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A Critical Study of Mrs. C. G. Bruce's *Peep at Many Lands: Kashmir*

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Abstract

The paper aims to find colonial discourse present in *Peep at Many Lands: Kashmir* by Mrs. C. G. Bruce. She has written her travelogue in the colonial era which was common during the period. Many people traveled to colonial lands for diverse reasons and presented the image of colonized people in a derogatory manner to justify their presence in the colonized land as the civilizing mission. This research paper will find such notions, if any, in her travelogue.

Keywords- *Eurocentric, Colonial discourse, Grand Tour, Stereotypes*

Introduction

If colonialism is an important part of history, colonial texts are important in shaping up the colonial ideology in that history. During the colonial era, travelers, explorers, merchants and people from various backgrounds travelled for various purposes. Some travelled to quench literary thirst, some to satiate materialistic desires, some for spiritual enlightenment, and some for salubrious climate while many for opening up the East for West. When Grand Tour entered the Western society in which aristocrats sent their sons usually for a period of five years, to learn; a curiosity among middle classes also developed to travel across the world and when the means of travel became cheap and easy with the advent of railways and improvement of travel services, middle class men and women left their homes to hit the roads. During their journeys, they often noted down their experiences in the form of letters, journals, diaries which later on was published in the form of books for their audience at home who due to some reasons were unable to travel. So, it became important for those writers to create text in such a way that neither seemed exaggerated and nor was boring because of which it also became difficult to identify which events actually happened and which were creations of the travelers for their readers to grasp their interest. Travellers kept in mind their audiences while writing their experiences. Mrs C. G. Bruce, British traveler in *Peeps at Many Lands: Kashmir* (1911) writes:

There are many travelers at the present times who are fortunate enough to journey East and West. The North and South Poles even have their visitors. But there are still a great majority who cannot, for various reasons, even hope to cross the Channels. For their sake those of their countrymen who have the privilege of foreign travel try to describe by pen, brush, and with which either professional duty or leisurely trips have made them familiar. (5)

She compares the travel book to a magical carpet which could take anyone to the place it talks about and she asks the readers to “step into the magical carpet and fly with me to Kashmir” (6). Kashmir is a far-famed land whose beauty was immortalized in Thomas Moore’s *Lalla Rookh*. Following lines from *Lalla Rookh* have been quoted numerous times to describe the land of snow-clad peaks and flowers:

WHO has not heard of the Vale of Cashmere,
With its roses the brightest that earth ever gave,
Its temples, and grottos, and fountains as clear
As the love-lighted eyes that hung over their wave? (Moore 285)

It had been a tradition for the western writers of colonial era who attempted to write on Kashmir that they used to eulogize the land as paradise. but when it came to the natives and their society, they were portrayed as uncivilized. Postcolonial studies which was inaugurated by Edward Said highlights these aspects of the colonial writing in which land of the colonized was presented as remarkably beautiful but its people equally atrocious and unworthy of such land. Mrs C. G. Bruce was no different than her predecessors and followers in portraying Kashmir. Europeans associated many stereotypical images with the people of East in order to justify their presence in their society. John McLeod writes:

Oriental stereotypes fixed typical weakness as (amongst others) cowardliness, laziness, untrustworthiness, fickleness, laxity, violence and lust. Oriental peoples were often considered as possessing a tenuous moral sense and the readiness to indulge themselves in the more dubious aspects of human behaviour. In other words, Orientalism posited the notion that Oriental peoples needed to be made civilised and made to conform to the perceived higher moral standards upheld in the West. (46)

The coloniser always considered the colonised as an inferior being that was incapable of doing anything. This ideology of West finds eminence in the works of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, wherein he talks about ‘self’ and ‘other’. This representation of West about East also finds reference in the postcolonial resistance literature. Said writes that East became an object-

suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theatrical illustrations in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character. (7-8)

Such an approach of the occident over orient helped them to create an image of themselves which was superior in variety of disciplines from anthropology to zoology. Descriptions about eastern people and eastern society in travelogue of Mrs. C. G. Bruce are not different than the description of postcolonial critics about the colonizers. Bruce when describe nature and natural landscape of Kashmir, she portrays it heavenly but when it comes to the people, man made things and society of Kashmir, her perspective is Eurocentric. While describing the landscape of Kashmir, she writes: “Kashmir is such a beautiful country, blest with such a good climate, grand mountains, fine rivers and lakes, so rich for agricultural purposes, and garnished with such lovely wild flowers and fruits, that one exclaims, Surely the tales of fair Kashmir can be only fairy tales of good kings and happy, prosperous people” (Bruce 13). But when it comes to the houses of Kashmir she writes that when looked upon from a distance they appear Swiss in appearance but a closer look at them unveils that “they are very dirty” (Bruce 11). Edward Said highlighted that when Europeans has to describe something good and beautiful they would compare it with their lands. In this case Bruce first compared the houses with Swiss houses when looked at from a distance but when seen closely they were no more good and Swiss in nature.

Bruce times and again added pictures of Kashmir and its people in her book, as pictures also served a great purpose during colonial times by adding credibility and authenticity in the text that the writer was actually present in the place and is providing true account. As discussed earlier, colonizers had to justify their presence in the colonized lands in form of civilizing mission; Bruce also tried to justify the visit of European travelers by remarking:

The numbers of travellers who pour into the country every year during the summer months are doing a great service to Kashmir. They bring in money, and they encourage her trades in exchange for pleasure and health, but they do more. The breezy, sporting nature of the Sahib , the humanising influence of the ladies and Children, the devoted ministry of the medical missionaries , are all silently teaching a good proportion of the people that whining and cringing and untruth are not the characteristics of true men , that endurance and energy are . They meet with honest dealing and kindness, and show that they have learnt to trust their visitors, for there is

hardly a merchant who will not send his goods on approval, knowing nothing of his customers save that they are Sahibs. (Bruce 31)

Comparing the beauties and bounties of East with West served two fold purposes: firstly, to make the European readers fully acquaint with the place and secondly, beauties were compared with the West and then contrast were made by adding simultaneously the negative qualities of the East. It can be highlighted from the following words of Bruce where she writes “Srinagar reminds one of a large Swiss village with its Chalet—like houses and mountainous back ground. It also recalls parts of Venice and of the river Thames. A strange mixture, and lacking, of course, in the civilisation of all these places” (Bruce 32). Here she first compares Kashmir with Switzerland, Venice and London but then highlights the contrast by writing about the uncivilized Kashmiris, this was actually a colonial discourse of the era to justify the colonization. Many such episodes and words are scattered throughout the pages of book from where one can analyze that while describing Kashmir and Kashmiris Bruce was of Eurocentric perspective and could not dissociate her from the empire.

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