



## KASHMIR: AN ORIENTAL LANDSCAPE THROUGH THE EYES OF EUROPEAN TRAVELERS

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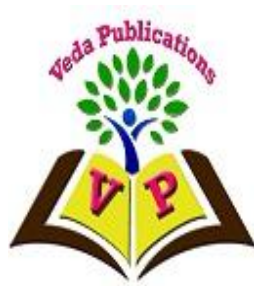
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### ABSTRACT

Through the accounts of European travelers, the image of Kashmir as an Oriental landscape over an era extended between the seventeenth and Mid-19th century. Generally, we can say that the statement concerning travel texts of the time under focus is that travel literature was in a progressive stage for being a cherished source of knowledge, recreation, and curious information and plenty of alternative novel attributes. Among the contribution of each passing day towards the genre of travels was an expected thing, as a result of the in depth development of European expansion and imperialism. Perpetually, growing travel records born from and in turn nourishing the images of the East and its inhabitants, subsequently collided with colonializing efforts of the time. The travellers encountering the East even sometimes proved an instrument in giving a lease of life to the imperial construction. This work aims to give details about their political interest and how the European travel writing on Kashmir, with its own needs and demands to full fill, have shaped various notions about the Kashmir valley.

**Keywords:** *Europeans, Travellers, Kashmir Valley. Oriental Landscape, Genre, Travel Chronicles.*





## INTRODUCTION

Kashmir was the necessary and a constant figure of the Oriental Lands and this existed from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century which seemed very much close to the continent of Europe. There was a simple thought that would exist to haunt the general population of multitude tastes, professions and aesthetics towards the valley. The broad advancement in the greatness of trade ventures and European companies that in the days to come would clear route for the ascent of their imperialism gave birth to a process of social and cartographic portrayal of various zones of world including Kashmir valley. The development of Kashmir valley as fascinatingly Oriental landscape was the general aftereffect of the extension of European adventurism, evangelism, trade and late imperialism in the East. Further usually, "Missionaries from the holy land to the Oriental countries made frequent visits and attempted to convert the masses of "heathens" or to support besieged Christian communities."

Collectively, all these means of travel and intense cultural interactions led to the development of vast body of travel chronicles. The travel accounts served as the prime documents of information that were obtained by the Western world before establishing the imperial hold over the Orient. Travel narratives, hence, played a historically an immense and extraordinary part that empowered the West to know and create ideas regarding the Orient. Travel accounts not only presented the oriental landscapes to Europe but inevitably through Europe, the entire world could know about the existence of idea called Orient. Conceived as the essential eye witnessed and indeed based on perceptions resounding emotional situations of individual experiences of European voyager within the outside lands, travel narratives fascinatingly delighted in wide popularity over a long span of time. Consequently, travel accounts as the representatives of the East were much more than simple geographical depictions. For, "they were also planned to divert, to entertain, through accounts of dramatic situations, monstrous events and uncivilized people encountered by the travellers." It is obvious that, as travellers made contact with new regions and peoples, authors and editors put the world on paper

for the new print marketplace at home: the number of new titles published (and old titles reprinted) during the early modern period suggests that there was a significant audience for travel writing, eager to hear news of the wider world and to reflect on England's place in it." The general assumption is that from these travel narratives emerged a picture of East which had to meet the twin requirements of faithful transcription and the interest of readership for which they even compromised with the actual and observed realities. Kashmir valley as a travel trope central to different travel accounts kept up by European travellers developed at time when travel narrations were considered exceptionally much a bearer of new knowledge and information from a world which remained in huge portion obscure and which avidly awaited a receptive European public. Found within the East, nearly associated to the other locales of East, it generated varying amounts of information, depending on the level of contact European and British travellers kept up with the regions comprising a Kashmir and so it was presented to the European audience through the travel narratives for a significant period, till it finally came under Western imperial domination.

## KASHMIR AS A FIGURE OF AN ORIENTAL LANDSCAPE

As an Oriental landscape, Kashmir was a host of exotic land surfaces, with individuals of divergent sorts, their different traditions, culture, and religious beliefs and eventually the foremost diverse identities. So evidently, in various travel records it received representations of varied nature. As various European and British voyagers over various interims of time visited and experienced the occupants of these grounds, a lot of pictures of valley and perspectives related with it created, contingent upon the explorers who experienced Orients in an assortment of conditions, watching religious and legal customs, just as practices, which were all imperative absolutely as a result of their evident contrast. In spite of the fact that as a piece of Oriental grounds and culture, Kashmir does not show up at any minute a special case to these European advancements and attempts in the East. Arranged in the north extraordinary of the Indian subcontinent, getting a charge out of deliberately a critical position and a world over notoriety for its common



magnificence and landscapes of Kashmir, similar to the whole Orient, got a substantial flood of Europeans from the seventeenth century onwards. Their experience with the valley and occupants of the valley found a fine articulation in their movement stories and accounts, which thus advanced a Kashmir area to nearly the whole world, anyway basically through an European personality. These European and British travel stories comprise a significant wellspring of Kashmir's history. They give bits of knowledge into various parts of the Kashmir fluctuating from regular scene, commonwealth, society, economy, topography and character of its kin.

The European and British voyagers who made regular visits to the valley of Kashmir since the seventeenth century were men of various cultural backgrounds and in the meantime spurred by explicit interests. Indeed, most early English travel was done (unequivocally or certainly) in the name of trade. Of the set of European travelers who put Kashmir valley on paper, some of them were guided by the unconquered want to know the world, some by business interests and some by pilgrim interests, and as needs be they seen, described and deciphered things of Kashmir in their movement accounts.

The travel accounts maintained by the curious humanist travellers bear a noteworthy distinction and character than the later ones maintained by travellers motivated by the colonial interests. what's more necessary to acknowledge concerning the travel accounts is that the incontrovertible fact that 'travel writing' created it on the market not solely as a kind for new knowledge however as a vehicle for satire, and from a amazingly early date, actual and creative voyages were used to criticise foreign habits, domestic conditions, and even Travel itself.' All these factors thus, have made the representations of Kashmir valley diverse , shifting, historically contingent, complex and competitive, and to handle them in a critical and as well as analytical manner is the central concern of present work.

The choice of Kashmir region as a case study is designed to help develop a carefully contextualized argument about the evolution of European travel literature and its intellectual content, which not only seeks to identify the changes, but also aims to explain

their logic. Moreover an effort is made to discern to what extent as Europeans first and as individuals second, they came up against the Kashmir region, and to what extent they are reflecting the existing Asiatic realities and what limited their attitudes towards a Kashmir region. From the very beginning Kashmir remains a part of European writing and it is located in the North extremes of India. Kashmir has received a considerable attention in number of European travel texts. In exploring the region across its length and breadth, for the European viewers as well for the imperial authorities, the role played by travel writing is undeniable. Large number of European travel texts, covering a span of more than three centuries, deal with Kashmir as a favourite place. These writings have been utilized in reconstructing the history of the region. The European drive in Kashmir is an interesting question.

The metropolitan interests as well colonial authorities in India seem to have collided in looking for information on Kashmir. During the period of nineteenth century there were many inspiring factors that lay behind the heavy influx of Europeans to the Kashmir region. The inception of travelling foreign regions, had turned into an almost everybody's domain. When by the middle of nineteenth century the repetitive nature of travel writing of familiar world began to be perceived as less popular, travelers adopted an another route to keep alive the readers appetite for travel writing. The route, come through by resorting to explore the less familiar and far outlying non-European regions. At last, amid such circumstances, the less explored African and Asian territories emerged as the fruitful zone for travelers. Though among Asiatic territories, it was Kashmir that figured more frequently. Many travelers who visited the region include the names of men of divergent interests. Only some of them belong to the category of travelers who encountered the Orient owing to their curious humanist interests. Curiosity played a significant role, as a driving force behind their endeavour in Orient. Their travel accounts served well in the way of other following travelers to begin with. The latter ones though, apart from acknowledging the significance of former travel accounts, also paid an equal significance to the desires and interests of the era, they emerged in.



Likewise, the travel accounts written in the perspective of imperial era perceived Kashmir through an imperial prism. Therefore most of the travel accounts explain Kashmir region from the imperial view point. Thus on the path of travelers, travel and travel accounts of European began to echo like to the voices of English imperialism and their encounter with Kashmir was on behalf of the Empire.

#### THE NATURE OF THE EUROPEAN TRAVELERS

The European travelers were traveled with the interests and imperial desires of the Empire and attempt to explore the region's strategic importance. "The state corruption" and "the oratory of reformation" like tropes were utilized to appropriate Kashmir region. The constant kind of travel writing emerged a few travel texts that were ideologically situated. They would echo open humiliation for imperial hold that has not yet been sincerely implanted over Kashmir. In such type of Empire oriented and ideologically situated travel writing, a deep sense of weirdness was expressed. In suchlike vices and ferocious circles they found Kashmir valley has plunged in, the travel texts of the time ascribed it to its being away from or at a distance from the free-thinking British rule. Therefore, the region figured by the texts of both the humanists as well as the Imperial explorers, and was consequently represented in miscellaneous ways. Kashmir being a mountainous region among the lap of high altitude Himalayan Mountains which appears to have been a land locked country, enjoying no continuous relationship with the external world. Large number of travel documents are available to know about the different aspects of the region reveals it has been in contact with the rest of the world. There exists large number of travel writings that explain how the region's political economy and geographical location concerned the interests of colonial government of India. Therefore towards the second half of the nineteenth century, travelers constantly perceived lack of information on the country and its inhabitants. To the good quality of travel aspirations of the English imperial viewers, the valley of Kashmir, received additional place central to other mid-nineteenth century travel accounts due the Russian threat. The growing threat posed by Russia to English interest Punjab and Afghan territories, which are a

part of Great Game travel narratives also. Though owing to rapid victories in central Asia Russia exposed the possibility of being a prospective foe for the British wellbeing in India.

Similarly the instable Afghanistan and Russian interference into it fueled the feud. Among all these clashes of welfare, Kashmir emerged in the figure of a boundary, more constant, scientific, and tactical and worthy to surround the Russian threat. Stirring away from the Great Game narratives there also surfaced travel accounts that were provoked by evangelical welfare. Urbanized by missionary men, who travelled to Kashmir with an evangelical wish, to improve the lot of non-European societies, though mainly rhetorical, their travel documents reflects Kashmir as a fruitful ground for carrying out missionary works. Though they partly expressed counter hegemonic thoughts, and partly voiced a staunch imperialist agenda by postulating anti-imperial observations.

During the twentieth century European travel writings started to eulogize the extreme exoticness of East and Kashmir valley as one of its perfect residence. But that does not mean no-space for travelers who would resort to ponder over elements of Otherness. An odd characteristic of the European interest in the Kashmir region, led the travelers to envisage the Kashmir in the context of colonial background. Therefore, though with the help of travel photography, Kashmir was easily made available to Europeans, to grasp the peculiarities of Kashmir, with the impression of impartiality, as it has been there at the occasion of encounter. As a result the travel writing on Kashmir constitutes a substantial portion of European travel writing on Oriental lands. Also central to such a vast body of textual depiction of a region, multiple interests of Empire, the dynamic role of travelers, travel intentions and clash of diverse interests were involved. The quantity of inscribing a region with deep intentions to secure safe and safeguard the interests of Empire and its bonafides makes it vital that the genre of travels on Kashmir be analyzed in a proper context. A good number of European travel writings on Kashmir, as a mean to symbolize it, took place during the Colonial age. In addition to this the European travel writing on Kashmir had by and big



revealed its propensity to be preoccupied by the needs and desires of colonial authority. Though the presence of colonial authority in the depiction of Kashmir had made it much of the travel writing what Michel Foucault had termed as “place making.” Imperial influence and specific projection of diverse aspects of a Kashmir region in countless ways in travel writing was successfully a process that could not avoid the hegemonic place of imperial dialogue. Each new travel text was enhancing the ability of European speculations about a space they were interested in for numeral reasons. As a result most of the travelers encountered it on behalf of realm. In addition to this the presence of concerns of imperial realm in their awareness has led them to approach the region either for imperial business or for formal imperial power. They venture it “prospective” but distress under native rule; “degenerated” and thus needs messianic touch of imperial tenet.

### CONCLUSION

From the beginning of Europeans travel to Kashmir, dual strands of travel narratives emerged. The dominant strand treats Kashmir as an oriental landscape and the immediate surroundings as destination. The other treats Kashmir proper as a jumping off point for travel into the depths of the Karakoram Mountains or through Ladakh and into the less pedestrian lands of central Asia. The travel writing on Kashmir constitutes a substantial portion of European travel writing on Oriental lands and the central to such a vast body of textual depiction of a region, multiple interests of Empire, the dynamic role of travelers, travel intentions and clash of diverse interests were involved. The travel narratives emerged a picture of East which had to meet the twin requirements of faithful transcription and the interest of readership, for which they even compromised with the actual and observed realities. The valley of Kashmir proper stood on the known routes into the high mountains of the Karakoram and trade routes into Central Asia, and so became a staging point for all expeditions intent on exploring the inner sanctum of the mountains or venturing beyond into central Asia. These latter narratives encompass a host of motivations but all are constructed against the sedate activities depicted in

the majority of travel narratives on Kashmir. Indeed a dissatisfaction with the ‘trivial civilized pleasures of Kashmir’ seems to mark these latter narratives, and it is this disdain for the pedestrian virtues of Kashmir proper that are deployed to discursively separate the ‘explorer’ from the mere ‘traveler’. Gradually, the strategic importance of Kashmir to the British became evident and travel writing beyond the vale assumed a political dimension. Likewise a European travelers explored its “geo-strategic” importance to serve as a scientific boundary, term it religiously backward and keenly awaits for “reorganization,” and excessively “exotic” and “nostalgic” that they need to visit. Therefore most of the travel accounts explain Kashmir region from the imperial view point and thus on the path of travelers, travel and travel accounts of European began to echo like to the voices of English imperialism and their encounter with Kashmir was on behalf of the Empire. Though all these imperial concerns have rendered the travel texts of European travelers who choose to inscribe and represent Kashmir.

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