

## Constructed Alterity in Mustansir Hussain Tarar's *Andulus Mein Ajnabi*

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### ABSTRACT

*The late twentieth century, influenced by Post-modern and Post-colonial discourses, Feminist and Deconstruction theory has unveiled ideological and political underpinnings behind so called scientific and objective narratives of past. Travelogue writing is one such genre which has been microscoped under the impact of these discourses and ideological motives brought to limelight. Travel writing, instead of giving a faithful portrayal of the target culture betrays personal prejudices of the writer and by doing so it stifles the voice and marginalises the narratives of the depicted culture. A traveller manipulates and constructs a culture through various discursive strategies like ethnic, racial and other groups. My contention in this paper is to scrutinize Andulus Mein Ajnabi by a renowned Pakistani travel writer Mustansir Hussain Tarar. The paper intends to establish that by assuming the objective role of an anthropologist and ethnographic reporter, Tarar only betrays a deep embedded religious and cultural prejudices. The use of historical commentary, autobiographical memories and philosophical ideas are only a garb to cover deep seated hatred of a Muslim against Christian culture.*

**Keywords:** Alterity, postcolonialism, representation, stereotyping, prejudiced perspective, travelogue

### INTRODUCTION

Serafin Roldan Santiago in his article "V. S. Naipaul's Vulcanization of Travel and Fiction Paradigm" exposes subjective approach behind so called scientific travelogues and their claim for faithful depiction of geographical, historical and social reality. To him, travel narratives are embedded with fictional elements and figures; likewise fiction includes many travel constituents and styles and both deal with representations that are many times exaggerated and inexact, sometimes indistinct and bizarre, hence a tool for creating alterity for the represented cultures. This is true of many types of writing discourses, such as, historical writing, investigative journalism, political treatises and natural historical writings, he establishes.

Likewise, Susan Bassnett in *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* states that contemporary reading of the travels, inspired by differing methodologies deriving from gender stereotypes, cultural studies and post-modernist theory, reveal underlying meanings of seemingly innocuous information of voyage in other lands that make possible to see more distinctly the means in which travellers create the civilizations they experience. From travellers' accounts of their journeys, we can trace the presence of cultural stereotypes and the way in which an individual reacts to what is seen elsewhere can reflect tendencies in the travellers' home culture.

Women and men are transformed into objects; creatures who acquire a substance to exist. The map maker, the translators and the travel authors are not the naive producers of the

manuscript. The works they produce are primary component of a procedure of management that forms and conditions negatively reader's outlook towards other civilizations.

## POST COLONIALISM AND POSTCOLONIAL LITERARY THEORY

Postcolonial theory is an exclusively postmodernist academic dialogue that comprises responses and investigation of the cultural heritage of colonialism. After the wide-spread fall of colonialism, the states that were colonies earlier were busy to identify and recognize themselves away from the boundaries of colonialism. The aim of the theory is fighting the remaining effects of colonialism on civilizations. It is not merely interested with scavenging past worlds but also finding out how the humankind can progress further than this era collectively towards a place of mutual revere.

In both occupation and colonization, content and textuality had a key role to play. European manuscript penned the non-European denizen as bearing an alterity. These texts and representations were viewed and regarded as prescriptive of norms. They were not chronicles of citizens and cultures but a projection of European concerns and wishes in the disguise of technical or objective noesis.

Bill Ashcroft and his co-authors in their celebrated work '*The Empire Writes Back*' are of the view that, "The idea of post-colonial literary theory also emerges from the inability of European theory to deal with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing" (7).

## CONSTRUCTED ALTERITY THROUGH REPRESENTATION

At the heart of the working of colonial discourses is the politics of representation, whereby Post colonialism is not only critical theory but an identity politics where the historical analysis of processes of colonization and decolonization must focus on questions of representation; namely, to deal with who speaks for whom along with what is being said.

Representation and 'Orientalism' has a rooted link as the issue of constructed alterity through representation in orientalist discourse was first raised by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. While analyzing textual representations of the Orient in Oriental Studies, he is of the view that representations can never be precisely realistic:

"In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation... the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such real thing as the Orient".(76)

Representation is, undoubtedly, utilized as a political tool particularly in pieces of writing, scholastic transcript, tales, fiction and journalism writings. Stuart Hall, a renowned sociologist, in his essay titled "The Work of Representation" elucidates the connection between political beliefs and representation and the schemes symbolizing both. He accesses representation as the mean or procedure through which signs, relations, and principles are socially constructed and reckoned by public in a collective society. Representations provide people tools to think about and talk about e.g. certain groups of people, such as nationalities. They may emphasize certain assumptions and disregard others. This is the politics of representation: to 'speak of' and to 'speak for' others. This is where stereotyping comes in. Stereotyping is a key concept in cultural analysis. Stereotypes are ways to define other

groups, either positively or negatively. The key issue about stereotyping is the permanence of classification: once fixed, stereotypical images, nevertheless exaggerated, can be enduring. Pickering claims that stereotyping is very regular and permanent in modern societies. They grow from a historical background. It reveals how stereotypes have come to mean what they mean today, and how they have survived both continuity and change. Generally, an image of a person or group is dependent on the historical context and ways to represent them change over time. This, however, is not the case with stereotypes. Usually, features are only added to them; they in themselves do not change quickly.

Chinua Achebe in his essay titled “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'” deplores the stereotypical representation of Africa and Africans in the British fiction. He comments that starting with *Heart of Darkness* western convention fabricated a fictional Africa where nothing fine occurs or ever occurred, an Africa that is to be discovered until now and is awaiting for the first European visitant to discover and explicate it. Achebe not only finds this laughable, but damning.

### **CONSTRUCTED ALTERITY THROUGH PRESENTATION IN TRAVELOGUES**

Gilbert and Johnston (*In Transit: Travel, Text, Empire*) establish that present-day travel writing endeavours to approach the world in a novel manner which is comparatively less exploitative and overcomes hierarchic relations between the presenter and the presented culture, colonial remnants however can be discerned clearly in vocabulary, grammar, symbols, images and structure of the travel account. These traces indicate ‘the continued power, influence, and effect of imperial modes of experiencing and narrating difference.’ (34)

Even quite traditional and empirical studies of travelogues that represent foreign and exotic places, begin to proliferate in indirect relation to a new program of thought whose outlines were emerging from works such as Said's. Postcolonial theory furnished a new perspective to read between lines of a seemingly innocent account. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs write, ‘A text that generally proffers itself to be true, as a representation of unaltered reality, makes a perfect test case for analytical work that tries to posit or explain the fundamental fictionality of all representation’ (*Cambridge Companion* 263). Mary Louise Pratt in “*Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*” opines that European naturalist-travellers presented themselves as innocuous of European supremacy but at the same time, they encouraged its agenda.

### **ALTERITY CONSTRUCTION IN ANDULUS MEIN AJNABI**

In travel literature the representational practice of stereotyping is an important element. Stuart Hall has a practical definition of representation:

We give things meaning by how we *represent* them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the way we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them. (3)

What we read in *Andulus Mein Ajnabi* are mental concepts, attitudes and feelings represented through the words. Also representation is a layered process. First, there are the mental representations. The objects, events and people are organized in clusters hierarchically,

sequentially and in other ways that form complex relations between the different concepts and clusters. This system both allows us to create new expressions and concepts. Since the relations are probably different in each individual and yet are similar enough, patterns to help us interpret each other and perhaps even to understand one another. However, as most people cannot read minds, another system of representation is needed.

In the case of *Andulus Mein Ajnabi* we encounter the same misunderstanding of the foreign culture by the travel writer. This difference in the cultural codes or symbols becomes often the cause of misrepresentation and adding to it the perceptual difference of persons belonging to even the same culture can also cause this misrepresentation. When referring to people or events, the speaker will resort to those classificatory models, which fit the speaker's culture and make their interpretation.

Most travel writing involves the observing of people, and that, in Shi-Xu's terms, takes place within perceptual discourse. Perceptual discourse in travel literature is "where people describe, imply, presuppose, refer to what they see or hear" (Shi-Xu 151). Discursive perceptions are the perceived constructions of the other, especially the kinds that have caused puzzlement in the observer. Discursive perceptions are used when there is need for a strong image to convince the reader of the massive importance of this or that event. This effect is particularly enhanced by presenting the scene via direct experience and I-narration.

Perceptions may lead to opinions. Shi-Xu defines opinion as "a personal belief formulated through discourse" (151). Opinions are clearly subjective and personal in the sense that they are the writer's own contributions to the text.

In the light of the above discussion if we analyze the travelogue *Andulus Mein Ajnabi* we come to know that the perceptual differences as well as inability to interpret the codes and symbols of a foreign culture leads to stereotyping and generalization causing alterity in the mind of the traveller which is transferred to the reader regarding the culture which is being represented. The perception of the writer leads him to make opinions and these opinions are then argued in the text using different discursive strategies. The purpose of all such stereotyping, generalization is to express writer's own suspicion of the cultural norms practiced by the foreign culture. This misrepresentation is done deliberately and it is not confined to the Western travellers, rather Oriental travellers also make use of this phenomenon in order to cause a split between the reader and the represented Western culture. Tarar expresses his earnest desire to 'visit Spain, not only for its legendary charm and picturesque beauty but, more importantly, to experience the heritage of almost 800 years of Islamic presence.' (3)

This account is about the writer's personal urge of decades to retrieve the past glory of Muslim Hispania. The subtext suggest that he wanted to see how Muslim Moors came and ruled over it for centuries, how they were divided in between themselves by greed for throne and how finally this weakness was exploited by the Christians and they were overthrown by the powerful. For him the Muslim Hispania of the past glistened with an intellectual grandeur, industrial progress and economic prosperity of the past Muslims and to see the present Spain with its demolished Islamic heritage was his objective. Tarar went to Spain with this prejudiced perspective and he saw everything in Spain with this biased eyesight. This distorted vision has been noticed by Majeed Nizami, the Editor of *Nawai e Waqt* also. He says:

For a Muslim like Tarar, who has some familiarity with Islamic history in the Iberian peninsula of the Mediterranean, a visit to Spain is almost like a pilgrimage. However, unlike the pilgrimage to Mecca, such a visit is spiritually and emotionally agonizing, for he is overwhelmed by manifestations of European Islam in Spain. That was the era of the Golden Age of Islam, from early 8th century to late 15th century, almost coincidental with Dark Ages in the rest of Europe, when Al-Andalus was the center of global civilization.(3)

Nizami could clearly see the spiritual and religious tilt of Tarar towards past rather than present and that the writer is oriented more towards proving the past glory rather than indulging in the present prosperity of the Catholic Spain and that all that is entwined with the writer's firm Islamic footings and his identification with the Muslims of the past rather than the present living country with its living culture. It seems that the writer has gone to search for a ghost of past which made him overlook the living reality. This hunt for the past makes the writer construct alterity for the present day Spanish civilization.

In this travelogue the writer has participated in currently flowing life of the country but this participation has been very meagre and one dimensional. He does not take into consideration all aspects of life. In order to misrepresent the people of Spain, only one segment has been presented and that is the result of his distorted, prejudiced view. No intellectual, professional, academic life, health department, or economic sphere is shown. All that appealed to the young writer were the cafes, bar rooms and sport events. The people depicted are the free wanderers like him coming from different parts of Europe and America. These people who are not burdened by any responsibility of a family or who have discarded any ethical or moral norms practiced in their home lands are the focus of the writer.

The worst part of this travelogue is the characterization of the women. The women are the easiest target by the writer to prove his oriental masculine attraction on the one hand and the moral perversity of the European women on the other hand. The narrator is the epitome of Oriental attraction and a pleasant mystery, followed by the Western women despite his persistent refusal to entertain them. In the very first chapter the writer/ researcher meets two American girls who are shown lavishing their favours upon the traveller and indicate their sexual availability to him. One of the two American girls says to the writer, 'What is wrong with staying for one night in San Sebastian? The girl in sweater smilingly looked at me in an inquisitive manner' (21). And then without bothering to take the consent of the writer she becomes judgmental and plans to stay with him. While her friend, the short heighted girl becomes afraid of a night alone implores the writer, 'if you have any friend around, we all four can have fun' (21). And the writer who has imbibed the Oriental Moral values, believes in abstinence and responds rather with irritation, 'Thanks for the offer...Allah hafiz' (21)

In order to highlight the inadequacy of dressing of the western women he has many examples to quote. While he was in Madrid he encountered a European young girl accompanied by her father who is wearing a mini skirt and is the center of attraction of the whole crowd.

To misconstruct the image of European civilization, only women have not been highlighted, men too are the focus of the writer's attention that is judged in comparison to the moral and ethical code practiced in Pakistani society. The writer creates in fact binaries between himself at the centre while westerners at the periphery. Their cultural norms are compared with what he has carried in his mind from his culture, and in that comparison, West falls short.



The men whether they are Spanish or European visitors are depicted as dwarfs with an only exception to Tony who is also not of the standard height possessed by the writer, rather he falls short of the category of a human being as he is compared frequently with bull. He says, 'Almost everyone in the Passio festival was looking at bull like Tony with amusement, among short heighted Spaniards he looked like a bearded giant' (93).

Tony, apart from his height, is the stinky fellow who has no sense of how to dress up and who does not bother to dress up as the writer while objectifying says:

On the mudguard a Britain flag was flapping and on driver's seat a strange, object was sitting. Its brown hair fell on its shoulders and its thick beard was intertwined with hair on its chest. Except for a knickers reaching over to his knees, there was nothing else on its body.' (82)

Occident men have never been objectified in a better manner by any other writer as has been done by Tarar in the case of Tony who is the representative of the whole West. He is a butcher by profession, an extremely untidy person who carries along a patch of dried meat with him and suffices to eat uncooked meat in time of need as he has carried the whole collection of his Cutlery randomly thrown at the floor of his jeep. His jeep is an ugly sight to look at in which the presence of this bull like person aggravates the situation.

The only sensible person according to the portrayal is Hassan who is a Muslim tourist and who is a mouthpiece of the writer. He is by profession a lawyer who is staying with his wife and eight children. His children are called 'angels' by the writer. They are sensible, hospitable and well mannered people. Hassan being the mouthpiece of the writer throws light on the causes of Muslim's downfall, as he is not a biased person. He voices the writer's opinion about the progressivisms of the Muslims of the past. Hassan says:

Muslim Hispania was a bright picture of the Muslim tolerance and progressivism... in this society woman enjoyed equal rights with their men. Thousands of the women were associated with the art of ghazal and writing books. An expert in the art of music was thought equal to a scholar. Religious tolerance was exemplary. Jews enjoyed remarkable position in institutions" (Tarar 124)

Not only the choice of the mouthpiece is informed by religious biases but the landscape also betrays the feelings of the writer. He enters Spain with a burning desire to see the remnants of the Muslim majestic past and he identifies himself with the Muslims of Hispania of the history, as he says in the very first chapter, 'after getting exiled from Gharnata, the return of a Pakistani Moor towards his own country Andulus' (148). So under the spell of this kinship he feels himself stifled in a Catholic State of Spain in other words 'other' and as a result the Spaniards seem 'alter' to him.

In contrast to it when he enters Gharnata, he feels at home. There are many pleasing remnants of the past in which he immerses profusely. Kordova that the narrator witnessed was a fragrant fragrance, a picture of adorable colours, a bright spectacle.

Muslims are described as "Eagles", on the other hand the epithets used for the Christians when they took over the country from the Muslims is described in extremely negative manner.

Upon the tallest of Gharnata's buildings, Christian soldiers, and missionaries came, after covering these narrow dark stairs, they devoured the crescent and installed in its stead the Cross.(Tarar 214)

Such adjective highlight the essentially thief like quality of these invaders and their barbarity is frowned upon by the writer.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the light of the above discussion it is clear that the writer's point of orientation was the cause of his blurred vision of the world around. He has taken the help of past records in order to construct ethnography of a people and that past record in itself is constructed by prejudiced segments. He has tried to exhibit conscious or unconscious beliefs, illogical opinions presented as authentic account. With a fixed starting point and the preconceived notions of Muslim past's superiority over present degeneration of the Christian world, he has tried to construct alterity of the Christian present. His account is not at all innocent and there lies a subtext of ideological moorings. In order to prove his point he has included only those segments which are in line with the degeneracy of the present Christian state. There is an exclusion of all other quarters in the field of health, medicine, agriculture and education with all its manifestations in order to prove his point of view.

The purpose of this study was to learn what travel writers who had been living in different parts of the world had to say about the country they presented. The primary source for this study was travel book by Mustansar Hussain Tarar's *Andulus Mein Ajnabi*. This travelogue is assumingly realistic representations about the country but the writer is more interested in constructing national stereotypes. The Westerners are shown the most vulgar and indecent people through their stereotypical presentation by Tarar. The result however is the construction of alterity. The people, landscape or the culture presented is made alien in the mind of the reader. The reader can not in his imagination enjoy being in a foreign dirty and vulgar atmosphere. The findings of the research are that the writer confirms the stereotypical images of the culture he presented.

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