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The Indian Hill Writings of Emily Eden, Fanny Parkes,
Frank Smythe and Eric Shipton**

by **Arup K Chatterjee**

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The concept of the archive shelters in itself, of course, this memory of the name arkhe. But it also shelters itself from this memory which it shelters: which comes down to saying also that it forgets it. (Derrida, 9)

The design, and the order of texts, in a literary canon, is its architecture. To prevent abusing the specificity of the discipline I will call it *architexture*. It is the selection and systemization of texts into a canonical hermeneutics. What precedes this architexture is an archiving of texts, by the architects, or what Derrida calls, the “archons”, who are “first of all the documents’ guardians... (and) accorded the hermeneutic right and competence...they recall the law and call on or impose the law.” (10)

I

If Indian English, in pedagogy and curricula, has generally begun after the Indian nation state, it does not mean that it has glossed over the English that came before the moment of independence. On the contrary, the canon of Indian English has begun with the works of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Rabindranath Tagore, H.L.V Derozio, Sarojini Naidu, among many others who wrote before India, insofar as, even Rudyard Kipling and E.M. Forster are, or must be, now considered Indian English writers. A recent addition to the Delhi University English syllabus is “Anglo-American writing from 1930” featuring work by Salman Rushdie, who for most part has been the toast of Indian English. We are, therefore, prepared enough to naturalize authors into hybrid nationalities, while teaching their works. Despite such

flexibility, there has been continual academic blindness towards Indian English travel literature written before independence. Of this literature, not much can be theorized in terms of present nation building or anti-nation criticism, purely owing to the stamps of leisure and commission with which travel literature is couriered to its readers. We have better to teach about hybrid nationalities and many Indias, in literature of the past and recent greats. Meanwhile, a colonization of literary ideas has begun through the gateway of a marginal canon, which I will call "Hill Literature".

Indian Travel English is so vast that even mining its minor facets is certainly welcomed with popularity. A part of it is Hill Literature made of early authors such as Emily Eden, Fanny Parkes, John Lang, and numerous others, including present ones like Ruskin Bond, Stephen Alter, Bill Aitken. Many of the older authors have come to public notice only in the last fifteen years or so. However, the agency of the architecture has been undergoing a regular *domiciliation*, on one hand, and colonization on the other. There has been no embargo on research related to Hill Literature by any patriarch, whatever. Consequently, when William Dalrymple re-published Fanny Parkes's *Wanderings of a Pilgrim (1850) as Begums, Thugs & Englishmen, The Journals of Fanny Parkes* (2003), he was free to quote entirely out of context, the subject-author of his finds, in order to justify the non-colonial attitude of his "patriarchic function" (see Derrida, 10). The urgency behind this, as Dalrymple makes obvious, was the "orthodoxy" of Edward Said's *Orientalism* – phenomena. So, in order to use Parkes as his tool of defiance he unreasonably schedules her into the binary of the colonial and the non-colonial. An excerpt from his Introduction to the book, which also informs an article in the *Guardian*, reads:

Parkes is an important writer because she acts as a witness to a forgotten moment of British-Indian hybridity, and shows that colonial travel writing need not be an aggressive act of orientalist appropriation - not "gathering colonial knowledge", as Edward Said and his followers would have us believe, but instead an act of understanding... it is ridiculously simplistic to see all attempts at studying, observing and empathising with another culture necessarily "as an act of domination - rather than of respect or even catharsis. (2007)

In the chapter “Ascent to Landowr” Parkes finds the Paharis “most exceedingly dirty” (Vol. II, 227) after having just finished calling them “animals to stare at” (ibid) resembling Tartars. Dalrymple points out that she found “Indian men ‘remarkably handsome’” (2003, x). It is not “men” that Parkes talks about but native servants. The exact passage that Dalrymple paraphrases from is:

Some of the natives are remarkably handsome, but appear far from being strong men. It is impossible to do with a few servants, you must have many; their customs and prejudices are inviolable... They are great plagues; much more troublesome than English servants. (Vol. I, 26)

“Remarkably handsome” is as un insightful and average in Victorian English expressions as Dalrymple tries to celebrate it. The only other human subjects Parkes finds “remarkably handsome” in her entire narrative are the interracial children of Mr Gardner and Mulka, and a certain bridegroom called Unjun Sheko. Apart from this the phrase is used for cows, bulls, an Arab pony, camel’s clothing, and so on.

Dalrymple, also adds that for Parkes “The evenings are cool and refreshing ... The foliage of the trees, so luxuriously beautiful and so novel...” (2003, x). Those are Parkes’s words immediately after she has pronounced the climate “oppressive” with “hot winds”. “I can”, she writes, “compare it to nothing but the hot blast you would receive in your face were you suddenly to open the door of an oven.” (Vol. I, 25). Within two paragraphs of the above climatic appreciation, she will call the weather “very uncertain”.

Finally, in a glaring counterfeiture, Dalrymple quotes Parkes, with a clear intention of sanitizing her persona. This is what Parkes wrote according to him:

“Oh the pleasure ... of vagabondising (*sic*) in India” (2007)

What Parkes wrote instead was “Oh! *the* pleasure of *vagabondizing over* India (Vol. II, 192, italics mine). The shift from “over” to “in” is strategic for Dalrymple who intends to project Parkes as a “patriarchic function” of the class that is not “over” but within the object of rule. In the section of this

vagabondizing Parkes can be seen “cantering away” on her Arab pony, a sight which speaks more of her individual and sexual prowess than her undoubted general love for India and its peoples. The very passages that Dalrymple quotes from contradict his representation of Parkes. Given this state of his revisionist and non-contextual references from Parkes, it is clear how little his work has been scrutinized by the editorial commissioners of both Guardian and Penguin.

Jacques Derrida analyses in *Archive Fever* the economy of Sigmund’s Freud’s rhetoric of self-archiving under the guise of self-criticism, wherein the psychoanalyst is struggling to find a “mutation” or a cleavage within his own institution. Freud, is here, matched by Dalrymple in his re-texturing of the existing *architexture*. This *architexture* has come under severe attack from the Saidian school wherefore it is incumbent upon the archon, now, to highlight the cleavages, which come in the forms of the Eden sisters, sisters of India Governor-General, Lord Auckland. He calls Emily Eden “waspy and conceited” which is entirely justified, and equally dangerous when done so in comparison with Parkes who as even Dalrymple acknowledges was “eccentric”. In fact, she was as eccentric as inconsistent, as free as fearless to express her mercurial responses. There is no vindication of Eden’s high-handedness as there is none of Parkes’s capriciousness. This is to say, casting Parkes as the symbol of Indian English hybridity is theoretically flawed due to Parkes individual hybrid constitution. Dalrymple categorically informs of Eden’s literary popularity, as opposed to Parkes’s whose *Wanderings* “never had another edition.” Eden’s *Up the Country* is, hence, analogous with coloniality, which must be disavowed, and simultaneously re-avowed in terms of claiming guardianship over that which is the secret. In Derridean terms, in the process of clearing the memory of the arkhe or the arch texturer, he has used itself as his ploy, and shelter.

As Derrida explains, the transformation of Freud’s house into a museum, although marks a passage from the private to the public, but does not do so from “the secret to the non-secret” (10). The hermeneutics of the *architexture* is left to the “archontic” signatory of a treaty of settlement, or domiciliation – practically a “house arrest”, as Derrida calls it – and in this atmosphere the archon archives. He uninterruptedly assumes patriarchy over the “secret”, marks his exergue before the hermeneutics of the *architexture*. In

other words, he cites before the beginning and lawfully orders the beginning and its course. Dalrymple, in this respect, resembles Lang, the 1850s' Australian Indian English writer, well known for his contempt of British officialdom. In his "Himalaya Club" serialized in Charles Dickens's *Household Words*, Lang writes effervescently of English snobbery, from his solipsistic refuge is Mussoorie. From here, he leaves us an inventory of English manners, stingy pensioners, and trivial scandals which have become a source of nostalgic imitation in most of present day Hill Literature. Incidentally, both have written most of their works based on or around Delhi, both went to Trinity College in Cambridge, and both are of Scottish descent. Needless to say, both have been signatories to an archontic domiciliation.

II

Bill Aitken, a Hill Writer from Scotland (now Indian), archives a new canon of architexts in "An Introduction to the Literature on Nanda Devi". Unlike Dalrymple, he does not try to posit the canon – or pose canonical differences – within colonial and non-colonial binaries. He seeks religio-spiritual, instead of ideological, grounds of difference, between his predecessors. Of the long list of authors on the patron-Goddess – as he treats the Nanda Devi – three stand out, persistently. They are judged on their degrees of reverence for the heathen deity. Both historically, and in Aitken's study, Frank Smythe comes between Eric Shipton and H.W. Tilman. Aitken chooses, however, elaborate first on Smythe, and leaves "for the last, the best and most literary offerings to the goddess", which is Shipton's *Nanda Devi* (1936). Aitken's archival essay succeeds in polarising Smythe and Tilman as spiritual antagonists, with Smythe as the believer and Tilman as the "workmanlike non-believer, and both being finally surpassed by Shipton's offerings. (Aitken, 2006)

The book by Smythe that Aitken refers to is *Valley of Flowers*, a choice that is as beautiful as strategic. Aitken does not choose, for instance, Smythe's *Kamet Conquered* or *The Spirit of the Hills*, in either of which Smythe is the mountaineer struggling against the invincibility of the hills, the rugged weather that scares away Darjeeling sherpas, of the very indomitable spirit that is the object of ascent. Nowhere is Smythe even partially irreverent of the Himalayas,

or acts “frustrated” as more recent day mountaineers like John Roskelley. Instead, in *Kamet Conquered* he warns:

The Himalaya must be approached humbly... Other mountains
forgive mistakes, but not the Himalaya. (8)

Yet, the atmosphere of unrivalled peace and cosmological sovereignty that Smythe witnesses in his sojourn in *The Valley of Flowers* could not be paralleled during a treacherous climb:

There is a power of which we know little in the west but which is a basic of abstract thought in the east. It is allowing the mind to receive rather than to seek impressions, and it is gained by expurgating extraneous thought. It is then that the Eternal speaks; that the mutations of the universe are apparent: the very atmosphere is filled with life and song; the hills are resolved from mere masses of snow, ice and rock into something living. When this happens the human mind escapes from the bondage of its own feeble imaginings and becomes as one with its Creator. (64)

Smythe is spiritually drawn to the pristine hills that had seen neither Europeans nor the commercialism that besotted the Swiss Hills, neither railroads nor vistas, but remained content in “the kindly peasant folk (that) graze their flocks in the summer months” (1936, 17).

The Valley of Flowers is located at about 12500 feet, which is at just half the height of Nanda Devi (over 25000 ft.) The latter is where Aitken places Shipton, while Tilman is left as “almost a caricature of the emotionally repressed Englishman” whose “appearance on top of Nanda Devi has a Chaplinesque dimension”:

[He] crave[s] her indulgence in breaching protocol by not
removing [his] boots on her sacred summit. (Aitken, 2006)

The peak, however, remains for Shipton, for whom it is the “Inviolable Sanctuary of the “Blessed Goddess”” (also the name of Shipton’s book). The mountain peak and the mountaineer “seem made for each other” (ibid), each sharing the other’s philosophical prowess. While Tilman’s Ascent to Nanda Devi is fraught with rashness and Judaic mindset (he “leapt at the opportunity”

(*ibid*), when Shipton refused), Shipton's reward lies in his "Sanctuary" at the base of the Nanda Devi. What separates Smythe and Shipton is that the former is shown singing the praise of the goddess's feet like a "gardener", while the latter consorts with her respectfully near her bosom. Smythe can be seen in *The Valley of Flowers* as a self-taught gardener "above jealousy and suspicion", without the ambition to exceed his arboreal garden. Shipton, on the other hand, is brought to the brink of extreme height and fame, whereat he refuses to cross the sanctuary of Nanda Devi, and de-sanctify it. All three mountaineers are domiciliated by Aitken to respective positions, in which Tilman's domicile is delegitimized, Smythe's legitimated, and Shipton's sanctified. In archiving this hierarchy of archons, Aitken himself assumes the patriarchic function.

Thesis

The word "fiction" has its roots in the Latin *fictio* which means "to feign" or "to fashion". Dalrymple and Aitken, both perform the archontic role of naturalizing a canonical hermeneutics; both do so by the reification of their corresponding patriarchic functions, through a defense of deferential responses to the Indian hills, ideologically or spiritually. Dalrymple's reification is based on a feigned revisionism of ideology in Parkes's representation of India where probably none existed, or an ideology that was overpowered by her unbounded spirit. It is part of his own quest for domiciliation. Aitken's reification tries to fashion away from the current trend of the technological ascent and altitudinal devaluation of the Himalayas, thereby re-inscribing his own domicile. While Dalrymple looks back in anger and gropes for the spoils of war, Aitken lives in historical and spiritual continuity with the holy ghosts of Uttarakhand. To call one as more or less archivally upright is not the requisite gesture. In either case, it is an act of *reification*, which is far from being critically questioned. It is a fiction that designs and defines a new architexture, that of Hill Literature.

Indian Hill Literature is a marginal canon, yet to be canonized by our academic institutions. Its study is crucial to our English, and it therefore requires a systematic, rather than a reifictional hermeneutics. What I have here called Hill Literature has been a twice-rejected literature, both at the hands of

the English, and the Indian English. In the last decade there has been increasing complexity of academic interest in Hill Literature, although not from Indian universities. In the shelter of a criticism of colonization, or in a criticism of the same critique, the memory of the present literary colonization of Hills Literature is waning unnoticeably. Quite readily the hoax and sombreness of Hill reifictions is turning into a twice born canon, unnoticed at birth, and re-engendered at the turn of the Third World academization. If the architexture of Indian hills is at the freedom of the archon it is imperative to determine the authority that has commissioned this archiving process. What gets archived within is always for benefit of the without. The domicialiation of the archivist is not self-determined, and neither is the house arrest a self-incarceration. The nation and the consignation are not in the same domicile. Our task is then to re-order the exterior source where the consignation belongs, and re-define the architexture of the hills.

There is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside. (Derrida, 14)

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