P-ISSN: 2790-6795	Annals of Human and Social Sciences	April-June 2023, Vol. 4, No. 2
O-ISSN:2790-6809	http://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2023(4-II)70	[767-773]

Annals of Human and Social Sciences
www.ahss.org.pk

RESEARCH PAPER

Colonial (Mis)representations of Sainthood: A Postcolonial Study of an Oriental Folktale

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ABSTRACT

The study questions the structuring and consolidation of an orientalized exotic cultural imaginary of an Oriental Punjabi saint. The research explores how the image of an Oriental saint has been exoticized to problematize the religious dispositions of Indian Punjab and label it a miracle-ridden society through the exoticization of saintly miracles. Exoticism, earlier, during the sixteenth century, meant "foreign" in a neutral way; however, with the expansion of the colonial empire and its agenda, it accommodated the discourse of difference by validating the dichotomies between the East and the West. The exotic cultural imaginary threatens the indigenous frames of reference because of its Eurocentricism. The research selects the folktale titled Jalali, The Blacksmith's Daughter, As Sung By A Bard Of Ambala District, from Richard Carnac Temple's book The Legends of the Panjab. Sir Richard Carnac Temple, a British colonial administrator, collected and translated this folktale under the pretext of anthologizing and preserving the folk narratives of the Punjab. The research seeks guidance from Edward Said's critical reflections on Orientalism, questioning the selected writer's positional superiority and notion of strategy. The study is qualitative and uses textual analysis as the research method. It is anticipated that the present research can inspire various future research projects concerning the colonial representation of Punjabi folklore to surface the discourse of difference and to challenge the resultant exoticized mis/representations.

KEYWORDS: (Mis)representation, Colonialism, Cultural Imaginary, Exotic, Hegemony, Ideology, Orient, Postcolonialism

Introduction

The cultural Other is a product of the ruling power structure. The dominant groups' collective consciousness is consciously instilled through the doctrine of marginalization. The compradors and the colonizers are the key players in this respect. The institutions like language, translation, and education come into play in the hands of ruling forces to inscribe class differentiation and subsequent Other to marginalize it through its worlding. It unearths a form of political appropriation. Furthermore, the act of collecting, translating, and publishing folk narratives cannot be an unbiased one. It appears to be politically driven and is open to questioning concerning power relations and consequential dominance. It furthers the colonial agenda of constructing and perpetuating the binaries such as self/other, centre/periphery, colonizer/colonized, etc. It consolidates the colonial assertion of the White Man's supremacy and covertly undergirds the political othering. The self-perpetuating colonial self and the cathected other regulate the phenomenon. The British Empire managed the praxis of such epistemic violence by unvoicing the Punjabi natives and erasing the Punjabi indigeneity from the archives of Punjabi folk anthologies.

The indecipherability of the power consolidation agenda of the British Empire from the narrative of *Mission civilizatrice* always remains questionable. The colonial enterprise of collecting and translating the Indian Punjabi folk narratives also helped accomplish the specific British agenda. Preparing the folktales and legends' anthologies of the Other's

colonized culture is trickful. It supersedes the apparent simple-looking act of the collection, translation, and publication of Other's culture, for it is not a case of equal power relations. Hence, collectors, translators, anthologizers, and commentators find themselves at a vantage point for the execution of the embedded colonizer's manifesto. The context of the imbalanced power relations and cultural binary opposition between the collector and the other underscore enough grounds for questioning the "translated text". The unequal/privileged position of the collector/translator raises certain questions concerning the appropriation of the selected Punjabi folk narratives. It establishes the colonizer's hegemony and his subsequent creation of the exotic images of the cultural Other. The colonial folklorists anthologized the Punjabi legends and folktales for comprehending and regulating the Punjabi Orient. They also strived to domesticate the exotic Punjabi Orient.

Literature Review

The study contends that the collection, translation, and publication of the Punjabi folktale titled JALALI, THE BLACKSMITH'S DAUGHTER, AS SUNG BY A BARD OF AMBALA DISTRICT, is equivalent to defacing and erasing the indigeneity of the Punjabi folklore and culture for strengthening the colonial empire. This politicized move proved to be detrimental to the colonized culture, favoring the colonial masters' discriminatory politics. The researcher explores this contextualized phenomenon with its ideological underpinnings to critically analyze the selected text, keeping the colonial folklorists' pretext of the preservation and production of oriental knowledge in view. They interjected new images into the "exotic cultural imaginary" about the Orient for the Western readership. Due to this, they concentrated on appropriating the Punjabi folk narratives, which resulted in misrepresenting the indigenous cultural experiences of the Punjabi Orient. It also resulted in the production of an exoticized pool of knowledge about Punjabi folklore. Henceforth, their portrayal of the oriental knowledge created the impression that the East was irrational and needed to seek guidance from the West.

The promotion of the concept of intercultural familiarity contributed to the popularity of Oriental India. The British interests in the translation of the indigenous folk narratives were triggered by their administrative and economic interests in the colonies. Also, Orient did not stand out as being latent. It could contest the Occident. Therefore, besides contributing to the Empire's economy, it also added value to the meaning of the colonizer's culture, language, and civilization. The fact also triggered the colonial adventure of collecting and circulating the oriental folk narratives to underline the exotic images of the cultural Other. They exploited the dichotomous "exotic cultural imaginary" of the indigenous culture to bolster the binary of the Occident vis-à-vis the Orient.

Folklore makes up a significant portion of the knowledge about any society's customs, rituals, and religion, provided that it is kept clean from adulteration conditioned by some ideological and cultural prejudices and differences. Barbro Klein underscores four fundamental meanings of folklore. She says that first of all, it refers to "oral narration", "crafts", "rituals", and "vernacular expressive" culture's "other forms". Second, folkloristics or folklore is a full-fledged "academic discipline" dedicated to the study of such phenomena. Thirdly, she asserts that it can describe specific "folkloric" phenomena that are colorful and related to the "fashion", "tourist", and "music" industries. Fourth, she adds that, like myth, folklore may give the meaning of "falsehood" (Klein, 2001, p. 5711). Ralph Steel Boggs states that folklore "As a body of materials, folklore is the lore, erudition, knowledge, or teachings, of a folk, large social unit, kindred group, tribe, race, or nation, primitive or civilized, throughout its history" (Boggs, 2005, p. 3). Folktales and legends are forms of popular folklore.

Bottigheimer talks about the relationship between folktale and oral narration. Like "real and perceived orality, the relationship between publishing history and "oral" or "folk" narrative, textual integrity, and the utility and validity of Marxist, feminist and psychoanalytical discussions of folk narrative" (Bottiggheimer, 1989, p. 347). She moves

forward to say that "editorial filters" play an important role in elucidating and obscuring the "societal norms" (Bottiggheimer, 1989, p. 352). She also reveals that it is essential to determine which society is under examination and who uses the editorial filter to formulate the resultant "text" (Bottiggheimer, 1989, p. 352). Sadhna Naithani finds the "global history of folklore research" to be highly "Eurocentric" as it only accommodates folklore collectors of European origin (Naithani, 2010, p. 1). Sadhana Naithani also avers that "colonial folkloristics" is a term that should be popularized to unearth the "empirical" and "epistemic" boundaries between the colonized and the colonizer (Naithani, 2010, p. 4). She emphasizes the significance of the "colonial folklore scholarship" to understand "culture theory and culture politics of colonialism". (Naithani, 2010, p. 4).

The folk narrative studies evolved with time. It can be divided into different phases. First, there are "studies without the reference to the informants" (Bottigheimer, 1989, p. 250). It was followed by a trend to evaluate through good mediators' selection. Then, the shift took place because the human "product" failed to remain the "object of research" (Bottigheimer, 1989, p. 251). These approaches have been superseded. Rainer Wehse proclaims that a "group of American folklorists" introduced the final development stage in such studies. They attacked both approaches, i.e., "text-tradition" and "narrator-research" (Bottigheimer, 1989, p. 251). They aimed "at making the situational context of a storytelling event the only legitimate object of study" (Bottigheimer, 1989, p. 251). He also names a few of them, including "Dan Ben-Amos, Richard Bauman, and Robert Georges". They took inspiration from multiple fields like "literary criticism", "ethnology", "preliterate cultures", "behavioral psychology", "linguistics", etc. (Bottigheimer, 1989, p. 251).

Material and Methods

Edward Said considers the late eighteenth century to be the beginning point of Orientalism (Said, 2003, p. 3). He asserts it to be a "corporate institution" that deals with the Orient. It makes statements about the Orient to authorize, describe, teach, rule over, and settle the views concerning it. He argues that Orientalism is a way to restructure, dominate, and have authority vis-à-vis the Orient. He finds the "notion of discourse" popularized by Michel Foucault quite helpful in unveiling Orientalism (Said, 2003, p. 3). Foucault expounded on this notion of discourse in his books *Discipline and Punish* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Said contends that failure to examine the discursiveness of Orientalism disallows the reader its comprehension as a "systematic discipline" managed by the "European culture" (Said, 2003, p. 3). It addressed and produced the Orient in its manifestations like political, militant, sociological, ideological, imaginative, scientific, etc. (Said, 2003, p. 3).

Charles Forsdick describes exoticism in terms of the "essence of difference" or "an imagined quality," which may include but is not limited to eroticism, mystery, savagery, and cruelty (Forsdick, 2014, p. 47). A foreign culture prescribes it and also causes a threat to native "frames of reference" (Forsdick, 2014, p. 47). Postcolonialism is inseparable from exoticism, and so is racism. The colonial context of exoticism is invariable. In this context, an attempt is made to absorb a foreign culture into the home culture by domesticating, simplifying, and essentializing it in light of the imposed understanding of the dominant culture (Forsdick, 2014, p. 59). There occurred a semantic shift in the meaning of the "exotic". First, it meant "foreign" neutrally. However, according to the colonial assertions, it gave more fixed and subjective meanings afterward (Forsdick, 2014, p. 59). Sandhya Rao complains that publishers of the West do not entertain books that fail to illustrate the extant imagery of "India" as per European expectations. Thus, exoticism accommodates the existing boundaries and expects the pursuit of similar boundaries and structures (Forsdick, 2014, p. 24). Therefore, the exoticism of colonial narratives could always be questioned regarding their authenticity.

The folktales and legends contain specific features of exoticism focusing on the oriental culture. Their readers belong to the mainstream instead of the insiders of the

culture. Repeating the stereotypes in Indian Punjabi colonial folk narratives attempts to nourish Orientalism. The postcoloniality of the selected text under discussion extends to racism and exoticism. What places are exoticized and when depends on who is doing the looking and from what location. "The exoticist production of otherness," explains Graham Huggan in *The Postcolonial Exotic,* is "contingent" and "dialectical" (Huggan, 2002, p. 68). It also serves the conflicting interests of ideologies and provides the rationale for the projects for reconciliation and rapprochement (Huggan, 2002, p. 68). It also legitimizes the necessitous violence and plundering. Roger Celestin's critique of exoticism imparts a sense of ''dualism'' in the colonial context. Roger Celestin investigates the utility of the exotic to locate India as unique, different, and primitive but without a threat during the Age of Enlightenment. He avers that with the expansion of the colonial Empire, the colonial exotic turned out to be a mechanism of accommodation (Celestin, 1996, p. 116).

Results and Discussion

Richard Carnac Temple's introduction to the tale, JALALI, THE BLACKSMITH'S DAUGHTER, AS SUNG BY A BARD OF AMBALA DISTRICT, exaggerates its popularity as he documents it as "a most popular tale all over the country" (Temple, 1900, p. 163). He continues that even the "women who live entirely at home" also know this tale, which is equally popular among them. Temple locates himself in the text this way and attempts to establish the tale as an integral household of all Punjabi families. Temple forgets not to bring his favorite exotic resort of a saintly "shrine" and tells about its whereabouts near "Lahor on the Amritsar Road" (Temple, 1900, p. 163). Temple's strategic location endorses the origin of the protagonist of the Rode Shah, the holy Islamic city of "Makka" with a mutual consensus of "all the legends (Temple, 1900, p. 163). The mention of "Makka" attempts to bring the folktale in line with the Western Orientalist strategic formation, for the holy city of Makka suffices the purpose of an exotic place in the European cultural imaginary.

However, he also assays to bring him in the line of the saints he has depicted as the miracle-performing saints in *The Legends of the Panjab*. In the introduction, he tries to establish his allegiance with 'Abdu'l-Qadir Jilani" as one of his followers (Temple, 1900, p. 163). At the same time, his Orientalist contempt for the subject surfaces when he calls specific details "sheer nonsense" (Temple, 1900, p. 163). He focuses on authenticating the indigenity of Rode Shah as a Punjabi saint when he gives the meaning of his name Rode Shah – "the Shaven Mendicant" (Temple, 1900, p. 163). In the concluding line of his introduction, Temple returns to his favorite subject of labeling the Indian Punjab as a miracle-ridden society and unfolds Rode Shah's miracle that brought him to fame. It was the miracle of making the worthless "dub grass of India green and sweet forever" (Temple, 1900, p. 163).

The tale begins with love at first sight, in a "dream" (Temple, 1900, p. 168). Rode Shah lived in Makka, whereas Jalali was born in Baghdad. Jalali appeared in Rode Shah's dream, and he fell in love with her instantly. The same happened with Jalali as she saw Rode Shah in her dream. This love episode is entirely exotic in which a *faqir* – a saint – falls in love with an unknown girl living in another country in a dream. The places of Makka and Baghdad have an exotic appeal for Western readers. The cities act as an exotic locale wherein Muslims of the Arab race dwell. Such a depiction becomes the European imagination of the Orient. A Muslim saint falling in love with a girl in a dream is a feast to the Western minds.

The upcoming allusions used ahead in the narrative also help exoticize it. After being overwhelmed by the dream vision, Rode Shah mounts his mule - Duldul. In the footnotes, Temple elaborates on the name Duldul and relates the name with the fourth caliph of Islam, "Ali" (Temple, 1900, p. 169). Hence, he can refer to the caliphate of Islam and exoticize the narrative by connecting it with the Arabs. The portrayal of Rode Shah is immensely exotic. He carries a gourd in his hand, "beads around his neck", and "Quran under his arms" (Temple, 1900, p. 169). Rode Shah says "*Bismillah*" while spurring his mule and meets "Four Friends" on the way. In the footnotes, Temple emphasizes its orientalness by calling "*Bismillah*" a "Musalman invocation" and also gives the names of "Four Friends", i.e., "Abu

Bakar, Umar, Usman and Ali" (Temple, 1900, p. 169). The conversation between Four Friends and Rode Shah only Orientalizes the narrative but is unimportant to the plot. Their mention in the narrative elevates the orientality of the narrative, making it acceptable to Western readers.

Rode Shah, the saint, speaks to the grass and asks it to provide a prayer bed, but it refuses to obey. Hearing it, the "dub grass", a wild Indian grass, permits him to take a load to make a bed to pray. Temple calls it a "Hindu" grass (Temple, 1900, p. 169). Temple also explains the length of a half bed, which is used by the *faqirs* for the sake of "penance" for its "extreme discomfort" (Temple, 1900, p. 169). Here, he has also exoticized the character of a Muslim saint as a masochist who inflicts pain on himself. This image suits the European cultural imaginary about the Orientals. The episode certifies the longevity of the dub grass as a result of the prayer of Rode Shah. Right after it, Rode Shah is shown talking to a boatman to help him cross a river. He offers two or three *paisas* – Indian currency - to the boatman, but he refuses to do it and challenges the Rode Shah to cross the river on his own if he is a *faqir* in reality.

The exotic atmosphere is all around when Rode Shah says *Bismillah* and his body "was aflame", and he made "a boat of his gourd and an oar of his staff" and crossed the river (Temple, 1900, p. 170). The response of the boatman to accept the saintship of faqir is totally as per the theory of Temple about Indian society, which is a miracle-ridden society in which wonder-working saints still live. The boatman also assures that had he known him to be a saint, he would have served him well. Having reached Baghdad, Rode Shah raises the slogan of "*alakh*", a pure Hindu gesture of asking for alms on the doorsteps of the houses. When offered some alms, he refuses to accept and tells them that he has been there to meet Jalali. This depiction of a Muslim saint falling in love with a girl and reaching her home to see her can be exotic and attract the interest of Westerners, but it is beyond imagination for the natives. Rode Shah is further exoticized as he is portrayed as "black as beetle" (Temple, 1900, p. 171). Jalali thinks the saint to be something to be dreaded at this stage.

Now, the anger of the oriental woman comes into play, demonizing the character of Jalali. She calls the household executioner. She orders him to either disappear the Rode Shah or "cut him to pieces" (Temple, 1900, p. 172). She commands him to "bind his arms behind" his back, "cut his body into pieces", and "tie up his body in a blanket" (Temple, 1900, p. 172). The body of Rode Shah was cut into pieces and taken to the river. Temple writes in the footnotes that it is a "Hindu custom" (Temple, 1900, p. 172). Nevertheless, he never gives the details of this custom. It appears just a note to further the exoticization of the folktale. The miracle of Rode Shah is seen again when fishes divided his flesh among themselves. He requested them to leave his eyes, for he would see his beloved. The sainthood of Rode Shah is further exaggerated when "Khawaja Khizar" finds an order from the "Court (of God)" to make his body whole as he wants to see his beloved (Temple, 1900, p. 173). Temple refers to Khwaja Khizar "as a Muhammadan saint and identified with the Prophet Elias"; he also refers to him as "the god of flood" (Temple, 1900, 416).

Subsequently, the body of Rode Shah was made whole, and he reached Jalali's home before the executioner. He again requested Jalali to show her to the saint. Upon this, Jalali again ordered to cut the saint into pieces, or she would "stab herself to death" (Temple, 1900, p. 173). Then, an oven was heated, and Rode was thrown into the red-hot oven with the arms bound behind his back. Once again, an order was passed from the "Court (of God)", and "the smoke went up in circles" (Temple, 1900, p. 174). In the footnotes, Temple interprets that Rode Shah escaped through these circles (Temple II 174). The account further narrates that the "ashes" of his body were "sent afloat" (Temple, 1900, p. 174). Temple writes it is a "Hindu custom" (Temple, 1900, p. 174). As Temple has previously done this at a couple of places, he again syncretizes the folktale and tries to validate the religious syncretism in Indian society. Nonetheless, it is a misrepresentation of the Indian Punjabi society, for in it, Hindus and

Muslims lived as two separate identities without following each other's customs and believing in their religious God/gods purely.

The saintly character of Rode Shah is once again over-exaggerated when he is shown attending a ceremony that was held for his funeral rites. The deceptive nature of the oriental woman is highlighted when Jalali, instead of showing her face to Rode Shah, asks her sister Kamali to impersonate her as Jalali. The saint curses Kamali if she impersonates Jalali, and subsequently, she loses her beauty. The saintly character of Rode Shah is also mocked when he is shown directing Jalali to go to the rooftop palace and veil off to show her beauty publicly. Jalali is now determined to go with Rode Shah because she has accepted him as a true saint, and if he disagrees to take her with him, she threatens to stab herself and die. She also admits that she cannot live without him. It also refers to the incontinence of an oriental woman who cannot get back once she chooses her man. The end of the folktale reveals that they both settled in Makka.

Conclusion

The West has always been curious about hunting an ideal Orient to validate its socio-cultural and religio-political superiority. The colonial administration and the missionaries were equally interested in the project. They put effort into constructing an ideal "exotic Other" to justify their supremacy and presence in the sub-continent region. To develop a repository of colonial knowledge consisting of exotic cultural imaginary with contrasting Oriental images regarding the Punjabi Orient, they appropriated the indigenous knowledge. A critical study of these colonial collections and their translations raises multiple questions about the production of knowledge as an ideology that always conditions knowledge and has its reach to the operating power structures. The British folklorists followed the former orientalists' paths and joined their league, showcasing their orientalist propensities. As Edward Said Put forward, the West did not orientalize the Orient because of its nature but due to its susceptibility to being oriental. They went unresisted because of the absence or dearth of counter-narratives. Their selection, collection, and translations of the Punjabi folklore anglicized and primitivized it. Their political dominance helped them construct and perpetuate the exotic cultural imaginary of the Punjabi culture through selected folk narratives.

The folktale of Jalali, the Blacksmith's daughter, aims to depict the oriental institution of sainthood. The narrative has multiple exotic elements that increase its appeal and acceptance among European readers. The main characters' names are purely Indian Punjabi, but the locale of the tale is the land of Arabs. The names of Muslim caliphs and other Islamic allusions help the author achieve acceptance and popularity among Western circles. The recurrence of Rode Shah's miracles helped Richard Carnace Temple support his theory about the religion of an average Indian Punjabi person as miracle-ridden. The analyses of the Richard Temple's strategic location and strategic formation unearth that the folktale is a type of determined writing that aims at consolidating the narrative as an orientalist correct through the use of the notion of orientalist strategy.

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