

From Hyphenated to Hyphenated Bodies: The Missing / (MIS) Placed Body of the Woman in the Archives: A Critique of William Dalrymple's *White Mughals*

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Abstract

This paper is a focused study of confronting archives as a place of negotiation and construed constructions. A place that becomes a fetish for the historian archival researcher in his attempt to decode history and write about this decoded history using his own tools of mechanizations. This can often result in catachresis- as in the process of collection of records and the recoding of records what inadvertently or advertently happens is recording of re-coded facts (a misreading and misrepresentation of facts driven from the archival shelves). On a secondary plane this paper attempts to study William Dalrymple's *White Mughals* which is a narrative history taking much from the archival dossiers. How catachresis happens to take place in this text on the part of the historian is what is discussed at large. Also the paper focuses on the study of how the body of the woman is missing and is in turn (mis)placed from the heavily gendered terrain of history in general (the history of the home and harem) and from history in particular (history of Dalrymple and from the archival prose) that is full of silences and gaps . As a result of this catachresis history becomes a disjointed endeavor that is full of hyphens and hyphenated bodies. This in turn eventually leads to catachresis of home, harem archives and of history itself.

KEYWORDS: history, historiography, home, harem, archive, catachresis

Introduction

Archives is derived from the greek word *archeon* . Jacques Derrida in his *Archive Fever (1995)* elaborates on the role of these archeons as being the all powerful patriarchal grids of speech which decide the functioning of this patriarchal agency. In the words of Sir Hillary Jenkinson who is known as the father of the archival studies, the archives were organized functional bodies which were without doubt non partisan in character. In traditional sense, the archivist was the keeper of the archives and the records there and what went into the archive is what was to come out of it. This was later objected by another archival theorist Theodore R. Schellenberg who contended that archive had a non partisan character. It had hyphens and this led to hyphenated histories. Hans Boom, a German photographer and archivist propounded another theory of archival studies which was to do with a societal approach to the archives- wherein the society made the archives and whatever was there was a result of the same.

Having carried my research in the archival organization I realized that Jenkinson had a pure positivist outlook towards archives and the archivist. Schellenbergs curt objections come to forefront when a researcher enters to doors of the archives to find remains of the dead and lost of the past. Booms societal approach is near to what Clifford Geertz suggests about writing about culture. He says when one is writing about culture his description can be thin as a result of winks upon winks

(individuals own interpretations and re-coding of the same which further can be decoded and recoded). How can then we rely on the archives completely for the writing of (his)story and (her)story in history.

Ideological appropriation in the archive(s)

A woman's body has always been placed in an oscillating grid pendulum. It is placed in a constant tussle taking place on a bilateral ground of dissipation and excessiveness. Women in different periods have been positioned ideologically be it in domestic places and private places as in home and in harem or be it in culturally and historically dominated spaces as in the archives. In historical discourse woman and her body seldom gets figured in an appropriate order. It rather gets appropriated as a result of seclusion, exclusion, containment and control. Thus woman is not just colonized in home or harem but her colonization takes place on a much larger scale-she is the hyphen and the hyphenated. This we witness when we see that in history and in historical space the woman and her body is lost from the ideologically constructed apparatuses of power – the archives. I call them “ideologically constructed”, because what gets into the archive is not what really did happen in the past. It is a construed construction of records which are produced as a result of ideology and power.

Archives are storehouses of information which have time and again resulted in aiding the historical researcher to write history. But are these records innocent or are they manipulated and convoluted in character. This is a question which needs a forensic analysis. In a culturally specific hierarchic milieu categorization takes place in the order of how class, gender and role play are bestowed and received. And in the process of perceivably categorizing hierarchies we often end up creating hyphenated spaces. The placing practice of others is often misplaced by others and in the process it orients their own placing methodology. Thus on cultural-spatial grounds a woman and her body gets missing and mis placed in home, in harem, in history and in the archives.

In history (his)story is what rules the pages of history (the papers in the archival organizations are mostly about patriarchal strands of society and its keepers or in the process of writing history it becomes (his)story as in the authors story-his winks on events of the past). Meenu Gupta in her book *Salman Rushdie: Re-telling History through Fiction (2009)* says that representation is a trickmaster's act. Employing various tricks of re-codification and simulations one presents and represents images which can be standing for something else when on the flip side they stand for some other thing/person /object. The archive is also similar. It's a tricky playfield where the recorded events /writings/ memoirs can be decoded and further re-coded in a simulated framework. Thus history that reaches us can never be a clear history of the past that had at some point occurred in the past. For the trickmaster (the archivist/ researcher/historian) have played games on it and with dice throw they have been able to control every move of every character. But in this game what goes missing and mis-placed from the archives is the body of the woman.

From Hyphenated to Hyphenated / From missing to being mis(placed) 'bodies' in and outside the archive

In oriental discourse we see that the body of the woman seldom finds order. It mostly occurs on the fringes. Looking at the history of the British Empire in India we

see that histories around the Empire are histories around the powerful. Woman and her body seldom is covered or recovered in historical discourse. Her real presence goes missing from history and historiography and also from the descript walls of the all powerful history organizations- the archives. There is no doubt that women like Rani of Jhansi – Laxmi Bai , Sarojini Naidu or Indira Gandhi who played significant roles in the past do find place in the historical dossiers but there are women characters whose discourse goes missing from the archives. I happened to have read William Dalrymple’s *White Mughals* (2002) in which I came across the non-leading lady of the book Khair -un- nissa.

E.M. Forster in his remarkable novel *A Passage to India* in 1924 remarked East is East, West is West and never the twain shall meet! Dalrymple in this book is bent on defying the diktat posed by Forster in his declaration. This book becomes a text of celebration of the meeting of two cultures. It celebrates hybridity and transculturation happening in the contact zones. Dalrymple’s celebratory cross cultural narrative is full of catachrestic shades. Catachresis is a term that comes from greek term ‘*katakhresthai*’ which in technicality refers to the act of misusing. But in relation to history it entails the act of misrepresentation. Thus we say a catachrestic representation- meaning displacing records to recode one’s hi(story).

White Mughals is a text that is about a cross cultural relationship of a White man named James Achilles Kirkpatrick who is a British Resident in the province of Hyderabad- the land of princes and nawabs. Enamored by the body of this land Dalrymple writes this love story that happened to convert this White man into a White Mughal. He fell in love with Khair-un-Nissa and converted to Islam by becoming a Muslim and leading the life of a converted and convoluted White mughal (convoluted: because of his conversion he was no longer relied by the whites for any of his actions). The book is about this man and incorporates within its ambit cross references to many such characters who converted into becoming Muslims and led an anglo-muslim life. What goes missing from the pages of this text is the body of the woman Khair and many such women who in the past had played such a significant role of compelling a white man to have converted into Islam.

Not only the text the archives too do not dwell much on this woman. Her presence is in the files but it is overshadowed by her consort who is revered by Dalrymple to the extent that the text becomes a text buttressed with colonial nostalgic leanings on the part of the author. Mikhail Bakhtin in his idea of the chronotope elucidates on it being one of the units of narrative analysis. According to Bakhtin “chronotopes in literary texts are not cut off from the cultural environments in which they arise: Out of actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the world represented in work.” (The Chronotope 84). This holds true in relation to Dalrymple’s representation of the Kirkpatrick hybrid era which he is so obsessed with.

Historical narrative will always have a beginning and an end but the beginning and the end will always be colored and agreed upon by its participants. Here in this historical narrative the participants are Dalrymple and his White Mughal characters. The body of Khair –un - Nissa and other women do not figure appropriately but it occurs in appropriated form. This appropriation is done on two planes – one by the British who in the various enquiry reports treat her as ‘somebody’ and designate her as ‘the woman’ with whom Kirkpatrick had an affair and for whom he had betrayed

his affiliations towards his own people. Nowhere in the enquiry reports she is addressed by her name! Also in the archives she is given no appropriate place. Whatever archival records occur in relation to this text is all about the British Resident James Kirkpatrick. The moment his records go missing from the archive that very moment Dalrymple is left in darkness (when on the contrary it is Khair-un-nissa who from till now was in dark but is now lost in the darkness).

Dalrymple writes:

“The lights go out and we are left in darkness” (396).

Just like the home and harem is a domestic place where woman either is domesticated or is kept in confinement under the purdah or the veil (as in the zenana) so is her position in the archives where too either she is domesticated by the patriarchal dossiers (positioned ideologically as a result of power) or she is kept in confinement – under the curtain. The home, harem and the archive here becomes the panopticon and the consort (as in Kirkpatrick) and the sovereign rulers (as in the British) and the author (as in Dalrymple) become the observers of this panopticon. Michael Foucault in his work titled *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) made use of Jeremy Bentham’s design of the prison – the panopticon. The panopticon was all that stood for surveillance and for power. Kirkpatrick, The British and Dalrymple become the observers here who from a vantage point keep an eye of observance on the ‘other’ (Khair and other women) so as to keep the ‘others’ body under control. This thus results in woman’s discourse missing from home harem history and archives. E.H. Carr in his seminal text *What is History ?* (1961) writes : History especially history driven from facts is like a fish monger slab, one chooses and places that fish on the slab which he /she wants to cook. In history too this is what happens. While writing history and while collecting evidence the historian picks and puts those records in his text which suits his contract zone. Hayden White in this connection contends that historiography is the art of emplotment of facts and events which are then in historians hand rendered a truthful sense of historical reality. Hayden through his works has problematized the status of facts and has endeavored through his writing to put forth history being a form of fiction. White through his writings show that the historical occurrences are caste and molded into familiar stories employing techniques which otherwise are used in the emplotment of novel and play.

Post modern theory and theorist have diverted our attention from the mainstream realist, objectivist, documentarist history and have emphasized upon the dominant paradigm making a fetish of the archival research. All these post modernists (Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur, Alun Munslow, Keith Jenkins and Dominik La Kapra) have analyzed the documents as texts that are constructed as a result of biases that can be culturally freighted. They all purport an anti positivist poetics of history and historiography. Archives as a subject of scrutiny gain attention here. Archives view postmodernism and postmodernists with an eye of distrust and dismay. For the post modernists texts are signs in language form that can be interpreted. As a result they are unstable, devoid of a true meaning. The meaning dies the moment the death of the author occurred (Roland Barthes). In Derrida’s views this death of author is taken for granted by many and this further leads to archivization (derridian term) which may produce more than it may record. The archived documents are therefore not static constructs but they are fluid in nature that changes according to the interaction that

takes place at the interface of the archivist, historian, user and the reader. They thus become the apparatuses of capture, of control and containment.

In these apparatuses of capture an indirect colonization of the fair sex occurs. The pertinent question therefore becomes that why there is negligible documentation about the experiences or the position of the woman and her body in history and historiography. The dynamics of gender construction and gender performance is absent from the archival shelves. The woman and her body is either kept in domestic sphere or behind the walls of the forts under veil or they are lying silent under the heavy and weighty prose that is primarily focused on men and their socio political regimes. Therefore we witness that the dialogic construction of archive has been a product of negotiation between the superior gender (male) and the superior powers at play. The most striking aspect of the archive lies in the absence of woman's bodies missing from the histories of the Empire and in turn from histories that are born out from the archives – as there is absence of female and the female productions from the archives.

In Dalrymple's text too we see that woman and her body is missing from the historical narrative and from the dossiers and records of the past. History thus becomes a negotiated and an accommodated history. Hayden White in his Essay that appeared in the Journal History and Theory, Vol, 23, No .1 (Feb, 1984) *The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory* writes:

“The historian's dissertation was an ‘interpretation’ of what he took to be the true story, while his narration was a ‘representation’ of what he took to be the real story. A given historical discourse might factually be accurate and as veracious in its narrative aspect as the evidence permitted and still be assessed as mistaken, invalid, or inadequate in its dissertative aspect. The facts might be truthfully set forth and the interpretation of them misguided. Or conversely given interpretation of events might be suggestive, brilliant, perspicuous, and so on and still not be justified by the facts or square with the story related in the narrative aspect of the discourse”. (White 3)

Conclusion

Therefore Evidence in history is the evidence which is contemplated from a historical standpoint. In the words of R.G. Collingwood it is not anything that is given to the historian. it is but the result of his interpretation. The social and psychological practices that help build the archives and the records therein are heavily gendered. The archive doesn't romance with the fair sex. As a result her voice is lost in the archival domain. Rmachandra Guha in his *The Small voice of history* notes that revisionist history should transcend gender perspectives and they should be concomitant in discarding a unitary narrative. He says, that if at all in history and historiography small voices of history do get a hearing, it will eventually do so only by striking down the telling of the dominant versions, breaking storylines and creating spaces of justified order. That woman's voice and her body is missing and is (mis)placed in/ from the archives, this calls into question the hyphenated (disjointed) and hyphenated (catachrestic) status of history and archives.

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