

Indian Snakes and Snaky India: British Orientalist Construction of a Snake-Ridden Landscape during the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

This article explores British Orientalist construction of 'snake-infested' India focusing on the constitution of Orientalist discourse through the real experience of the colonisers gained in course of their extensive engagement with Indian wilderness while they began to subjugate more and more areas of the subcontinent. The main thrust of this article is to prove that, the Orientalist creation of the inferior image of venomous Indian snakes and the land they dwelled, as reflected in a range of nineteenth-century colonial literature, was definitely not a product fashioned through the Western interpretation of classical Indian texts; rather, this Orientalist understanding was inevitably fostered through the visible reality of livelihood in India and influenced by a traditional Christian sense of animosity towards snakes. This article, therefore, is a critique of the argument that scholastic construction of Orientalism derived only from the Western interpretation of scriptural accounts of the East.

Keywords: Indian Snakes, British Orientalism, Wild Orient, William Shakespeare, John Milton, Satan.

1. Introduction

This is an article about the British colonial encounter and Orientalist engagement with venomous Indian snakes and the land they inhabited. It focuses on some nineteenth-century colonial literary creations which particularly illustrated the Europeans' obsession with "the great number of poisonous snakes" in India and the frequent possibility of losing lives and properties through the 'havoc' caused by these 'scourges'. By accepting Edward W. Said's principal thesis that the practice of Orientalism consciously produced and managed—mainly through a long history of literary production—an image of 'barbaric' and 'exotic' Orient (Said 2001), this article aims to show how the growing British involvement with Indian wilderness, in course of their subjugation of more and more areas in the subcontinent, encouraged the colonisers to imagine the Indian snakes as the evil-doers, real adversaries to colonial expansion and inferiorise India as a snake-ridden 'wild' and 'deadly' landscape. Such endeavour superbly helped them to create an unbridgeable difference between the East (the Other or the strange) and the West (the self or the familiar), shape ideas of Europe's privileged place in the globe and thus ultimately provided the justification for Western dominance. In this connection, this article also intends to locate the religio-cultural milieu within which somehow a sense of Western animosity towards Oriental snakes was developed and traditionally prevailed. It shows that the Western unfriendly attitude towards these reptiles was inevitably and hugely influenced by colonial concerns and interests;

but this antagonism has also its cultural roots in the long-standing Christian idea of snake being a satanic creature or a mischievous 'evil', an idea that was constantly fostered through the timeless writings of William Shakespeare, John Milton and other leading English authors. However, in dealing with the Orientalist creation of Indian 'snaky' otherness, this article departs from the recent histories of Orientalism in India beyond a point. The modern historiography of Orientalism often argues that the inferior image of India constructed through the concepts of caste, *sati*, Hinduism etc., which contributed substantially to the ideological armoury of imperialism, was developed mainly by a particular Western understanding and interpretation of classical Indian texts (See Dodson 2011; Inden 1990; and Mani 1998). Though not completely discarding this argument, this article, on the contrary, specifically highlights that Orientalism in the context of colonial India was not merely a texts-based epistemological and ontological construction of the Orient that has nothing to do with the diverse challenges of the real physical Orient. Rather, in several occasions, the essence of the practical difficulties faced by the colonisers, particularly while confronting venomous Indian snakes during their day to day operation in India, provided them with the tool through which the Orient was imagined as a 'savage' and 'wild' land of deaths, which must be properly shaped, mapped and appropriated for the sake of colonial rule.

2. Venomous Indian Snakes in Colonial Accounts

Until the mid-eighteenth century, European travellers and traders seldom wished to stay long or settle down permanently in India. Most of them generally spent their brief career in comparatively healthy coastal enclaves and rarely journeyed to the far reaches of the subcontinent. During the fragmentation of the Mughal Empire, the Europeans, mainly the servants of the English East India Company, candidly involved themselves in the power politics of the subcontinent and tried to swell up their localised presence and limited involvement in India. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the East India Company, embarking on a long series of battles and diplomatic strategies, ultimately succeeded to transform itself from a trading concern to a territorial power. The growing military activity and consequential expansion of the Company's domains, for the first time, created a context for extensive European travel and settlement throughout the country (Arnold 2005, pp. 11-16). As the need for cross-country travels, scientific surveys and excursions in increasing numbers was felt essential, especially during the post-1857 era, under the patronage of the Raj—in order to acquire knowledge of newly subjugated colony and exploit its natural resources for material benefit of the colonial government—many hitherto unexplored areas gradually opened up to the colonisers and they had to engage with the vast 'exotic' and 'wild' environment of India. It was in this condition, when the colonisers, during the course of their duties and expeditions to the remote areas, frequently encountered venomous Indian snakes and became aware of their power of deadly envenomation. What the colonisers anxiously recognised were huge snakebite-induced morbidity and mortality in this country (See for example, Fayrer 1878, 1882; Nicholson 1883). Indeed, the presence of various snake species in this alien colony, many of which are 'dangerously' venomous, seems to throw a direct challenge to the everyday livelihood of the British residents in India. The hopeless situation became all the more hostile as the colonisers neither had adequate medical-zoological knowledge of such a variety of snakes, nor had any effective antidote to manage abundant snakebite deaths—a must need for the imperial expansion and establishment in the subcontinent (See Bhaumik 2012, 42-53).

Completely perplexed by so many deaths of snake poisoning and with no ready remedy, the shocked and frightful Britons deliberately felt to be threatened by sudden and sure death of snakebite while travelling and living in India. European missionaries, merchants, military personnel, civil officers, surgeon-naturalists and all those belonged to them (wives, sisters and

daughters), began to imagine India as a 'savage' and 'snake-infested' landscape, as the 'Other' of the 'civilised' and 'salubrious' West. For instance, the anonymous author of the book titled *India: Illustrated*, lucidly pointed out that India was always a misfit, a troublesome site for European abode:

One of the greatest drawbacks to life in India is the great number of poisonous snakes that are found. They creep into the houses and even into the beds; they drop down from the thatched roofs; they lie coiled up in the roadways, and are everywhere. It seems almost incredible, but nearly forty thousand people die every year from their bites. From such a scourge there seems no way of escape (Anon. 1876, pp. 60-64).

Quite similarly, Rev. John J. Pool, a Calcutta chaplain, expressed his shock and surprise at the presence of such huge variety of snakes and large number of snakebite victims in India. In his travelogue, he wrote:

There are more snakes in India than in any other part of the world, and...there are at least twenty-one distinct varieties of snakes in the East. Out of this number fortunately only four varieties are venomous, but then there are millions belonging to each variety or order.

The author continued further:

[...] every year a very great number of deaths occur, both amongst cattle and mankind, through the bite of snakes, and particularly through the bite of the cobra. It is estimated that 20,000 human beings every year perish in India alone through this cause (Pool 1894, pp. 144-145).

Thus, the reports and rumours of snakebite deaths almost completely captured the British imagination of Indian nature and landscape. In this context, as Pratik Chakrabarti pertinently argued, snakes and snakebite mortalities considerably dominated the official and popular discourse in nineteenth-century British India (Chakrabarti 2012, p. 116).

Venomous Indian snakes absolutely became a dominant part of the colonial fascination and engagement with 'deadly' Oriental landscape. A number of 'thrilling' anecdotes, concerning Oriental jungle and lifestyle, eloquently projected European fear for life in a snake-ridden country. In these writings, India was painted as a cruel, chaotic and disease-laden territory which was "divided equally between jungle, tigers, cobras, cholera, and sepoys" (Kipling 1899, p. 35). In such a feral and debased landscape, the Europeans often imagined themselves as being hounded by unruly 'vicious' snakes (See Pool 1894, p. 149). Rev. J. Ewan in his book, titled *India: Sketches and Stories of Native Life*, depicted a furious snake he accidentally met with, which not only attacked him boldly, but also seemed determined to cause mischief. In his version:

In the rainy season of 1880 I had the narrowest escape I have ever had. I was returning to Delhi, about 9 a.m. one day, along the Agra road, when I saw a bright, yellowish snake glide out from among the tombs and come on to the road. I apprehended no danger, and drove on, feeling confident it would get out of my way as I went forward. In this I was mistaken, for it stopped short in front of my horse. The poor brute was paralyzed with fright, and stood still. The snake was then by the footboard, and before I could take in the situation it sprang at me. I instinctively dropped the reins, and the horrible thing flashed past, striking me on the tips of the fingers and the knees as it passed. The spring carried it over the conveyance, but it turned and renewed the attack, and I could hear it distinctly beating against the bottom. The syce [sic] added to the horror and confusion by screaming, and for a time I could not tell whether it was in the well of the conveyance or outside. Fortunately the horse, feeling the reins loose, dashed off and broke the spell. When I drew him up and looked back, it was still on the road as defiant as ever. I had

proved its springing capacity already, and without a moment's hesitation left it in possession of the field.

I found out subsequently that it was one of the most dangerous of the snake tribe, the bite of which meant death (Ewan 1890, pp. 147-148).

In the same manner, one of the famous stories of Jim Corbett also fascinatingly provided the coloniser's contemplation of India's deathscapes. In recounting an awkward situation in Mokameh Ghat, when he himself was trapped in a small dark bathroom with a venomous cobra, "one of the most deadly snakes in India", Corbett wrote:

The fact that the cobra was as much trapped as I was in no way comforted me, for only a few days previously one of my men had had a similar experience. He had gone into his house in the early afternoon in order to put away the wages I had just paid him. While he was opening his box he heard a hiss behind him, and turning round saw a cobra advancing towards him from the direction of the open door. Backing against the wall behind him, for there was only one door to the room, the unfortunate man had tried to fend off the cobra with his hands, and while doing so was bitten twelve times on hands and on legs. Neighbours heard his cries and came to his rescue, but he died a few minutes later.

I learnt that night that small things can be more nerve-racking and terrifying than big happenings. Every drop of water that trickled down my legs was converted in my imagination into the long forked tongue of the cobra licking my bare skin, a prelude to the burying of his fangs in my flesh (Corbett 1968, p. 187).

All these extracts vividly illustrated that the colonisers were absolutely sure of pernicious nature of Indian snakes and extremely irritated by their presence everywhere in this 'snaky' colony. Predictably, the Europeans could not always get narrow escape from their bites and sometimes must have fallen victims to harmful snakebites. Obsessed by this horrible possibility, the colonisers were overwhelmed to consider poisonous snake as a major threat to the life and health of the Europeans living in India.

In course of time, this apparent threat to European lives posed by India's most 'deadly' reptiles became so alarming, particularly in the absence of any efficacious antidote, that the colonisers even envisaged that all 'noxious animals', like venomous snakes, were heinously committed to immense 'depredations' all over the country. As Sir Joseph Fayrer of the Indian Medical Service reported:

[...] the annual losses of human life, and of cattle, and the injury to crops caused by these scourges, were exceedingly great. Whole villages were at times completely depopulated, public roads and thoroughfares rendered literally unapproachable by human beings, even in broad daylight, and thousands of acres of once cultivated land were, in consequence, entirely deserted, and confined to the growth of brushwood and rank vegetation, to offer, in their turn, safe coverts to these various animals, and enable them to do more havoc in the surrounding country (Fayrer 1878, pp. 2-3).

Thus, poisonous Indian snakes, in their natural habitat, became the 'scourges' intended to destroy individual life and also to transform a land of production into a desert of deaths, a very Eden into a hell. It was in this context that, Rudyard Kipling, in his 'Nursery Rhymes for Little Anglo-Indians', cautioned young Britons residing in India about hell-on-earth:

In the plains of India,
Where like flies they die.
Isn't that a wholesome risk
To get our living by?
The fever's in the Jungle,

The typhoid's in the tank,
 And men may catch the cholera
 Apart from social rank;
 And Death is in the Garden,
 A-waiting till we pass,
 For the *Krait* is in the drain-pipe,
 The Cobra in the grass! (Quoted in Dillingham 2005, p. 15)

This rhyme and several individual testimonies of the colonisers' confrontation with Indian snakes reflect that physical engagement with Oriental landscape—habitat of numerous strange and unfamiliar poisonous reptiles—is actually a prelude to unhealthy living and premature death abroad. It is not surprising therefore that venomous Indian snakes appeared, in European eyes, as the *bêtes noires*, and one of the chief constraints for British imperial presence and ambition in India.

In this compulsive condition, the colonisers remorselessly began to mark this reptiles as 'evils' or sources of 'disorder' and tried to contain them ideologically and organisationally. For example, when the initial shock and confusion were over, the British Orientalist representation strikingly characterised the entire Indian snake race as a perilous entity which though used to exist outside the civilised society, frequently penetrated it, created extreme disorder and halted much expected progress (See Fayrer, 1878). The colonial accounts often coloured India as a romantic arena; and while the Indian snake was imagined as a sign of barbarism, the Briton, who initiated "the crusade against the thanatophidia", appeared as a symbol of progress and civilisation (See Nicholson 1883). This romantic idealisation tried to demonstrate how Indian wilderness created difficulties for the civilised Europeans and how they triumphantly overcame these and finally established law and order. The constructed scenario was that the ophidian populations as if were the very sign of Oriental jungle-raj challenging the valour of the civilised 'masculine' West and must therefore be vanquished (For detail, see Fayrer, 1878). The entire process, as projected in various colonial narratives, not only revealed the defeat of a wild Oriental creature through the victory of British rationalism but also constituted a cultural superiority of 'manly Englishman' over the barbaric Orient. However, alongside this Orientalist understanding, the colonisers also painstakingly accumulated from all possible sources, medical-zoological knowledge about snakes and their venoms to find out a 'scientific' antidote for snakebite envenomation in India. Scottish physician Patrick Russell was a pioneer in this scientific endeavour (Bhaumik 2012), followed by various prominent doctors like, Joseph Fayrer, David Douglas Cunningham, Lawrence Augustine Waddell, Alfred John Wall, Alexander Pedler, George Lamb, Leonard Rogers and others (For detail, see Chakrabarti 2012, pp. 113-141). These physicians' interest in Indian snakes and their venoms, under active patronage of the colonial authority, was also an indication of the British inclination to explore the Indian wilderness, find a way to extirpate the 'evil' in the grass and thus ultimately discipline the faunal world of India to sustain and strengthen the colonial economic system of penetration and control over resources. No doubt, such systematic engagement with snakes was a first-time incident in India, undertaken under a particular compulsive condition, which helped to shape and ameliorate a Western sense of animosity towards Indian snakes. It was this growing animosity which, as the colonial medical practitioners failed to find any efficacious remedy for snake poisoning, even encouraged the colonial government to take the drastic step of bounty-killing of snakes as a matter of policy during the second half of the nineteenth century (See Chakrabarti 2012, pp. 124-127; Rangarajan 2005, pp. 22-34). Just, due to British anxiety and animosity, millions of snakes were caught and

destroyed throughout the country, thereby seriously disturbing the ecological and cultural complexes of which they were significant part.

3. Genesis of British Animosity towards Snakes

However, it will be a mere folly if we assume that the British unfriendly attitude towards snakes was only an upshot of the colonisers' shocking encounter with the 'snaky' wilderness of India. No doubt the real difficulties that the colonisers faced in snake-ridden India mostly stimulated the Western sense of fear about snakes. Nevertheless, the traditional Christian idea of snake as the 'evil' or 'Satan', which the colonisers brought upon themselves, also profoundly influenced their notion about venomous Indian snakes. It will be pertinent here to provide some Christian myths and literary evidences which illustrate that the people of the British Isles were traditionally not comfortable to the existence of these mischievous reptiles. Of course, the ancient legend of Ireland regarding Saint Patrick, a Romano-British apostle and bishop of the Irish, banishing all snakes from the island by his prayers is one of the best evidences of English antipathy to the ophidians (Anon. 1889, p. 93). It was this inimical sense which, perhaps, impelled the most celebrated harbinger of Elizabethan Renaissance, William Shakespeare, to synchronise the theme of snake with the theme of sin, terror, corruption and devaluation of human soul. In his famous tragedy *Macbeth*, written between 1603 and 1607, Shakespeare strongly used the physical image of snake and poison to depict an atmosphere of destruction and delinquency. For instance, in Lady Macbeth's advice to her husband: "[...] look like th'innocent flower, / But be serpent under't", the snake actually became a sign of hypocrisy, treachery, boundless greed and ambition (Shakespeare 1997, 127). Often in the play, the snake appeared analogous to one with vindictive nature and symbolised fear and jeopardy. In the *Hamlet*, the *King Lear* and the *Othello*, Shakespeare also used the image of snake integrated with the theme of evil (For detail, see Sengupta 2011). Thus, in the enlightened British Christian worldview snake came to be imagined as an anathema or an evil entity about to destroy human lives and well-being.

Plausibly, the most severe religious accusation against snakes was raised in the famous epic poem *Paradise Lost*, a seventeenth-century masterpiece of English puritan poet John Milton. Influenced by the account of the Bible, mainly the *Book of Genesis*, Milton portrayed Satan as 'the infernal serpent', the originator of sin and God's greatest adversary, who appeared in the Garden of Eden with an agenda from Hell, intending to corrupt and destroy God's new, beloved creation, Adam and Eve, and fulfilling his ambition of being supreme. To fulfil his hidden desire, Satan first took the form of a cunning serpent and impressed lonely Eve by complimenting her beauty and godliness. Marvelled by the speech of a creature like snake, Eve enquired how the serpent learned to speak and she was craftily made to believe that the beast acquired this status by eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge which Eve and Adam were forbidden to eat by God. Satan tells Eve that God actually wanted Adam and Eve to eat the 'Fruit Divine' and His stricture was merely a test of their courage: "God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just; / Not just, not God..." (Milton 2003, p. 394). The seductive temptation through the evil offices of Satan puzzled Eve and the dignity of the Mother of Mankind was spoiled:

Here grows the Cure of all, this Fruit Divine,
Fair to the Eye, inviting to the Taste,
Of virtue to make wise: what hinders then
To reach, and feed at once both Body and Mind?
So saying, her rash hand in evil hour

Forth reaching to the Fruit, she pluck'd, she eat (Ibid., p. 396):

So Eve first tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree and met Adam. Adam was horrified as he knew the upshot of transgression of God's decree, but did not want to remain innocent and refused to

forsake Eve in her extremity; he also ate the fruit. God punished them soon for their defiance; Adam and Eve had to leave paradise hand in hand into an earth full of sorrow, pain and death. Henceforth, the serpent became a structural metaphor for Satan and was accused as the architect of the Fall and human disgrace. Consequently God pronounced his judgment:

Because thou hast done this, thou art accurst
Above all Cattle, each Beast of the Field;
Upon thy Belly grovelling thou shalt go,
And dust shalt eat all the days of thy Life.
Between Thee and the Women I will put
Enmity, and between thine and her Seed;
Her Seed shall bruise thy head, thou bruise his heel (Ibid., p. 410).

Thus Milton promoted a prototypical animosity against the entire race of snakes in his magnificent style. Also, in the *Paradise Lost*, God showed more mercy to mankind's first parent than to the serpentine Satan and fallen angels who followed him in rebellion, presumably because Eve and Adam was utterly deceived, in one way or other, by satanic conspiracy and although they earned sentence, were still open for redemption.

It is necessary to mention here that, in the *Old Testament*, legendary serpent of the Garden of Eden, called *Nahash* in Hebrew dialect, was characterised to represent both evil and divine force of salvation and agent of life. It was the author of the *Book of Revelation*, the final book of the *New Testament*, appearing at the close of the first century, who uniquely reinterpreted the snake as the Devil, where the 'serpent of old' ultimately became the Satan in disguise, an immoral spirit responsible for the immense loss (Vijayaraghavan 2006, pp. 5-12). Milton arrogated to himself a privilege in retelling this biblical story and casted the cynic figure of Satan depending on a sidelong glance at the story line of the Bible. In this context, Neil Forsyth remarks:

Readers of *Paradise Lost* are often surprised to find that there is no mention of Satan, only a talking snake, in the book of Genesis. Indeed Satan's appearances in the Bible are decidedly few and inconsistent. In Job he is a sneaky member of the Heavenly Court, in the Gospels he is the opponent of Jesus in the wilderness, and in Revelation he appears as a 'great dragon' to fight a cosmic battle with the angel Michael. One could not reconstruct Milton's magnificent creation from such sparse hints (Forsyth 2014, p. 17).

So, where the Bible is silent, Milton's imagination is unfettered and the puritan poet zealously "presents an entirely new conception of the Evil One of the Bible and the Devil of medieval belief" (Prince 1998, p. 18). As one scholar says, Milton's Satan:

[...] possesses an innate heroism that makes him wear the mask of confidence despite having lost his war against God. His mind is invincible and totally opposed to God's will. His speeches are full of inspirational thought that can motivate his followers to defend his cause. He convinces them to take up arms and convinces Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. This is his achievement: to influence the free will of others to follow his persuasion, and to achieve power over the other minds he encounters (Paul 2011, pp. xxix-xxx).

By creating such enigmatic and awful character like Satan—who in the form of a serpent originated all disobedience and invented the great revolt, *il gran rifiuto*—Milton actually makes his readers live through the experience of active evil, as if such a real satanic being existed in the mundane world who ought to be an object of attention as well as detestation. In this emotionally charged context, every living snake which appeared in Christian mind as a creature resembling Satan, became a wilful sinner, not a friend in disguise, but an eternal enemy of humankind.

Importantly, this epic verse *Paradise Lost* casted an overwhelming influence over the English literary society during the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries (Dyson and Lovelock 1973, pp. 13-14; Kolbrenner 2014; Shears 2009). One can easily comprehend the immediate literary imitation of wicked personality and unrepentant evil nature of Milton's snake in several latter creations, like seventeenth-century poet Lucy Hutchinson's epic poem *Order and Disorder* (Hutchinson 2001) and the then famous opera composer John Dryden's *The State of Innocence, and Fall of Man: An Opera* (Dryden 1678). The fascinating words of Shakespeare, Milton and other classical and romantic English writers about the subject of malevolent character of the snake considerably reinforced the British antagonistic mood of the time which continued unabated in the ensuing centuries. Thus, the image of the snake as Satan and as the root cause of mankind's immeasurable ruin grew sharper and brighter among the English people. Moreover, Milton's biblical poetry became the most popular text in the English schools and meticulously taught to the young Britons. In this respect, one scholar argues:

The story of the Garden of Eden and of Adam and the serpent with Satan indwelling is a favourite with children and so the erroneous belief about the serpent gets entrenched in the young minds generation after generation (Vijayaraghavan 2006, p. 12).

There is no doubt that, most of the colonisers were well accustomed to this enduring and unwavering culture of animosity towards snakes through their childhood lessons in various English schools and several other institutions run by the Church authorities. The specific religious idea of the Fall of Humanity led by the immoral serpent, whose body Satan took, surely encouraged the colonisers, frequently confronting venomous snakes in India, to imagine these reptiles as the spectres of sin and death and India as a snake-ridden pagan land, similar to 'a Universe of death'.

With a firm belief in the Christian idea of evil in mind, the colonisers marginalised Indian snakes and condemned the Indians as they used to maintain a normal relationship with these reptiles and even worshiped them. For example, one Christian newcomer in colonial Calcutta bluntly said that:

The very term snake has an objectionable sound with it, and we doubtless find it difficult to understand that the people of India can worship such a reptile (Pool 1894, p. 142).

The inculcation continued further, as the author wrote:

[...] in South India snake worship very generally prevails amongst the lower classes of the people. In the town of Trevandrum the other day, while a Christian colporteur was reading the Scriptures to some people in the courtyard of a house, a serpent passed by him. He wished to kill it, but was forbidden by his audience, who shouted, "Do not touch it—it is our god." What a god! Just think of falling down and worshipping a snake! To our Western feelings it is shocking in the extreme, but in the East it is an everyday occurrence (Ibid., p. 143).

Thus, the superiority of the Western Christian identity over the Indian religious one was craftily constructed and perfectly ordained. The presence of venomous snakes, snake-charmers and snake worshipers in India, all these became the parameters by which European culture differentiated between what is Eastern and what is Western. Within this overall pattern of the Oriental/Occidental distinction a doctrine was forcefully carved out to reinforce and legitimise the dominance of the civilised, rational and enlightened West over a savage, irrational and essentially religious Orient like India.

4. Conclusion

This article reveals the contribution of European literary texts, travelogues and other writings in the creation of nineteenth-century India as a snake-ridden feral land of deaths, which was the

mirror image, or Other, of the wholesome and civilised West. This evocative construction of an 'exotic' Oriental colony, infested by numerous venomous reptiles and inhabited by snake-worshippers, reinforced the idea about India's environmental and social primitiveness, which provided a moral justification for European control of the Orient. It further elaborates that this particular Orientalist understanding of a 'snaky' landscape was mainly articulated through the very reality that the colonisers experienced during their journey and stay in India, though, previously held Christian idea of snake as a satanic creature also influenced the British Orientalist mind-set. But what this article particularly points out is that, the visible reality of Indian wilderness mainly led the colonisers to configure more or less a distorted perception of the wild and savage Orient and this creation, as manifested in nineteenth century colonial writings, barely owed to the Western engagement with and interpretation of scriptural accounts of the East. Thus this article offers a sharp deviation from the claim that Orientalist discourse was only an imperialist textuality providing an ancient Indian texts-based lens through which the Orient was viewed and controlled. The mechanism of Orientalist representation in Indian context was rather more complex than commonly assumed by the scholars.

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