

Europeans on Kashmir: Translation as an Enabling Intervention

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Abstract: This paper proposes to study the enabling impact of the Western translation of Kashmiri folklore on the Kashmiri literature and culture. It will contest the popular and largely valid perception that the translation of Indian literary texts into English by the British colonizers was an Orientalist enterprise and had a definite agenda which was to give the Western readers a feel of the Indian mystique and to enable the colonizers to administer India. Further, the Western translators had a patronizing/colonizing attitude to the source language text that according to them was being 'improved' by translation. This paper will contend that Kashmiri literature (oral as well as written) has gained immensely by the interventions of the western translators of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Scholars like J. Hinton Knowles, Aurel Stein and George Grierson have played a pioneering and seminal role in documenting and perpetuating the folk literature of Kashmir. Their interest in this enterprise was purely academic and to date, the folktales translated by J. Hinton Knowles and Aurel Stein are considered to be standard and the starting point of any study of Kashmiri folklore.

As is well established, translation is not an isolated act but part of an ongoing process of intercultural transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Further, it is not an innocent, transparent activity but is highly charged with significance at every stage, which rarely involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems. Translations are always embedded in cultural and political systems, and in history. This paper proposes to study the impact of the Western translation of Kashmiri folklore and classical texts on the preservation and recording of Kashmiri literature and culture.

This paper contends that Kashmiri literature (oral as well as written) has gained immensely by the interventions of the western translators of the nineteenth-and early twentieth-century. Scholars like Aurel Stein and George Grierson have played a pioneering and seminal role in documenting and perpetuating the classical and folk literature of Kashmir. Their interest in this enterprise was largely academic and even now the folktales translated by J. Hinton Knowles and Aurel Stein are considered to be standard and the starting point of any study of Kashmiri folklore. In this paper I will restrict myself to delineating the collaboration between Aurel Stein and Pandit Govind Kaul, briefly referring to

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the contribution of Grierson in the production of *Hatim's Tales* and his collaboration with various Kashmiri scholars.

Until about thirty years ago, the most readily accepted definition of Orientalism was an academic one. Any one who taught, wrote about or researched the Orient was an Orientalist and this enterprise was designated as Orientalism. In the post-Edward Said era, the nexus of knowledge and power which 'created' the Orient and underpinned the Orientalist discourse thereby producing the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period has become a commonplace of the academia. Hence, any study of the scholarly efforts of the Europeans to collect and translate the folklore of any part of India cannot ignore the history and tradition of the Orientalist enterprise, one which was pioneered by Orientalist scholars like William Jones who professed that it was his "ambition to know *India* better than any other European knew it." (Said, 51) Many of the early European Orientalists in India were, like Jones, legal scholars, or else medical men with strong missionary leanings. Further most of them were imbued with the dual purpose of investigating "the sciences and the arts of Asia, with the hope of facilitating ameliorations there and of advancing knowledge and improving the arts at home." (Orientalist goal stated in the *Centenary Volume* of The Royal Asiatic Society founded in 1823.) Undoubtedly Said's *Orientalism* created a discourse articulating binary categories: orientalism and colonialism, colonizer and colonized, self and other. The post-Said scholarship of the past two decades has been critical of the colonial administrators in their role as Orientalists, and has analyzed their works in order to show the colonial biases underlying their representation of the Orient. In this new paradigm of thought, too, however, the colonized or the oriental has been the passive point, much the same silent 'other' as in the colonial orientalist writings. Thus, from a post-Said perspective it is possible to view scholars like Aurel Stein and George Grierson as colonizer scholars/folklorists whose work is a usurpation of the labours of several Kashmiri scholars who played a vital role in the translation and hence the production and the collections of folklore and other oral narratives. However, as I will attempt to foreground in my paper, the system of binary opposites--colonizer-colonized, ruler-ruled, foreigner-native, scholar-assistant, or even self-other, cannot yet encompass the association and collaboration of the European and Kashmiri scholars in the collection and translation of Kashmiri oral narratives and classical texts. It is a situation wherein the so-called colonized, ruled, native assistant is as educated as his British counterpart is self-conscious, willing, and appreciative of the work. The colonizer, ruler, foreign scholar is also a missionary, a geographer/explorer and a bureaucrat, and a resident of India for the greater part of his life. Thus it is possible to see him both as the self, and the other, depending on whose perspective he is seen from. It is also possible to discern multiple agencies in the production of knowledge within the structures of colonialism and

these agencies interact in far more complex ways than can be comprehended within a system of binary oppositions. Colonialism generated an intercultural mental space within its overall power structures, but this space had to be, and was, negotiated by the individuals who deployed both their power positions and their individual strategies. This combination, understandably, differed from one person to another and also made a difference in the knowledge thus generated.

Perhaps the best example of this complex relationship between the European scholars and the Kashmiris may be seen in the interface between Aurel Stein and Pandit Govind Kaul in their collaboration while translating Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* and *Hatim's Tales*. The interface between Kashmiri Pandit scholars and their Western counterparts has contributed considerably to the literary legacy of Kashmir. Beginning in the last quarter of the nineteenth century it continued till the second quarter of the twentieth century and played a pivotal role in recording and perpetuating Kashmiri language, literature and culture.

Dr. Marc Aurel Stein, a Hungarian by birth and a naturalized British citizen, arrived in India at the end of 1887, as Registrar of Punjab University and Principal of the newly founded Oriental College at Lahore. He first visited Srinagar, Kashmir during his first summer in India, in June 1888 where he was received by Kashmir Governor, Dr. Suraj Kaul. It was in this very visit that Stein expressed his desire to acquire the Sanskrit manuscripts from Kashmiri Pandits. He was amazed by the abundance and diversity of Sanskrit manuscripts in every nook and corner of the valley about which his teacher and another European scholar (Georg Buhler) who had spent several years in Kashmir had written a detailed report. Soon after his arrival in Kashmir, Stein met some of the foremost and learned Kashmiri scholars who were interested in collaborating with the Europeans. These were Pandit Govind Kaul, Pandit Nityanand Shastri, Pandit Mukandram and Pandit Sahaz Bhat. Of these he formed a lasting and academically fruitful association with Pandit Govind Kaul collaborating with him in the translation and editing of *Rajatarangini* as well as his collection of folktales entitled *Hatim's Tales*.

Stein was aware of the existence of the only true manuscript of *Rajatarangini* which Buhler had called the Codex Archetypus. During his stay in Srinagar in the summer of 1888, Stein obtained two manuscripts. First was in the possession of Pandit Balbhadra Razdan which was copied in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and second was copied around the same time from the Codex archetypus and was in the possession of Pandit Govind Kaul. Quick to notice Govind Kaul's special interest in antiquarian subjects, Stein was inspired to plan a critical edition and commentary of Kalhana's Chronicle of Kashmir in collaboration with the former. This was the beginning of a long period of close association between the two in scholarly interests and work, and continued practically unbroken for nearly eleven years till Kaul's untimely death in June 1899.

The plan to edit *Rajatarangini* (which is the oldest written record of the various dynasties which ruled Kashmir from the earliest period down to Kalhana's own time) first suggested itself to Stein in the summer of 1888, when he visited Srinagar. This monumental task he accomplished in two phases; first was the Sanskrit edition of 1892 which he edited with Pandit Govind Kaul, and the second was the masterly two-volume, *Rajatarangini* translated into English with an introduction, commentary and appendices published in 1900. As stated by Stein, neither the Sanskrit edition of *Rajatarangini* published in 1892, nor the commentated translation of it published in 1900 would have been possible without the multifarious and invaluable assistance he received from Kaul which he has put on record. To quote Stein:

among those who have assisted me in carrying out this task I must mention in the first place Pandit Govind Kaul of Srinagar whose help in connection with *Rajatarangini* I was fortunate enough to secure during my first visit to Kashmir. Pandit Govind Kaul has rendered me very valuable assistance in communicating oral traditions of Kashmirian Pandits as well as the results of his own researches on many points connected with Kalhana's narrative and with ancient topography of the country. His spirit of scientific enquiry and his thorough acquaintance with the history and geography of his country have enabled him to find new explanations to many difficult passages of *Rajatarangini*. These explanations have frequently influenced me in the selection of readings for my text. I owe to Pandit Govind Kaul a careful collation of manuscript which was made before I obtained the use of archetypes. . . . I have received equally useful assistance from a younger Kashmiri scholar Pandit Mukandram. I am indebted to both scholars for much information on Kashmirian topics without which correct comprehension of Kalhana's text is unattainable and I gladly take this opportunity to thank them publicly for unflagging zeal and industry which they have shown in collecting it. I trust the services they have thus rendered to all students of the chronicle of Kashmir will meet with due recognition in their own country. (quoted in Pandita, 64-65)

Hatim's Tales was published in 1917, several years after the death of Pandit Govind Kaul. Stein dedicated it to the memory of his dear friend and associate of many years. In the Preface to the *Tales*, he not only gave a detailed account of the manner in which the tales were collected, transcribed and translated, but also paid glowing tribute to Pandit Govind Kaul. As Stein points out, his interest in the "language and folklore of Kashmir arose from the labours which, during the years 1888-98, I devoted to the preparation of my critical edition of Kalhana's Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir and of my commentated translation of it. The elucidation of the manifold antiquarian questions which these tasks implied, and which in various ways constituted their chief attraction for me, was possible only in close touch with Kashmir scholars, and needed constant reference to the

traditional lore of their alpine land.” (Stein, xv). While encamped on Mohand Marg working on his translation of *Rajatarangini*, Stein noticed that the villagers spoke intelligently with clear utterance which was very different from the phonetic features of Kashmiri spoken by townfolk of Srinagar, whether Brahmans or Muhammedans. The rich store of popular lore that Kashmir had in the form of folktales, songs and proverbs also attracted him. And so, in the summer of 1896, when he was working on *Rajatarangini* in the seclusion of his cherished mountain camp, Mohand Marg, he embarked upon the venture of collecting folktales. He was fortunate in securing the services of Hatim Tilawon, a professional story-teller who was held in high esteem in that part of the country. Hatim was a cultivator settled in the little hamlet of Panzil, and owed his surname to the fact that he possessed an oil press. Recounting his first encounter with Hatim, Stein says,

When he had been induced to climb up to my mountain height and had favoured Pandit Govind Kaul and myself with his first recitation, we were both much struck by his intelligence, remarkable memory, and clear enunciation. His repertoire of stories and songs was a large one. Though wholly illiterate, he was able to recite them at any rate of speed which might suit our ears or pens; to articulate each word from the context, and to repeat it, if necessary, without any change in pronunciation. Nor did the order of his words or phrases ever vary after however long an interval he might be called upon to recite a certain passage again. The indication of two or three initial words repeated from my written record would be sufficient to set the disk moving in this living phonographic machine.

Stein was able to retain Hatim in his mountain camp for about six weeks, and during that time he recorded the tales. Progress was slow because Stein was meticulous about recording each word phonetically and so often required it to be repeated several times. “Whenever a story was completed I used to read it out to Hatim, who never failed to notice and correct whatever deviation from his text may have crept in through inadvertence or defective hearing.” (Stein, xiv)

About the assistance he received from Pandit Govind Kaul while recording these materials Stein acknowledged that he would have hesitated attempting this task had he not been assured of Pandit Govind Kaul’s most competent and painstaking collaboration.

The intimate knowledge which long years of scholarly work carried on in constant close contact had given me of his methods and standards, enabled me to leave certain essential portions of the work entirely to his share and with fullest confidence in the result. I could feel completely assured that with that rare thoroughness and conscientious precision which distinguished all his work on the lines of the traditional Sanskrit scholar, his record of Hatim’s text written down in Devanagari characters

simultaneously with my own would be as exact as the system, or want of system, of Kashmiri spelling current among Srinagar Pandits would permit. I was equally certain that he would spare no trouble to make his interpretation of it, both in the form of an interlinear word-for-word version and of an idiomatic Sanskrit translation, as accurate as possible. (xiii)

Kaul's text as written down at the time of dictation was always revised simultaneously with Stein's. The interlinear translation was then added in the course of the following day, after references to Hatim were made, wherever doubts arose about the meaning of particular words or phrases. The preparation of the fair copy of both, with the idiomatic Sanskrit rendering added, was a task which helped to keep Pandit Govind Kaul occupied during Stein's absence in Europe for part of 1897.

Hatim's Tales was finally published in London in 1917. It was George Grierson who undertook the task of revising, editing and publishing the work, and as he was in the course of editing it, he noticed the lacuna left in Kaul's record of Hatim's last tale due to the accidental loss of the concluding pages and some missing words in the text. Fourteen years after he had first recited the texts in 1896, Hatim's services were once more solicited. His recollection of the story was as fresh as ever although he had given up being a professional story-teller, and he recited the tale in exactly the same words as he had fourteen years ago, thus enabling Stein to record the concluding pages of the tale.

This account of the recording and translation of *Hatim's Tales* clearly underscores not only the collaboration between Stein and Kaul, but the crucial and vital role that the latter played in the entire venture. Stein was not slow to acknowledge this and in the preface to the *Tales*, published several years after the death of Kaul, he paid fulsome tribute to not only Pandit Kaul but to the entire Kashmiri pandit community, perhaps because, to use a clichéd phrase, he had fallen in love with Kashmir and his home on Mohand Marg.

"It affords me an appropriate opportunity for recording some data about the life of a cherished friend and helpmate whose memory deserves to be honoured for the nobility of his character as much as for his scholarly gifts and labours. The association of Pandit Govind Kaul during close on ten years with my own efforts bearing on the history and antiquities of Kashmir has always been appreciated by me as a special favour of Fortune, or—to name the goddess under her own Kashmirian form—of Sharada, who is the protectress of learning as well as of the alpine land which claims to be her home; for he seemed to embody in his person all the best characteristics of that small but important class among the Brahmans of Kashmir to which the far-off and secluded mountain territory owes its pre-eminent position in the history of Indian learning and literature.

"I cannot attempt to indicate here the evidence to be gathered both from the Sanskrit literary products of Kashmir and from surviving local tradition, which makes me believe that high scholarly attainments and a special

facility of elegant rhetorical or poetic expression were to be found among the truly learned in Kashmir more frequently combined than elsewhere in India with a keen eye for the realities of life, power of humorous observation, and distinct interest in the practical affairs of the country. Kalhana himself seemed aptly to illustrate this typical combination of features. In Pandit Govind Kaul I found them all again and united with a high sense of humour, a bearing of true innate nobility, and a capacity for faithful attachment which from the first made me cherish him greatly as friend, not only as an accomplished mentor in most things appertaining to Kashmir and its traditional past. (Stein, xv-xvi)

Stein concluded his Preface to *Hatim's Tales* by reiterating his love and appreciation for Kashmir and Govind Kaul:

But my love for Kashmir has remained unchanged, and so also my gratitude for the great boon it has given me in Pandit Govind Kaul's friendship and help. That I was enabled to prefix a record of his life to this volume and thus to do something to preserve his memory, is a privilege I appreciate greatly. (Stein, Preface, xxvi).

Undoubtedly, *Hatim's Tales* is a striking instance of international and inter-religious collaboration---a Hungarian, an Irishman (both naturalized British citizens), and two Kashmiris; a Jew, a Christian, a Hindu and a Muslim, all contributed to the recording and production of the work. That the work was finally published in London and with a European as the author, does underscore the imperial power structure and the hegemony of the West. To some extent it may be viewed as the appropriation of the knowledge of India by the Europeans. However, on the basis of the above analysis of the collaboration between Stein and Govind Kaul, I would still argue that from a postcolonial perspective these two categories----British and Indian--- are not ultimately separable in the knowledge thus generated. Past records need to be expanded beyond the limits of colonial perspectives.

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A Tagore painting