

Text or Action? Characterising Astronomy in Colonial India

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Most scholarship on *jyotihshastra* or astronomy in South Asia is about pre-colonial history. This paper concentrates more on knowledge-making practices relating to observational astronomy in the colonial period. In the process, it seeks to consider different possibilities for characterising the encounter between Europeans and Indians in ‘science’. Among the few histories that have been written on astronomy in colonial India, there are notable attempts to depict an interaction of traditional (Indian) and modern (Western) astronomical knowledge, typically through exploring how contemporary intellectuals sought to reconcile *Puranic*, *Siddhantic* and Copernican cosmologies; the historiographical emphasis tends to be on the text. However, by looking more at experiential constructions of knowledge in the astronomical observatories established under the East India Company, focusing on ‘science in action’, this paper suggests another means of investigating the nuances of colonial science – one that highlights the multidirectional dynamics of its working practices, but also exposes its iniquities.