

# Tangled Encounters with the Indian Other: English Women Travel Writers Confronting India

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**Abstract:** *The travel narratives of Emily Eden (1797-1869) and Fanny Parkes (1794-1875), depicting their extensive travel through India, provide valuable insights into the initial encounter in the first half of the nineteenth century between the Europeans and the native Indians from a female perspective. The narratives, which comprise Eden's letters Up the Country (1867) and Parkes' journal Wanderings of a Pilgrim (1850), reveal the competing discourses of gender and imperialism at work that create tensions and ambivalences within the texts. On the one hand, the women as English travelers represented colonial power, but on the other hand, their gender placed them within a secondary or weaker position within the power discourse. Thus they wrote from a liminal position and their descriptions of their encounters with the colonial Other are fraught with anxiety and fractures. These travel narratives present an alternate view to empire building, and they manifest a complicated negotiation with Orientalism, evident in their use of the picturesque and in the moments when Eden and Parkes write about meeting Indian women. This paper argues that even though the women travel writers reinforce the dominant imperial and orientalist view, yet at times, they break away from the hegemony of monolithic Orientalism to present more personal and nuanced responses to India and Indians.*

The history of travel writing starting from Homer's *Odyssey* presents male figures as explorers and adventurers while the women like Penelope remain at home, waiting for the man to return. This was the norm for a long time with very few women undertaking journeys and even fewer writing about them. However, technological advances in the nineteenth century saw a rise in women traveling all over the world; and as England consolidated its power in India, women joined the men serving the East India Company. Consequently, as early as the 1830s, there were a number of women accompanying their male relatives to India. Two of these women were Emily Eden, the sister of the Governor General, Lord Auckland, and Fanny Parkes, the wife of a minor colonial official. They not only traveled through India but produced travel narratives which provide us with rich and significant insights into the discourses of gender, imperialism, and orientalism.

Women have functioned as signifiers in colonialism for both colonizers and the colonized. British women in India represented the domestic values and the emotional resonances of the Empire, including the normative values and attitudes of the center. These British women of the imperial structure were locally known as *Memsahibs*. Due to the close identification with the imperial values, these women (strengthened by a wave

of Raj nostalgia in the 1980s) occupy a negative stereotype of the disdainful white woman as the wives presented in Forster's *A Passage to India* or the immoral women of lust as in Daphne in *The Jewel in the Crown* of the Raj Quartet or Olivia in *Heat and the Dust*. V. S. Naipaul, in examining why the British rule had to end despite the fact that "no other conqueror was more welcome than the British," suggests "some say the arrival in India afterwards of white women. It is possible" (qtd. in Suleri 77). In this regard, Emily Eden who was in India from 1836 to 1842 and Fanny Parkes who was in India for 24 years from 1822 are important for presenting an alternative discourse to the dominant view of Imperialism which is male produced and also heavily implicated in Orientalism. Thus, instead of the failed bridge party of *A Passage to India* they show the possibility of understanding and sympathy between the English and the Indians. According to William Dalrymple (xvi), Parkes was one of the last travelers to witness a close and harmonious relation between the English and the Indians; the closeness which give way to rigid distancing and mutual suspicions after the Mutiny in 1857.

Women's role in imperialism is a contentious issue. Writers such as Pat Barr and Marion Fowler view the *memsahib's* role with sympathy and they valorize the efforts of these women to humanize and essentially feminize the empire. Margaret Macmillan even argues that the *memsahibs* were appreciated and loved by their servants. In contrast, recent post-colonial critics contest this perception and have relentlessly exposed the women's complicity in perpetuating hegemony and prejudices. This conflicting view of the women's role is a consequence of the ambivalent position the women occupy, and the ensuing ambivalence of the women themselves. Sara Mills explains:

The work of women travel writers cannot be fitted neatly within the Orientalist framework, and seems to constitute an alternative and undermining voice because of the conflicting discourses at work in their texts. They cannot be said to speak from outside colonial discourse, but their relation to the dominant discourse is problematic because of its conflict with the discourses of 'femininity,' which were operating on them in equal, and sometimes stronger, measure. (63)

The women travel writers like Parkes and Eden occupy a liminal space. As *memsahibs*, they belonged to the ruling class. They had come to India as part of the imperial mechanism and they represented the supremacy of the colonial race and its power. By writing about India, they were contributing to the discursive formation of India by producing knowledge about India and circulating their depictions.

However, women had to undertake a complex negotiation with conflicting discourses that affected them. By disseminating information about the colonies the women were impinging on the male preserve of knowledge and thus risking the violation or transgression of the normative gender roles of their time. Mills argues that the women preserved their given gender roles by circumscribing the scope of their narratives to domestic details and innocuous description of lands and peoples. The women were careful not to present scientific, political or authoritative data. The decision to focus on the domestic side of the empire created a safe feminine area for women to describe. In addition, the women also adopted the confessional genres as the mode of writing. Thus they published their travel texts as letters and journals in genres that are not valued as authoritative or scientific. Parkes published her journal and Eden letters which she had written mainly to her elder sister and friends. These choices were made to ensure the femininity of the writers. They mitigated the potential transgressions risked by travel and by publishing when they positioned themselves as a dutiful daughter maintaining a journal for her mother and a dutiful sister writing home regularly.

Following Mills, I would like to argue that Fanny Parkes and Emily Eden operate within the dominant imperial discourse but at times they undermine the hegemonic view. They were constrained by the social conventions of gender and also the dictates of national interest or their own race. However, their narratives reveal that women could negotiate with the discourses that governed them. The travel narratives of the women travelers present a female gaze but one that is implicated within the colonial discourse. Also the journey and the encounter with the Other impacted upon them so that they would change and undergo shifts in perspectives. This paper will analyze moments in their texts when both orientalism and imperialism are fractured.

The two major discourses which the women writers adopted in their travel narratives are that of the picturesque and orientalism. The writers, Parkes and Eden themselves, have used the term "picturesque" and "oriental"

separately. Following their use of the words, this paper will argue that the picturesque is a mode used to depict the external landscape of India and “oriental”/Orientalisms is employed to describe the privileged internal spaces that the travelers were privy to. The paper draws on the pictorial and aesthetic connotations of picturesque and the political and literary associations of orientalism in the discussion. Although these two discourses are very similar and overlapping, it is necessary to separate the two strands. David Spurr in his book on travel writing and journalism, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, has addressed this issue of coalescing or overlapping terms. He points out that a range of tropes were available for representation, “the repetitions and variations of these tropes are seen to operate across a range of nineteenth and twentieth century contexts” (3). Thus, any attempt to classify these modes “involves a certain degree of abstraction, not to say reduction: it subordinates the complexity and discreteness of any moment to the need for understanding it within a larger context” (3).

According to Indira Ghose, much of women’s travel writing falls under the picturesque mode (38). The picturesque emerged in the eighteenth century and continued in the next century as the prevalent mode of depicting landscapes. Originating in painting, it was an influential movement that crossed into literary texts and it was very popular in both travel guides and narratives in Britain as well as abroad. The concept was initially developed by William Gilpin who included the uneven or the rugged in sceneries to enhance the beauty of nature. The theory was further developed by Uvedale Price and he set out the suitable elements for the picturesque to include ruins, dilapidated buildings, and even gypsies and beggars. One can easily connect the features of the picturesque with the romantic sensibility which also stressed on the antiquated, the remote, and all with a touch of melancholy.

The picturesque was appropriated by female travel writers to depict the unfamiliar East as it gave them a framework from which to view the unknown Other and to contain the depiction within a familiar paradigm. Parkes and Eden both used the picturesque as an organizing principle of their descriptions. The connection with colonial power is made clear by Jill Casid who maintains that travel narratives used the picturesque as a mode of aesthetic and political control. She explains the picturesque served to domesticate the foreign by recomposing it into an already familiar model. At the same time, this domestication of the exotic was a means of containing the unfamiliar/foreign within known boundaries (46). She further argues that the picturesque provided a rhetoric of possession because the spectator can master the land by sketching or describing it from the vantage point of a spectator.

This imperial appropriation is also noticed by Sara Suleri in her statement:

For the female as colonizer, the picturesque assumes an ideological urgency through which all subcontinental threats could be temporarily converted into watercolours and thereby domesticated into less disturbing systems of belonging ... the picturesque becomes synonymous with a desire to transfix a dynamic cultural confrontation into a still life, converting a pictorial imperative into a gesture of self-protection that allows the colonial gaze a license to convert its ability not to see into studiously visual representations. (76)

Both Parkes and Eden made use of the picturesque. In Parkes’ case, she draws attention to it in her title *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*. Her journal contains a series of word paintings of different scenes of India ranging from Calcutta to Allahabad to Delhi over a period of the 24 years that she lived in India. She uses the word very often to capture the pleasure that a particular rural or exotic scene offers her. Thus she writes about the beauty of a Bengali temple:

We have just passed a ruined ghat, situated in the midst of two Hindu temples of picturesque form: an old peepal tree overshadows them; its twisted roots are exposed, the earth having been washed away during the rains. (285)

The dilapidation of the run down temple and the ruggedness of the twisted roots happily fulfill the picturesque expectations. In keeping with the conventions of the picturesque, exotic natives also fall under the purview of the spectator gaze. While the rural poor, beggars, and gypsies were the focus of the picturesque in England, similarly the disempowered and dispossessed natives are the focus of the colonial gaze. So along with the ruined temple, Parkes finds the Bengali women bathing and carrying away water along the ruined ghat to be a scene worthy of

sketching. Later when she encounters fakirs at the Chandpaul ghat, she asserts “I forgive them the sin of rascality, for their picturesque appearance” (286).

Following the conventions of the picturesque, Parkes delineates the shrines and historical ruins of India. By focusing on the antiquities, there is a suggestion that India’s present has nothing to offer and its glory was in the past. Thus Parkes can freely appreciate the Indian monuments such as the Taj Mahal. She presents detailed and exuberant description of the Taj which she visited in January 1835.

I have seen the Taj Mahal; but how shall I describe its loveliness? Its unearthly style of beauty! It is not its magnitude; but its elegance, its proportions, its exquisite workmanship, and the extreme delicacy of the whole, that render it the admiration of the world. (179)

Parkes was able to inscribe her appreciation of India because this was an India of the past which no longer held any threat to the British hegemony. Also, she praises the Taj only after she has mentioned in an earlier journal entry that the Taj is under British power and may be sold off by the Governor General. Interestingly, it was also in this entry that we find Parkes subverting the picturesque by including a criticism of colonial policy. It was rather daring for a government official’s wife to question the decisions:

The Governor General has sold the beautiful piece of architecture, called the Mootee Masjid, at Agra, for Rs 125,000 (about £12,500) and it is now being pulled down! The Taj has also been offered for sale! But the price required has not been obtained . . . If this be true, is it not shameful? The present king might as well sell the chapel of Henry VII in Westminster Abbey for the paltry sum of £12,500: for any sum the impropriety of the act would be the same. By what authority does the Governor General offer the Taj for sale? Has he any right to molest the dead? To sell the tomb raised over an empress, which from its extraordinary beauty is the wonder of the world? It is impossible the Court of Directors can sanction the sale of the tomb for the sake of its marble and gems. (120-121)

Here Parkes has embedded her criticism of colonial rule through a comment on art and aesthetic concerns. As it was not possible for the women writers to publish or publicly present direct criticism of the colonial policies, the lapses and the wrongs can out in indirect means through an anxiety over art or, as in the case of Eden, concern for humanity and the English themselves.

Emily Eden, like Parkes, recorded her stay in India. She was in a more privileged position as the sister of the Governor General and his hostess. She accompanied him on his political tour to the Northern Provinces and she was witness to the durbar presented to Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of the Punjab. Yet the Hon. Emily Eden, daughter of a prominent Whig family, who biographers claim to have been politically conscious does not present any political detail or commentary in the letters that she published. In keeping the gender conventions of her time, she limits her topics to domestic arrangements and picturesque views of India. Her publication of her letters that she wrote during the four year march from Calcutta to Upper Provinces describe her witnessing the Great Game, the political conflict of Britain and Russia that had spread to Afghanistan and northern India, but she refrains from commenting on the political dimension. Instead she presents the hardships of the journey, the social on-goings among the English officials and with the natives along the way and, of course, the scenery and the weather. Pablo Mukherjee has commented that Eden’s failure to provide useful knowledge was the strength of her work. He cites the *Athanaeum*’s praise of Eden’s work in presenting a picturesque account of Indian life, and this picturesqueness he explains was associated with anti-utilitarianism and antiquarianism (25-26).

Eden in a similar fashion to Parkes appropriates the discourse of the picturesque to focus on the ruined aspects of India and the exotic different people of India. Like Parkes, she too focuses on the contemplation of a historic monument of India instead of highlighting the grandeurs of the present. For instance, she quickly glosses over the grand home of Dwarkanauth Tagore though she appreciates the fireworks he put up (*Letters from India* 255). In *The Golden Interlude*, a retelling of Fanny and Emily’s letters, there is mention of the books and grandeur of the Tagore home (51). Yet in the letters that Emily Eden published for a public readership she neglects to include this. It is for this public persona of a staunch imperialist that Eden has been much criticized and vilified. Many see her as closely aligning herself with the official colonial discourse. However, I would like to argue that Eden, like Parkes,

situates herself very firmly within the colonial discourse but also counters this discourse with her criticisms.

Emily Eden was not as enthusiastic or as emotional as the Indophile Fanny Parkes. From the beginning of her journey, she complains about the unfamiliarity and strangeness of the land and repeatedly inscribes her homesickness for her own land and people. However, this does not mean that Eden was as waspish or prejudiced as many contemporary researchers regard her. For Eden, like Jane Austen, was an ironist who always regulated her emotions and who presented her criticisms through sardonic wit and ironic self-deprecations. This ironic mode is extended to Eden's treatment of the picturesque as well. She too has focused on the ruins of the past glory of India and on the exotic Otherness of its people. In *Up the Country*, Eden presents Delhi, the seat of the Moghul or native Indian emperor, as a city of ruins. In her entry dated Camp, Delhi, Feb. 20, she writes "Four miles round it there is nothing to be seen but gigantic ruins of mosques and palaces" (94). Even the "king of Delhi's palace" is a place of ruins. The picturesque discourse strongly emerges in the following description of the palace: "It is a melancholy sight-so magnificent originally, and so poverty stricken now. The marble hall where the king sits is still very beautiful, all inlaid with garlands and birds of precious stones" (97). She then quickly deflates this grandeur with the "but the garden is all gone to decay too, and 'the Light of the World' had a forlorn and darkened look"(97).

Interestingly it is in the very moments of the picturesque that Eden embeds her debunking of the imperial discourse. In a very casual light-hearted tone, she presents her caustic assessment of English policy in the following excerpt:

In short, Delhi is a very suggestive and moralizing place – such stupendous remains of power and wealth have passed and passing away – and somehow I feel we horrid English have just 'gone and done it', merchandized it, revenueed it and spoiled it all. (98)

In a deft movement, Eden has segued from dwelling in the past to arriving at the present and registering her condemnation of current English practices. Still maintaining a flippant tone that would not be out of place in drawing rooms of London, Eden inserts a further scathing comment: "I am not very fond of Englishmen out of their own country"(98). This is definitely an anti-imperialist moment.

Indira Ghose notices another introspective comment on English shortcomings in Eden's description of the Kutub Minar:

Well of all things I ever saw, I think this is the finest. Did we know about it in England? I mean did you and I in our old ancient Briton state, know? Do you know, without my telling you, what the Kootub is? Don't be ashamed there is no harm in not knowing, only I do say it is rather a pity we were so ill taught. (99)

Besides the acknowledgment of ignorance, Eden also appreciates the magnificence of India when she writes, "I expected the Kootub would have been rather inferior to the Monument. One has those little prejudices. It happens to be the Monument put at the top of the column in the Place Vendome, and that again placed on a still grander base" (99).

Another passage which many critics read as Eden's undermining of dominant discourse is her ironic role reversal of what would happen if an Indian "black Governor-General" would go to England and look at ruins.

Perhaps two thousand years hence, when the art of steam has been forgotten and nobody can exactly make out the meaning of the old English word 'mail coach' some black Governor-General of England will go and look at some ruins, and doubt whether London ever was a large town, and will feed some white-looking skeletons, and say what distress the poor creatures must be in; they will really eat rice and curry; and his sister will write to her Mary D. at New Delhi, and complain of the cold, and explain to her what snow is, and how the natives wear bonnets, and then, of course, mention that she wants to go home.(66-67)

Ghose reads this as a "deconstructive move" (83) where the ironic gaze is fixed at Eden herself and her own culture. She sees Eden breaking away from colonial discourse which always presents the home culture as superior even while meditating on the past glories of Oriental culture. Ghose explains this as "In the ironic

distance from her own culture that the text enacts, lurks a suspicion of the absurdity and transience of British colonial rule. And finally, what Eden's text sets up for mockery most of all is her own persona: that of a letter-writing, perspiring, bonnet-wearing homesick traveller" (84).

Pablo Mukherjee has also commented on this passage as an important instance of Eden's debunking of dominant discourses. He, however, reads in this passage a shift from the picturesque which he calls "uneven" or "unevenly" picturesque (26). He connects the starving white mass to the victims of famine that Eden had witnessed on her journey to Delhi. The descriptions of poverty were not neutral dispassionate depictions of pictorial merit but heart-wrenching sympathetic accounts. In a text noted for its witty detached tone, Eden's concern for the starving Indians registers a strong emotional response.

After seeing starving children and women at Powrah, Cawnpore, looking like skeletons, Eden goes on to write: "I am sure there is no sort of violent atrocity I should not commit for food, with a starving baby. I should not think about the rights or wrongs of the case" (65). She is moved to write "I am sure you would have sobbed" (66) to describe the effect of seeing a starving baby being fed by an equally emaciated elder sibling of 6 years age.

Mukherjee rightly points out that the distress of seeing the famished masses led her to imagine the white skeletons. He also explains that the strong compassion that Eden displays "disturbs the norms of the picturesque that binds Eden's writing" (35). The reference to the starving Indians "injects a tonal and thematic excess that cannot be domesticated under the sign of melancholy which Leask sees as one of the fundamental signs of the picturesque" (35). The strong emotional note of the passage fractures the aesthetic distance of the picturesque. Here Eden has moved beyond the imperial discourse to enter into a moment of empathy and emotional intimacy with the colonial subjects.

Another discourse which the women travelers appropriated was the discourse of Orientalism. By the very act of describing India and circulating knowledge about India they were operating within the framework of Orientalism. As Ghose explains, the power hierarchy in this discursive formation as "The Oriental is consistently denied the power to know and represent himself or herself .... By denying agency to the Oriental object of knowledge, the Western Orientalist subject appropriates for him or herself—it is he(or she) who has the power to produce the Orient through his/her production of knowledge (24). By appropriating the discourse, women were able to negotiate a form of gendered power which allowed them to contest and compete with the male preserves of scientific and scholarly discourse.

Orientalism emerges as the repetition of certain tropes and images that fix the Other in particular stereotypes. Besides emphasizing an alterity with the English/European Self, Orientalism also mystifies the Other as exotic and alluring. Like the picturesque discourse, this discourse too provides the writer/spectator with familiar idioms and frameworks with which to depict and thus circumscribe the foreign Other. This accounts for why both Parkes and Eden draw on a tradition of Oriental tales to situate their depiction of India. Parkes places herself in the Orientalist tradition when she writes: "The perusal of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's work has rendered me anxious to visit a *zenana*" (35).

The Oriental strand is clearly manifested in the accounts of the *zenana* that the women produced. By writing about Indian domestic spaces, the English women were able to incorporate Oriental practices within their own sphere of experience. Describing Indian women who were in seclusion provided the women travelers an entry into the discourse of Orientalism. Since men did not have access to the inner spaces or *zenana*, the female quarters of upper class Indian households, the women could legitimize their writing as a necessary contribution to imperial knowledge. Representations of upper class and aristocratic Indian women form a large part of women's travel writing. It is foregrounded in Parkes' title, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque, during Four and Twenty Years in the East: with Revelations of Life in the Zenana*. Dalrymple's abridged edition of the journal also gives prominence to the *zenana* descriptions in his title, *Begums, Thugs and Englishmen*.

Parkes' depictions of the *zenanas* are situated within an Orientalist discourse. In one of the early accounts written in 1823 she includes a letter from a friend who had visited the King of Oude's *zenana*, and the royal women are described as follows: "But the present King's wives were most superbly dressed, and looked like creatures of the Arabian tales. Indeed, one was so beautiful that I could think of nothing but Lalla Rookh in her bridal attire" (55).

Parkes herself gives us a voyeuristic view of sensuous languid women she meets in the zenana of Colonel Gardner. Her friendship with this Anglo-Indian family gives her access to the inner quarters and the stories of the women. When she herself has the chance to enter and meet an Indian princess, she perpetuates the stereotype in her voyeuristic gaze. She delineates almost every aspect of Mulka Begum's physical beauty from her eyes to her lips and teeth. Parkes exclaims "How beautiful she looked! How very beautiful" (193). She goes on to state: "Her figure is tall and commanding; her hair jet black, very long and straight; her hands and arms very lovely! Very lovely" (194).

In her depictions of the Begums of Awadh, she is actually quite critical of their intrigues and power plays. Interestingly, though she gives a negative view of the meddling Begums, the very act of registering the interference or influence of the Begums is a fracture in the stereotype.

While Parkes reinforces the Oriental tropes in her inscriptions of zenana life with its multiple wives and cloistered lives of women, she simultaneously both upholds and subverts the feminine discourse of her time. In comparing the Muslim women with English women, Parkes valorizes the English. Regretting that James Gardner, her friend the Colonel's son, was not sent to England for education she writes: "I fancy the begum, his mother, would never hear of her son's going to England for education; and to induce a native woman to give way to any reasons that are contrary to her own wishes is quite out of the power of mortal man" (226). In contrast, "A man may induce a European wife to be unselfish and make a sacrifice to comply with his wishes, or for the benefit of her children" (226). In describing her first visit to the zenana of a rich Calcutta native gentleman, she writes: "I was glad to have seen a zenana, but much disappointed: the women were not ladylike" (35).

At the same time, however, the zenana visits provokes a sympathy for women's condition and Parkes transcends the racial differences to generalize on the universal suffering on women. Thus she transgresses the nineteenth century discourse of femininity and approaches a radical feminism for her time when she asserts "It is the same all the world over; the women, being the weaker, are the playthings, the drudges or the victims of the men; a woman is a slave from her birth; and the more I see of life, the more I pity the condition of the women" (276). This is a comment made after she contemplated the zenana.

Parkes is able to finally overcome her initial prejudice and attain a moment of cultural empathy and mutual understanding when she meets the deposed queen of Gwalior, the Mahratta Queen Baiza Bai. Unlike the passive, stay at home Muslim princesses and wives of her earlier encounters, the Bai is an active woman who lives in camps and likes horse-riding like Fanny Parkes herself. Perhaps these common interests provided a common ground from where the English traveler could objectively view her Indian counterpart and form a friendship. Parkes decenters the Oriental view she had been promoting throughout her journal when she praises her friend the Baiza Bai: "I visited the Bai several times and liked her better than any native lady I ever met with" (247). It is in this encounter also that Parkes re-evaluates the British superiority. In a moment of self-reflection she acknowledges the flaws of English culture when she admits to the suffering of the widows in England.

An English lady enjoyed all the luxury of her husband's house during his life; but on his death she was turned out of the family mansion, to make room for the heir, and pensioned off; whilst the old horse was allowed the run of the park, and permitted to finish his days amidst the pastures he loved in his prime. (248)

This negative view of England however is countered by a reminder that the Hindu widow's plight is worse as they are not allowed to remarry.

Nevertheless, the meeting with the Bai is very important because here Parkes also confesses to an Indian/native that the women's condition in England is not better. One of the rationalizations for British rule in India was to rescue the women in the zenanas and the widows who were sent to the pyres for the sati. So Parkes' dialogue over the "severity of laws of England with respect to married women, how completely by law they are the slaves of their husbands, and how little hope there is of redress" is of significance for multiple reasons.

First of all, here Parkes is destabilizing the dominant discourse of Orientalism by exposing the weaknesses of the Occidental power. She is criticizing the situation of women both in India and in England thus undermining the discourse of gender. And perhaps, most importantly, she is narrating a moment of dialogue. Here the Indian

woman is not the object of her gaze but someone who asks her questions and who probes her. Here the Indian woman's voice is represented and she is treated with respect and admiration. The Bai's wit is also recorded when the Bai asks who made the laws in England. Hearing it is the men, instead of denouncing male chauvinism, the Bai answers "I doubted it... 'since they only allow themselves one wife'" (247). Parkes's fondness for the Bai throws positive light on both colonial and Indian women indicating that friendship was possible between the two cultures.

The interest in depicting the zenana was also shared by Emily Eden. Her treatment of the Indian women is also like Parkes': ambivalent and contradictory. She gives details of the dresses and the appearances of the women she meets. She emphasizes the body and its physical merit in pointing out how one chief ranees, the mother of Pertab Singh was "one of the prettiest little creatures I ever saw" and the other queen "was immensely fat, and rather ugly" (226). In her encounter with some of Runjeet Singh's wives, she is again evaluating rather than describing. She measures physical worth when she judges the women. She declares out of five of the ranees, "Four of them were very handsome; two would have been beautiful anywhere" (232). On the one hand, she follows the Orientalist mode by highlighting the allure and beauty of the zenana women. She makes notes of the fabulous jewelry, "the huge strings of pearls" and "crescents of diamonds" (233) they wear. On the other hand, however, she undermines the glamour and like Parkes draws attention to the flaws. When she went to meet the Rajah of Benares, she describes the reception of being seated on a velvet sofa and watching a dance as "The whole thing was like a dream, it was so curious and unnatural" (28).

Yet, in a narrative that functions as a theatrical presentation of the spectacle of the British, with the emphasis on the 12,000 men march, durbars and rajahs/rulers that the Edens met on their travel to Punjab, the descriptions of the women are anti-climactic. Thus when she and Fanny are taken inside to meet the women she does not continue in the dream sequence. Here mortality and decay punctures the fabulous because the queen, the grandmother, is old and ill, and being forced to kiss her "was not very nice" (29). More disappointingly, the women were not dazzling, the Rajah's sisters are "very ugly."

Like Parkes, she is employing the discourse of Orientalism when she sends back her reports of the inner quarters of Indian households/palaces. She focuses on the queens rather than the servants and other lower class women she must have surely seen and met. She writes only about Rozina, her lady's maid, rather than about all of them. However, there is an uneasiness in meeting the Indian women. Both Parkes and Eden display an anxiety when confronted with the otherness of the Indian women. Parkes at first presents them as idle and even ugly as in the case of Mulka Begum. It is only after seeing Mulka Begum for the second time in the evening that Parkes is so eloquent in her praise of the Indian princess and later she mentions that the Begum was a great help to her husband in running their estate.

Eden is a more reticent writer than Parkes. While Parkes described India and its scenery and people in her journal, Eden remained focused on life around the Governor General's retinue, with the Anglo-Indian social life and the various receptions the Edens visited. Yet her representations of the women are curiously limited. One would imagine that she would want to share the private glimpses of the secluded zenana. The aristocratic traveler does not present us with any memorable female like Parkes' Mulka Begum or the Baiza Bai. In fact, Indrani Sen has pointed out that Eden was very unimpressed with the Mahratta Queen (47). Eden finds her a "clever looking little woman." She does not even appreciate the Queen's subterfuge to allow the sisters to retain the "splendid" jewels that she presented to them. Perhaps Eden having met with reigning princes was not much interested in the deposed queen who was probably trying to garner favor from the English to re-establish her position. Also Eden's lack of enthusiasm or admiration of the women could be due to the fact that she was in India for only 6 years and she was very restricted in her movements due to protocol so she could not freely mix with any Indian individual. In fact, this is a point she regrets in one letter after she visited the wives of the Sikh nobility in their tents. She writes, "I should like to see some of these high-caste ladies several times, without all this nonsense of presents, &c., but as to hear their story, and their way of life, and their thoughts" (227).

So Eden too undergoes a change. The encounters do create a destabilizing of received notions, and both travelers do feel more open to learning and accepting the new culture. It is while meeting the women that Eden is aware of how she is the object of a reverse gaze and how even the disempowered Indian women can have fun

with her. Twice she complains that the women purposely spoiled her gowns with attar and that they enjoyed doing so. She even admits that Runjeet Singh's wives "laughed at our bonnets" (223).

In conclusion, these excerpts taken from the journals and letters of two nineteenth century travel writers are moments worthy of critical attention. True they are not evidence of a completely alternative reading. The two women remain entrenched within an imperial discourse so this article is not an apology for their imperial orientalist tendencies. However, this article has tried to show that opinions and attitudes were not intransigent.

Both Eden and Parkes began their journeys with diffidence and prejudice. However, in the case of both women, a shift in perspective is noticed. They are at times able to transcend their colonial perspectives and be both self-critical and open. Their relations with India was tangled and not clear cut. The ambivalence they experienced gave way to the freedom to open up. Parkes definitely moved towards decentering her imperial notions in her fulsome articulation of love and eagerness for India. Dalrymple notes that Parkes was regarded suspiciously by the British in Delhi for taking an interest in the descendants of the Mughal king (xvi). She had to pay a price for countering official colonial discourse. As Dalrymple writes she was "one of the last of the generation who was able to express unequivocal admiration for India. Even so her attitudes were subject to criticism from her peers" (xvi). This pressure or criticism she faced in India probably accounts for the ambivalences in her attitude to India. Eden as the sister of Governor General had to align herself more closely with the official discourse. Yet she too is anxious that her views about India may have been too sympathetic and she defends her position in her preface. Eden and Parkes will remain important for destabilizing hegemonic discourses and creating textual spaces for cross-cultural understandings.

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