



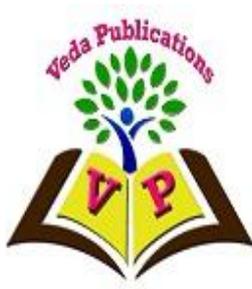
POLITICAL CONCERNS OF THE ENGLISH (BRITISH) IN KASHMIR: A CASE STUDY OF VICTOR JACQUEMONT

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ABSTRACT



Travel writings have been always a popular form of writing, even before it actually developed into a genre consciousness of its own. From the late 18th and early 19th century onwards the European travellers' voyages in Kashmir were shaped by various factors, such as personal interests (adventurers), missionary zeal, and the designs of colonialism. The aim of their visit is recollected and reconstructed through their memoirs and travelogues. This paper examines an administrative setup of Sikh rule (1819-1846) by taking into account the explorations of Victor Jacquemont (1828-1832), a French Botanist. As an essential exponent of his description of Sikh rule is based on the descriptions made on behalf of British Empire in India. The aim of this paper is to examine his exploration, as he was deputed mainly to investigate the nature and settings of the Sikh rule. It will further investigate the interests of British for the expansion of their territories into north India.

Keywords: *Victor Jacquemont, British India Empire, Sikh Rule, Kashmir.*



INTRODUCTION

Kashmir witnessed a heavy influx of European travelers during the period of nineteenth century. Their interest of travel in Kashmir was shaped by many factors varying between personal interest and colonial designs. It is on account of this complexity that travel texts have been considered as an innocent body of literary descriptions, gospel truths, possessing priceless scientific information, which is much worthwhile in countering the exaggeration of indigenous accounts. The aim of their encounter is no doubt mentioned in their memoirs but the agenda they largely managed to keep hidden. And one profound example of it is the travel accounts of Victor Jacquemont. He was born in 1801 and died in 1832, visited the Kashmir and produced a bulky volume of his travel narrations essentially through a set of letters while travelling in the Kashmir during the period nineteenth century. The characteristic features assigned to him a colonial adventurer and not a botanist encountering the Kashmir on behalf of colonial empire.

Young husband was one of the colonial military officials in India who during the tenure of Lord Curzon was given the duty to discern and develop latest information about the developments taking place in the north-west frontiers of British Empire in India. This assignment resulted in the formation of three Great game travel narratives namely, *The Heart of a Continent* (1896), *Kashmir* (1909), and *India and Tibet* (1910). And it was as a president of Royal Geographical Society, he participated in the anniversary function of Jacquemont's travel text. For his exemplary work he ultimately became president of Royal Geographical Society. It was as a president of Royal Geographical Society, he participated in the anniversary function of Jacquemont's travel text, held at Paris in 1934.

Perhaps it was out of this respect that on the same occasion foundation of a society was laid down. Named after the late traveller, the society was named as 'Society des amis de Jacquemont.' Young husband was one of the representatives of Britain, paying respect and tribute to a traveller who had significantly served the English imperial interests. In January 1827, Jacquemont received an invitation

from Pierre Louis Cordier of the Muse 'umd' Histoire Naturelle in Paris to undertake a scientific survey in India, with full pay and full discretion over the course of the expedition (Kyord et al. 789). At last the biography of the late traveller was published in the same year. Victor Jacquemont was the hero-traveller in the early half of the nineteenth Century and almost after an interval of hundred years after his death the show took place in 1934. So as to year (1934) also marked the hundredth year since the first edition of his travels had been first published in 1833. For the first time his famous travel account though published in 1833 and therefore soon after the publication the travel account received a massive popularization and it was "hailed as the master piece of the genre in France." Its first English translation may be one of the essential outcomes of its rendering in English that within a short duration its travel account achieved hype. An anthology of his letters was later on published under the title, *Letters from India*, and constitutes a remarkable position in the colonial discourses on the Indian subcontinent. Jacquemont visited many parts of India including Kashmir from 1828-32. Being a European with non-British nationality he could hardly come under the severe scanner of Ranjeet Singh, who hardly permitted any Englishmen to enter his domains.

However, he had been a product of the English imperial milieu. The introduction of the travel account reads, "in September 1834 a collection of letters was published under the title of *Letters from India, describing the travel in the British dominions in India, Tibet, Lahore, and Cashmere during the years 1882-1829-1831*, undertaken by the order of the French government by Jacquemont, traveller naturalist to the Museum of Natural History, Paris, translated from French, and met with massive success, enough to justify the publication of a second and enlarged edition in May, 1835" (Jacquemont). A French citizen Victor Jacquemont was born in 1801 and at the time of his death in (December 7, 1832), he was in Bombay (India). His family was one of the members of "Nobles of the sword" enjoying a number of small fiefs and had an honour of being an idealist Republican, a man of high character, well versed in law, church and public affairs.



Victor Jacquemont (1801–32) was one of the most prominent representatives of the new French generation that came of age around 1820. He travels in the United States in 1827. Here he met many intellectuals and artists. His personal experience forced him to leave the country and he took up journey to India. Jacquemont traveled to India leaving Brest in August 1828. He arrived at Calcutta on 5 May 1829. He went to Delhi on 5 March 1830 and went onwards towards the western Himalayas. He visited Amber in Rajputana, met with the Sikh Emperor Ranjit Singh at his capital of Lahore, and visited the kingdom of Ladakh in the Himalaya. Lahore was controlled by numerous empires throughout the course of its history, including the Hindu Shahis, Ghaznavids, Ghurids, and Delhi Sultanate by the medieval era. It was reached by the height of its splendor under the Mughal Empire between the late 16th and early 18th century, and served as its capital city for a number of years. A city was captured by the forces of Persian Emperor Nader Shah in 1739, and fell into a period of decay while being contested between different powers. Lahore was eventually became a capital of the Sikh Empire in the early 19th century, and regained much of its lost grandeur. It was then annexed to the British Empire, and made the capital of a British Punjab. Therefore in the case of a Victor Jacquemont, the option to travel British possessions in India, owes greatly to a wider variety of vested interests. Though in addition to this, it is clear that the idea to travel India came only after a set of deliberations with colonial authorities in London, and with the influential members of newly developed Royal Geographical Society of England. Also to a substantial extent of English interests were also involved in assigning him a job, to make a historical journey and also his biographer appropriately reasons that he was the “honored guest and intimate friend of the most distinguished among the Company’s servants in India.” (Mohan 10)

During that period the possessions of the East India Company were bounded on the north by the Chinese Empire, into which no foreigner was permitted to enter, and on the north-west by the Punjab, then an independent state. Therefore, it was towards these comparatively unknown regions that Jacquemont directed his views. So the difficulties of

an expedition of this nature had discouraged some of the most enterprising travelers, but he felt himself strong in perseverance and courage. As the natural history of India was but little known, and the northern portions of the country wholly unknown to men of science. Similarly a few travelers had indeed penetrated in different directions towards the north of the English possessions. Secretly he was to account for the topography of Kashmir as well, because Ranjit Singh would not allow Englishmen in his territory. British officers were looking for opportunities to extend their power westward and in Kashmir. Although the Dogras had been ruling over Kashmir as subordinates to Ranjit Singh. Since a reflection of influences and vicinity that collectively shapes the mode of Jacquemont’s account, his travel documents were consisted of number of understanding postulations. It clearly shows that his travel account (not scientific explorations) bears a person for investigating an imperial nature (Mohan 330).

JACQUEMONT’S HIDDEN AGENDA AND TRAVEL IN KASHMIR

A Victor Jacquemont’s travel account entitled, *Letters from India: Describing a Journey in the British Dominions of India, Tibet, Lahore, and Cashmeres during the Years 1828, 1829, 1830, 1831*, has been written around the 1830’s when the English East India Company’s swing was in development in India. After the battle of Plassey in A.D 1757, English East India Company as sovereign power had gradually emerged as a successful European power that could carve out an Indian empire for the British. Through pursuing a set of policies to utilize the Indian assets in the interest of furthering conquests, the image of the English East India Company had been defamed and deteriorated. This was possibly because of continuously embarking on the path of enlarging the British colonial power. Its perpetual contribution in the expansion of the empire had led the emergence of different controversial voices and detractors. Also thus emerged the need to challenge these detractors of East India Company by advocating the cause of expansion as part of the method of dominating oriental civilization.



In the context of Europe Jacquemont's travels accounts possibly might have helped much in reimagining the otherwise weak and defamed image of the East India Company. In favor of, the content of the text simply tended to provide an aura to the era of imperialism, representing a timely endeavour and effort to cultivate a more vociferous voice in favour of the Company's position in India and to address perils that faced the British interests in India. Jacquemont's travel account incredibly supported the policies of expansion and prescribed English imperialism as the only agency worthy to change the decadent oriental lands like Kashmir. His travel text as a proof of encounter of a European with a non-European state and subjects, has categorically implored the cause of European domination. Jacquemont attempted to help develop a more progressive picture of East India Company at a time when many voices were being raised against it. The political atmosphere of England by around 1830's had changed much and was politically charged. Several groups, including the newly emerged prosperous industrial elements and other clashing interests of commercial groups, were collectively emphasizing the need to deprive the Company of its Indian possessions. The proponents of Laissez-faire economy in England were recurrently acted as a pressure group by advocating Indian possessions should be directly governed by the British crown, rather than being controlled through a monopolistic East India Company. Besides they wanted to open India as well as major portion of eastern trade and commerce for all sections of the metropolitan society. Perhaps it was mostly this pressure-group politics that deprived East India Company's monopolies first in 1813 and then in 1833. Since it is clear that the recurrent demand of complete shift of authority from the Company to the crown was gaining more ground. Convincingly the Company had been blamed, for putting at stake, the English fame in India. As per her ruthless expansion and social engineering programmes, the reaction on the part of the colonized was expectedly awaited. Through these circumstances, the company was empathically in need of documents and substantial arguments to hold and justify the existence and behavior of colonial government of India. While in a reverse

form, as an agent Jacquemont performed a convincing role in the regeneration of the English East Company's rule and reputation. Therefore it clearly shows that his travel writing regenerated and brought in a message of all that was good on the part of colonial government of India, whose progressive image was hoisted in the metropolis through nationalistic flattery. Also being a citizen of a France, the arch rival of British during the time of mounting imperialism, Jacquemont did not tear apart the image of East India Company. Slightly he further suggested the colonial extension of East India Company. On owing this sort of commendable account, undoubtedly the distorted image of English East India Company and her contribution in further expansive campaigns might have been overhauled. Possibly it may little easy to proclaim that Victor Jacquemont's travel account was meant to overhaul the damaged picture of the East India Company, through the portraying in dark colours the territories that were being governed by Ranjeet Singh, the founder of the Lahore Darbars. As per in his admiration for British India and the detraction of Sikhs he writes:

European civilization deserves to spread through the universe; and in default of civilizations of the West, its mere domination remains benefit to the peoples in other parts of the world, it is probably the only one which the religious institutions of the East permitted us to confer upon it. (Jacquemont 206)

Due to the above statement, it obviously offers various insights to comprehend the Jacquemont's approach of coming to terms with the Orient as a traveller. So the European background, mind-set, and other imaginations of Jacquemont regarding orient seems to be trifling and trivial that provides an idea of how he would have reflected upon the Oriental things in the following pages of his travel text. Jacquemont's travel account, involves encounter of identities like European and Eastern (Orientals), with ample confidence in the British colonial state's administrative capabilities. It is one of the domineering features of his travel documents and



also the Jacquemont's travel reports recounts amazingly his Eastern experiences. As per holding against the earlier views propounded by his predecessors such a François Bernier, George Forster and William Moorcroft and others, Jacquemont first of all, refuted the existence of Kashmir valley as terrestrial paradise, a claim much popularized by them. On owing to Jacquemont's hands, Kashmir valley's investigation and precise description, he could not explore the Kashmir as a paradise, nor even extolled its potentialities. He chooses to emphasize as the picture of Kashmir with which he had encounter, was aptly in accordance with the spirit of the colonial era, he was living in. Kashmir appeared to him hugely suffering due to its isolation from British India and the Sikh administration of Kashmir, he believed, had taken full advantage of the absence of British in the region. So the Kashmir valley would appear in Jacquemont's eyes as a true picture of Asiatic despotism and the miseries wrought in by such native rule, gave him many reasons to treat British India as its counterpart. He says that, "there are problems in governing the barbarous and semi barbarous races, but Sikhs are lacking the capacity to reform and modify them. some of whom still have a value for those concerned with the questions which inevitably arise when western ideas come in contact with eastern ways of life." (Jacquemont 101)

Now the idea is that, Sikhs were running a state with the hallmarks of Asiatic despotism and had enhanced the scope for his arguments like, "the whole state was suffering under a crushing taxation." (Jacquemont 102). Consequently, "Everyone in the valley apparently would surface as leading a life of distrust and full of discomfort" (Jacquemont 102). In addition to this he reiterated that not only the subjects of the state, even the Sikh army appeared living in full discontent conditions and all of that ultimately led him to declare that Sikhs were no less than Turk (Jacquemont 98). Thus the full of admirations for British government of India, and the benefits being conferred upon India by British rule, he even went to the extent of saying that:

I have deep rooted conviction that no national government would secure them the benefits which they owe to English government: peace

both external and internal, and equal justice for all. It is better for the peoples of India to be governed by a foreign aristocracy belonging to a highly civilized country than by their own ignorant, cowardice, and cruel one (Jacquemont 211).

Jacquemont provides as an eye witness account, which has been in the context of Kashmir valley during the time period of Ranjeet Singh's lordship. "Ranjeet Singh," Jacquemont speculates, "is a kind of titular king functions both in the guise of a virtual despot and all together enjoys a sort of ritual sovereignty." Also he portrays that Gulab Singh, one of Ranjeet's feudatories in Jammu province, as the greatest lord in the Punjab after Ranjeet (Jacquemont 178). On owing to these projections, one is driven to deduce that perhaps the Treaty of Amritsar [1846], concluded between British government of India and Gulab Singh. Similarly his vociferously sounds as an admirer and advocate of a cause of Gulab Singh's and a few of his descriptions of Sikh government are significantly [though partially] not easy to deny as they run parallel to the descriptions provided by the native sources of the time. The value judgments and dichotomous narratives apparently oriented towards the colonial rule, makes such travel metaphors more or less a deliberate attempt to "Orientalize", the East jointly on micro as well as on macro levels (Jacquemont 211). Jacquemont mentions about the people of Kashmir valley in general and he believes that they are mere imposters. He says that:

Kashmir is a land of knaves; scoundrels; bandits; but I am prudent... Nothing is commoner than to kill a man for the sake of stealing an old pair of breeches worth twenty or twenty four sous, half a rupee; the whole population goes about armed with sabres, which they wield, I am told, with great skill and the figures one meets on the road all carry long matchlocks on their shoulders though in my opinion these are not very alarming.

Significantly, he suggests the climax of his construction, is that neither the common masses nor even the well-off Brahmins who were well



acquainted with literary traditions since times immortal have received any scant respect. This reflects profoundly when Jacquemont writes:

as for the Pandiths are concerned, who are all Brahmans by caste; they are grossly ignorant and there is not one of my Hindu servants who do not regard himself as better caste than they are... they eat everything except beef and drink arrack (local medicine in liquid form), though nobody does so in India, but mean of the lowest castes.

On another occasion, he recounts:

I expose their ignorance of the Shastras and their slackness of their discipline; any man here is a little ignorant than the rest and less overtly a knave is a saint; and the estimable public of Kashmir takes me for a most saintly Christian (Jacquemont 217)

It means that he provides a picture of Kashmiri society and treats it broadly as a part of Eastern society. So the Eastern objects and structures from the point of his view were more or less negative foil of the West, ultimately made him to sound acrimonious.

Society in East is vitiated from its very foundations. Its chief elements, the family is almost non-existent. Among the upper classes which set the example for the rest, polygamy makes Indian fathers indifferent to their children, owing to their great number, and strives up horrible jealousies and hatred between brothers. A woman is an impure creature, regarded by the husband as scarcely belonging to the same species as himself. As the children grow up, they soon acquire his abominable idea of contempt for their mother.

Thus a Jacquemont was affected by the European recognitions instead of submitting to the law of

perception. Also he was watching and portraying the things in a straight forward way in which he build a truth dependent on European experience as opposed to on perception. Therefore Jacquemont appeared not the slightest bit prepared to trade off with his self-character or to uncover the disadvantages of his own way of life and society, which subsequently had made him to be immediately at two places, a Western delegate in East. His experience with the East was with a foundation to assess things without undermining his self-character. Though these portrayals being profoundly one-sided, that fundamentally and more efficiently maintaining the superior claims of the West. Due to their personal interest in Kashmir valley, he proceeds ahead by proclaiming, "There is nothing straight or simple about the people of the country. They resort to craft in everything."

It shows that the Jacquemont viewed Indian things not very different, but far rather poorly to advocate the reason for British colonialism in India. The profound quality of India is in general and Kashmir in particular, in Jacquemont justification, appeared to dislike change and enhancement, so long it holds its current religious establishments. He comments against the current religious beliefs and also the changes completed by William Bentinck, the then governor general of India, he announced the engendering of modern education as fundamental as the substance and presence of the colonial rule in India. The Jacquemont was actually an agent of the requirements of his time than substances and is having religious beliefs and assumptions of the power with which he was seriously associated with. So the travel narrations, in a praised way he suggests that, if there is any expectation of civilizing the East, it is by this way alone. Consequently he stresses the need of spread of Enlightenment of Europe in this land, which would qualify it to administer itself one day (Jacquemont 222).

CONCLUSION

The assumption of Kashmir in particular and India or Asia as a whole, in general, reflects Jacquemont's tendency for being unavoidably a true supportive and advocate of British imperialism. Jacquemont's travel narrations are in much



resemblance with the then claims of imperial power. The whole agency seemed to be borrowed rather than being a cerebral one, or based on surveillance and also the reformation perhaps the textualization of official claims of contemporary imperialism. Jacquemont's ideas, expressions, experiences and encounter on Kashmir, it clearly shows that he works as an agent of East India Company. He was firstly as a European and secondly as an individual, his intelligence and ideological framework was somehow a derivative one, highly conditioned by the imperial claims of his times which consciously or unconsciously had left his work now in stigma. Therefore it is clear that the idea of his travel to India in general and Kashmir in particular, came only after a set of deliberations with colonial authorities in London. He is a man who adjoining areas in and outside Kashmir and also the decision of his travel was certainly a part of politically motivated enterprise and his contribution in explorations of Sikh rule was only to investigate the nature of imperialism.

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