'surveillance' and 'aestheticization'. Spurr concludes 'surveillance' by remarking that, "the writer's eye is always in some sense colonizing the landscape, mastering and portioning, fixing zones and poles, arranging and deepening the scene as the object of desire". As Wakefield while writing about the landscape of valley in *The Happy Valley: Sketches of Kashmir and the Kashmiris* remarks:

Kashmir may be defined as a country consisting for the most part of a comparatively level tract of land, a wide vale or plain, embedded and set high in that portion of the mountain mass of the great Himalayan chain which skirts the north-western border of Hindustan, stretching between lat. 33 15' and 34 35' N., and long. 74 10' and 75 40' E. It is entirely surrounded by ranges of this stupendous chain; forming one large enclosed valley, divided into two unequal portions by the river Jhelam, which traverses its entire length, and having

numerous glens or minor valleys, opening into it on every side from the lower portion of the lofty rocky wall by which it is environed. In form it is irregularly oblong, lying north-west and south-east; about ninety miles in length, with a width of twenty miles or even less at its narrowest, to twenty-five miles at its .broadest part; with an area of 4,500 square miles, and an average height of 5,200 feet above the sea level. (8-9)

Wakefield has given in his book, the significance of the mountains of the valley, which formed a natural barrier against invasions. During the time when Wakefield entered the valley, Britain was afraid that its rival Russia might intrude to the British Indian Empire through this quarter of the country, as it reached closed in Afghanistan. Wakefield writes, “I opine that to invade India on this side would be a wild and profitless undertaking” (13). Such reports became significant, which during the time of their visit were stored as diaries, letters, memoirs etc and later published as books, to satisfy the colonizers about the safety of their empire.

Another aspect of the representation of landscape which was present in colonial texts on oriental native lands as per Edward Said, David Spurr and Mary Pratt was the aestheticization of the land. Colonized countries were considered more susceptible to an aesthetic treatment, and were considered of aesthetic value of their own which “continually provides what writers call ‘material’ of a special nature: the exotic, the grotesque, the elemental” (Spurr 46). Pratt writes that the travelers first explored the landscape and inlands of various parts of the colonies and then wrote back a detailed account of the things that came across their way. In the travel writings of the colonial era, travel writers were focused more towards the landscape than the natives and their society as landscape provided much scope for new knowledge and discovery. Pratt further writes that writing about the landscape served twofold purpose: scope for discovery and opportunity to conquer, as details about landscape provided a close view of the mountains, exits and entering points of the land. Wakefield too aestheticized the land of Kashmir, however, his approach towards the land is more informative and only a small portion of the book is dedicated to the aesthetic perspective of the land. He writes:

Kashmir is a theme well worthy of a poet. Nowhere in Asia, nor even perhaps in the remaining quarters of the globe, can the parallel be found of such an earthly paradise; a paradise in itself as formed by Nature, but made doubly beautiful by its surroundings. For these are bare, rugged, and frowning rocks, a wilderness of crags and mountains, whose lofty summits tower to the sky in their cold and barren grandeur a solitary and uninhabitable waste. Yet in the midst of this scene of unutterable desolation there lies spread out a wide expanse of verdant plain, a smiling valley, a veritable jewel in Nature’s own setting of frightful precipices, everlasting snows, vast glaciers, which, while adding to its beauty by the contrast, serve also as its protection. (2-3)

Many of his contemporaries too attempted on the subject: Sir Walter Lawrence wrote in detail about the flora and fauna of the valley and categorized them in *The Valley of Kashmir* (1895); Sir Francis Younghusband, an army official, aestheticized the landscape in *Kashmir* (1911). The time of visit, profession of the traveler and duration of stay defined the content of the travel accounts of different writers.

Wakefield contributed a great deal to the mapping of Kashmir for the colonizers and his book on Kashmir is laden with the representations of land in the form of words, pictures and map. Such books became the centre to the colonial discourse and gather information about the place. In order to capture land, the first significant aspect for the colonizer was to know the land and in order to gather knowledge of a place it has to be explored and mapped. Wakefield in his book also gave a detailed description of the landscape through words, pictures and map of the valley.

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