

Reading Orientalism in John Tallis's Map of Northern India

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Abstract

Cartographic history, in the last couple of decades has witnessed an increasing influence of Edward Said's Orientalism. Colonial discourses created an image of India that reflected its own prejudices and stereotypes. Colonial Maps of India as part of this discourse reflect this perception, and intent. Deriving from 'orientalism' in general and 'imagined geographies' in particular the present essay explores the vignettes in John Tallis's, Map of Northern India. It is argued that in these imaginative geographies Europeans represented a distorted, oriental, 'other' image of India.

Keywords: *cartography, vignette, orientalism, colonialism, Eurocentric, binary*

Introduction

The present article attempts to explore and infer imagery of India in the maps collected in John Tallis's, *The Illustrated Atlas, and modern history of the world*, following Said's concept of 'orientalism' in general and 'imagined geographies' in particular. 'Orientalism' was a binary opposition created by European as 'superior', 'western', 'themselves', and the 'inferior', 'orient', 'other'. It was created to represent and control the east or non-western. From this, emanated the notion of 'imagined geographies' which refers to perception of space and subjects represented in texts, images, and cartographies articulating sense of fantasy, mystery, and wonder, by their producer, as an outside observer (Desbiens, 2017: 1-6).

Maps are among the oldest forms of human communication. They are basic tools for helping our mind to comprehend the surrounding world. Even before the arrival of maps as physical artifacts, it is assumed that there must have existed, a cognitive mapping of spatial information (Harley, 1987: 1). The animals also have the ability to convey information about spatial relationships, as studies of animal behavior have revealed examples of mapping procedures (Lewis, 1987: 50). Alongside the trajectory of human history, we can observe and trace the development of cartography from prehistoric to the modern period (Smith, 1987) (Schwartzberg, 1992). The progress of modern cartography coincided with the maritime expeditions of Europe in the 15th century and grew exponentially during the colonization of the Americas, Africa, and Asia. During the period of colonization, cartography became an instrument for expansions and control, while concurrently; on the other hand, cartography

also shaped the direction of colonization (Tally, 2016: 1). In the 19th century, cartography embodied, in its process and product, the dominant colonial authority. This phenomenon was best evident in India where European powers, specifically the British, 'defined their current holdings and laid the ground for expansionist ambitions' (Chester, 2000: 256-257) (Kalpagam, 1995: 87-88).

Critical Cartography

Since the Middle Ages the cartographers aimed to represent spatial features and relations through abstraction in maps. Maps were considered truth documents accurately representing the real physical world. However, in the 1980's, cartography witnessed a paradigm shift and this view of map, being objective truth, was challenged by various scholars. Critical Cartography is an explanatory framework and methodological approach that postulates maps as reflecting relations of power. In the past few decades, researchers have moved away from the earlier focus on geographical accuracy to interpreting maps themselves in their historical milieu (Kitchin, Perkins & Dodge, 2009: 4-9). The ongoing multi-volume *History of Cartography* project (Harley et al, 1988) is one such example of this paradigm shift. The editors, Harley and Woodward stressed on content instead of the form of maps. Many chapters in this book discuss the indigenous, pre-modern maps or map like objects found in different cultures throughout the history. The notion that maps are texts or discourses that need to be read was used by researchers in late 1980s, deriving from various already existing theories from philosophy, literary theory, sociology etc. For J. B. Harley, maps are meaningful images, he asserts that maps need to be understood within the historical contexts they were created in order to delineate the interests of its makers (Harley, 1988: 278-303). As opposed to the normative perspective, Harley viewed maps as social constructions, thereby, expressing power. Harley's work (1988, 1989, 1990), drawing specifically from Michel Foucault and Derrida, were one of the early works that discussed power, ideology and surveillance in relation to map and map-making (Crampton and Krygier, 2006: 16). Harley's work drew criticism from many scholars. Harley states that he owed most of the ideas in his essay to writings by Foucault and Derrida (1989, 2-3). While, Dennis Wood (1993: 53-54) has criticised Harley's work in detail, Barbara Belyea (1992: 1-2) point out that Harley's 'knowledge of Derrida and Foucault was gained largely from commentaries on their work rather than from their own writing'. Kitchin, Perkins & Dodge (2009: 11), citing Denis Wood (1993) and Jeremy Crampton (2003), also agree that Harley's 'application of Foucault to cartography is limited'. Dennis Wood's book *The Power of Maps* (1992) claimed that maps contrary to general belief can never be sterile and unbiased, in reality they are always full of intent, and how map-maker hide advancing this intent. He argues that maps, when closely inspected, could reveal the power inherent in them. Wood with John Fels and John Krygier, in *Rethinking the Power of Maps* (2010), an extension and rework of his *The Power of Maps*, explores and examines maps, and their meaning. They demonstrate that maps are propositions; they diffuse information,

myths, and articulate authority. Jeremy Black's *Politics and Maps* (1997) deals with how objectivity and ideology play a significant and crucial role in defining the contents of maps. He asserts that maps are innately political. He does not accept the idea that maps can be neutral and objective records of a territory and demonstrates that they are political tools.

There are many works that studied colonial cartography of India as one of the European knowledge creating projects, and the vital role these projects played in the construction of the 'colonized orient', following Edward Said's thesis of 'orientalism'. Kapil Raj (2007) in his book *Relocating Modern Science* devoted two specific chapters on mapping and surveying in which he studies how modern cartography in India was founded with the efforts of British and Indian subjects. The work of Mathew Edney (1997), *Mapping an Empire* is also significant. He examines the 19th century British projects on the line of J. B. Harley's belief that map are not true images rather when deconstructed they can reveal complex rhetoric and distortion. In order to explain the nature of British imperialism in India, Edney's work as he claims, extends the work of other South Asianists such as Ronald Inden, demonstrating how British created the oriental 'other', C. A. Bayly showing that the British representations were preserved in myths of rationality, order, and accuracy, and Thomas Metcalf's view that British created the difference between them and Indians to justify their rule (Edney, 1997: 33-34).

'Orientalism' in India

Edward Said (1978), in his magnum opus, *Orientalism*, reveals the prejudices against East, the 'Orient', that existed in the western imagination. It describes the process of how European colonial powers in the 19th Century constructed the Orient in order to dominate and obtain authority over the East (Koefoed and Haldrup, 2020). Said's primary critique was that Westerners generalized, and stereotyped the society and culture of the East as primitive, barbarian, unchanging, and exotic who were stuck in the past; while the West or 'Occident' is modern, developed, and mundane. During this process, he created the binaries of West/East, us/other, and superior/lesser (Culcasi, 2006: 688).

The term 'Orient' comes from the Latin word *oriens* meaning east or facing east in relation to Europe. Before Edward Said's work 'orientalism' had a positive connotation, it referred to study of Eastern society, history, language, and culture (Fox, 2001) (Heehs, 2003: 169). The basic premise of Said's 'Orientalism' was that since the Europeans, throughout its history, engaged mostly with themselves therefore, their culture and worldviews were very Eurocentric. So, when European interaction with the East grew exponentially, they split the world into Europe and the Orient. In doing so, this term 'orient', now represented anything that is not European, including the regions of the world which were not even part of the east. Europeans held their society as 'superior' and the East or the 'other', as inferior, so 'Orientalists' or European colonizers used it to justify colonizing the East. The differences of the 'orient' were seen as 'weakness' and they assumed that they were doing 'lesser' a favour. For Said orientalism as a discourse was vindictive, a-historical and totalitarian. Said's critique was

influential in the development of postcolonial theory which flourished in literary studies, history, anthropology, sociology, etc. (San, 1998: 29) (Hamadi, 2014: 39). The focus of post-colonialism is on the struggles of newly independent countries, who threw off the colonial order post WW II, at the level of identity, culture, and history and not just the political or economic issues they confronted. It studies the impact of colonialism and its processes on both the colonizer and the colonized (Culcasi, 2006: 688). While Edward Said's work focused on Middle East, however his method is acceptably appropriate to other regions of the world. A number of scholars have extended Said's orientalism to India (Jouhki, 2006: 6).

Ronald Inden, in his *Imagining India* (2000) divides the Western discourses on India into commentative, explanatory and hegemonic accounts. He argues on the lines of Said's thesis, that over the past two hundred years, these discourses have illustrated 'orient' as 'other' and 'inferior' to the west. He shows how India was 'imagined' as incapable to know and act itself rationally. In Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer's *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* (1993), a number of essays follow the concept of orientalism. Van der Veer in his essay goes further from Said's position and shows how 'orientalist discourse' sometime also empowers the colonised in order to pursue self-identity. Kyoko Matsukawa's (2000) doctoral thesis is worth mentioning who also applies this extrapolation of orientalism to India. The focus is on the period between the first arrival of Portuguese in India towards the end of the 15th century, and witnessing the rise of modern orientalism in the first half of the eighteenth century. Matsukawa's in his work explains the historical process of the European categorising of Indian as the 'Other'.

Historians of cartography has also engaged with orientalism implicitly and explicitly from focusing on the imperialist cartography of halcyon colonial period to 20th century cartographic material embedded with orientalist notions (Culcasi 2006: 688). In India a significant body of research addressed orientalism in British cartography. In this direction a significant work is Mathew Edney's *Mapping an Empire* (1997). Although, we have already discussed this work earlier in the paper however, one instance in this book is worth noting here, as it is very relevant to the theme of this article. Edney analysis a cartouche of James Rennel's, 1782 map of *Hindoostan*, an allegorical scene, full of oriental imagery, in which Britannia is shown receiving Hindu sacred texts from Brahmins in protection from Muslims. Thomas Trautmann says that 'every intellectual project derives its meaning in relation to larger, collective projects that long preceded...' (Trautmann 2006: 3). He distinguishes New Orientalism focusing on India, Sanskrit and Vedas from Old Orientalism that learnt Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish, etc. Therefore, this new Orientalism appeared from the old since Europeans explored India through Persian language. Tracing dynamic patterns in *longue durée*, he identifies that it was Claudius Ptolemy who initiated 'locational project' of mapping of the earth in his *Geography*. He further reasons that modern mapping of India was not a product of colonialism instead it was carried forward by the 'Ptolemaic space' project of the deep past (2009: 155-188). Michael Mann's (2003) paper, *Mapping the Country: European Geography and the Cartographical Construction of India, 1760-90*, is an important work in this

direction. He argues that British cartographic works led to its economic, political and finally military development in India and maps, unlike scientific cartography in Europe for administrative objectives, were used as a tool for control and dominance. Another noteworthy work is by U. Kalpagam, she also argues and demonstrates how modern cartographic representation of India and colonial projects of conquest are entangled by studying major British surveys that were initiated during colonial period of India (Kalpagam, 1995). Baijayanti Chatterjee, in her paper, sees mapping of Bengal by Britishers and French, as a development of colonisation and imperial expansion. Unlike many scholars who viewed colonial cartography as rectilinear practice of control, she shows the interplay between Indian and colonial cartography (Chaterjee, 2021). Tarun Kumar Mondal, also in his paper has examined the how dynamics of Indian cartography has played from colonial to a post-independence period (Mondal, 2019).

Decorations in Maps as 'Imaginative Geographies'

Europeans, through oriental discourse, created imaginative geographies, 'othering' or representing places, people, and cultures, expressing power dynamics. The imaginative geographies produced images which mirrored the prejudices, stereotypes, and desires of their authors. These images, within in their layers, can reveal the dialectic power between authors and the subjects. Imaginative geographies are both a tool and an outcome of orientalism in which 'self' and 'other' is realized (Al-Mahfedi, 2011: 9). Although, the tradition of decorating maps has been there since early times however, as the knowledge grew deeper and deeper during the exploration era, we see an outburst of these decorations in and around maps. These decorations took the form of cartouche, marginalia, vignettes, and borders. Cartographers filled the previously blank spaces and started depicting, cultures and people of new territories. Often, the maps of newly discovered territories and mystical east were decorated with imaginary animals, monsters, ruins of buildings, native inhabitants in traditional attire, flora and fauna. The nature and form of these decorations and images were shaped and reshaped as colonial discourse changed through time. In the case of India, traveller's accounts of Magesthenes, Marco polo and others were used to produce images to decorate maps. These decorative images make maps as 'cultural texts' and 'ideological image' (Clarke, 1988: 455-456).

John Tallis's Illustrated Atlas of the World

John Tallis, an English Publisher, was born at Stourbridge, Worcestershire, on 7 November 1817, the eldest son of John Tallis and Lucinda Chance. He is well regarded for his cartographic publications in the 19th century (Jackson, 1969: 19). He inherited his father's business of bookselling and publishing and expanded it to include many other aspects of book production. During his lifetime he published various views maps, and atlases under various business names including Tallis and Co, John Tallis& Company, and later the London Printing and

Publishing Company (Jackson, 1969: 25-26). The Crystal Palace or the Great Exhibition of 1851, which was held in Hyde Park in London from May 1 to October 15, 1851, to commemorate the industrial and technological progress of Great Britain (Kallen, 2018: 1). This captured Tallis's attention and he published *Tallis's History and description of the Crystal Palace and the Exhibition of the World's Industry in 1851* (Tallis et al, 1852) (Jackson 1969: 23). He also published *The Illustrated Atlas, And Modern History of the World Geographical, Political, Commercial & Statistical*. His *Illustrated Atlas of the World*, published for the Great Exhibition of 1851, is regarded as the last decorative atlas to be published in England (Jackson, 1969: 21). The *Tallis's Illustrated Atlas* includes eighty-two maps which were drawn by John Rapkin, and the vignettes were engraved by various artists. All maps have borders decorated with intricate foliage patterns and some vignettes of buildings, animals, birds, or local people. Although, three maps depict India and its parts but, our focus is on one map that is *Northern India Including Presidency of Calcutta*.

Map of Northern India

The map of *Northern India Including Presidency of Calcutta* is a very decorative map showing various places of northern India and Bengal Presidency with places of Nepal and Bhutan. It has vine pattern border and shows around six inset vignettes, The Seal of the East India Company on top left, Car of Juggernaut on top middle, The British Residency – Hyderabad on top right, Tiger Hunt on bottom left, Ruins - Old Delhi on bottom right, and Hindoos on right side. A sole Muslim figure is shown standing in action, in between the vignette of Car of Juggernaut, and British Residency, while a decorative vine surrounds these three images. At the bottom of the map, inside the decorative border, it shows legends which specifies that British possessions with pink colour, states under British protection in yellow colour & independent states in green colour. At the bottom outside the decorative border the name of the publishing company is shown, J&F Tallis, London, Edinburgh, & Dublin. On the bottom right outside the decorative border it reads The Illustrations by A. H Wray & Engraved by J. H. Kernot. The latitude and longitudes are written on the decorative vine pattern border.

Now we focus on analysing these decorations as oriental imagery. The inset vignette, Car of Juggernaut is very striking in many ways. It shows a procession or *rathayatra* with a massive chariot or *ratha* with a large crowd surrounding it and mountains in the background. The famous annual festival of Jagannath Temple of Puri, involves public procession of a chariot in the form of a temple, carrying idols of Hindu *deities*, *Jagannath*, *Subhadra*, and *Balabhadra*. The term 'Juggernaut' is the anglicized form of Lord Jagannath. The earliest description of this event is found in account of Friar Odoric of Pordenone (1274? –1331) who travelled many parts of Asia and stayed in China between 1316 and 1327. Later this work was copied and expanded by Sir John Mandeville, in his work *The Voyage and Travels of Sir John Mandeville, Knight* (Moseley, 2015: 14-19). Mandeville described this procession emphasizing on a particular part where sometimes pilgrims die under the huge wheels of

the chariot. He says, 'Many pilgrims also put themselves under the chariot wheels, to the end that their false god may go over them... every year, there die under the said filthy idol more than 500 persons' (Mandeville, 1997: 333). Later during the colonial period, as seen in the writings of Rev. Claudius Buchanan (1843), and many others, Juggernaut, came to be associated with violence, death, and bloodshed. Buchannan's description speaks of how Europeans viewed Indian rituals as savage, primitive and wrong and how Indians can be saved from this 'cult' by Christianity. The 'othering' is visible in the description and popularization of the term Juggernaut to portray Indian culture in a binary opposition. By the mid nineteenth century Juggernaut still referred the Jagannath Temple of Odisha but, slowly with the time the actual meaning of Juggernaut kept shifting towards anything that was in opposition to Europe (Altman, 2017: 30-34). The vignette of the Tiger Hunt, drawn on bottom left, depicts a jungle scene, in which people mounted on elephants are hunting tigers, one of which is being attacked and the other is shown in the foreground hiding in the grasses. Elephant and tiger were emphasized by Europeans in their paintings and fiction for a long time since their arrival in India. Europeans used these animals while describing India so much that they sometimes symbolised India. These were the oriental animals and in this hunting scene both are shown as something that needs to be controlled and dominated. These hunting scenes became site of power and dominance projections. For Europeans India was mysterious and adventurous land where they can express masculinity (Torri, 2013: 45). Another vignette is the seal of the East India Company, drawn on the top left register of the map is quite different from the 17th century and later 19th century seals. It shows the one stage of evolution of the East India Company's seal as it coursed its path from being a trading company to a behemoth trade, administrative and military power.

The vignette of Ruins, Old Delhi is quite interesting as it displays the nineteenth century European desire, for ruins that signifies the remoteness in time and space. There are many maps and paintings drawn in colonial period that depicts these images of old building in ruins (Bozdogan, 1986: 53-54). Bozdogan, while discussing orientalism and architecture argues that through orientalist discourse Europeans 'reconstructed' the East 'verbally and visually'. By producing images of historical buildings Europeans 'us' created Indian 'their' history and culture in a narrow, stereotypical, and biased approach.

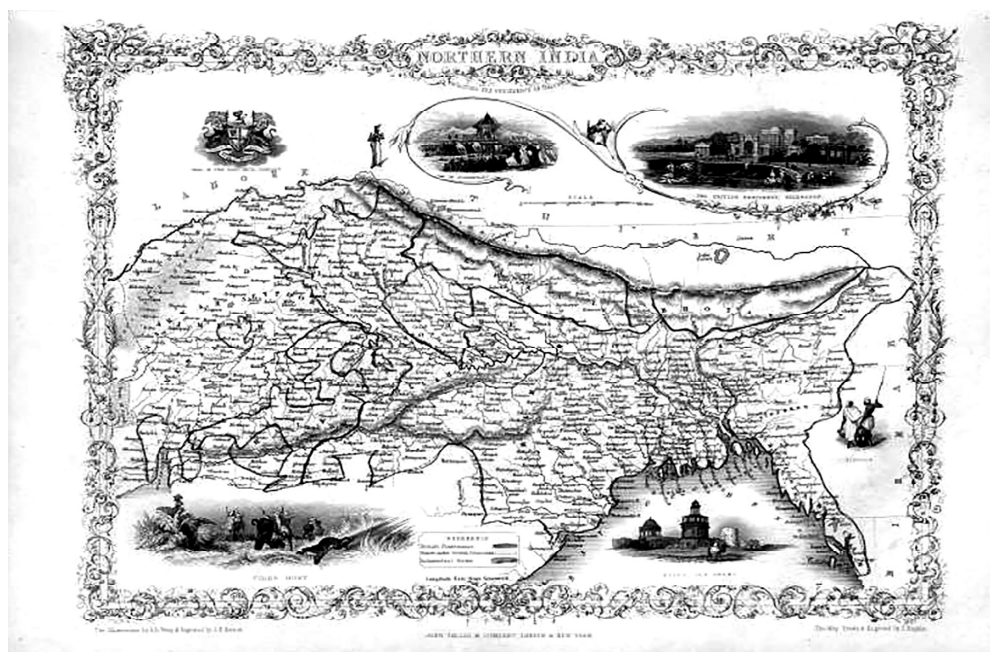
Similar preconception and categorization of cultures as 'other' is seen in the vignette of Hindoos, where a soldier is conversing with a woman, both of them are shown in their traditional attire signifying poor, traditional, and strange. The sole Muslim figure in traditional attire shown on top exemplifies same emotions of 'othering' and 'strange'.

The vignette in the top right register labelled, British Residency, Hyderabad showing British Residency complex on the banks of the river Musi with a procession of some sort passing through its gates with elephants. It was built in 1803–1806 as a Palladian palace by Col. James Achilles Kirkpatrick and was designed by Lieutenant Samuel Russell of the Madras Engineers. It was a residence of the officer of Indian Political Service (Khalidi, 2008: 115). The site was grandiose symbolising the power and supremacy of the British Empire. The rising

economic influence demanded new buildings with western elements signifying triumph of British over India

Conclusions

Imaginative geographies were utilised by European powers for representation, othering India and its culture through recourse to specific imagery reflecting and enabling relations of power. The images used as an example of this 'orientalist discourse' are only a small part of the images that were created throughout the 18th and 19th century. With the above, discussion it become apparent that maps in general are not mute and sterile but they are verbose and signify the meaning of their authors. The particular map of Northern India from the maps collected in Tallis's, *The Illustrated Atlas* is one such example which through its drawn vignettes displays the oriental imagery of India by the British.



Map of Northern India Including Presidency of Calcutta in Tallis's, *The Illustrated Atlas, And Modern History of The World Geographical, Political, Commercial & Statistical*.

From David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries

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