Chapter I

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), prolific letter-writer and diarist, early feminist, socialite, introducer of smallpox inoculation in England, involved in Whig politics- traveled to Turkey along with her husband, Edward Wortley Montagu who was sent to Turkey as an ambassador to represent his country. The account of this travel earned critics’ acclaim. She also championed the feminist cause and introduced inoculation in England. On the down side, she was repulsed and swindled, yet she won her struggle. Born in influential aristocracy, she groomed herself in her father’s library and friend circle, comprising a number of daughters of nobility and gentry, and launched her literary career by adolescence. A strict disciplinarian governess turned her into a rebel who opted to live individualistically, even in love and marriage. She chose Edward Wortley Montagu as her life partner and eloped with him and proved to be a loyal wife, displaying perfect domesticity besides acting as his political campaigner. After the Whig victory, Wortley got a chance to serve as Ambassador Extraordinary to Turkey and Lady Mary accompanied him. But Wortley’s mission failed and they returned to London to settle down. Here she befriended a number of intellectuals and littérateurs. In later life, she was wrecklessly cheated and soullessly mocked but she endured and reconciled with her lot in life and as she was on her death bed, she was heard to have said that: *It has all been most interesting.*

With a number of projects and literary works to her credit, Lady Mary deserves being called both an intellectual and a social activist. She actively engaged herself in social...
discourse and motivated the court and the nobility. She led the Inoculation Drive in England and made it a success with the generous help of Princess Carolina, in spite of being dragged in scandals. In Winter 1743-4, she was there to track a brilliant comet. Since early age, she was devoted to feminist advocacy. She also showed the way to inter-cultural amity by mending Oriental lore and rectifying earlier mistakes. Similarly, the saga of her penmanship covers a range of literary genres: juvenilia, poetry, diary writing, annotation, essays, pamphlets and the letters, especially Turkish Embassy Letters that earned her lasting fame.

Chapter II

(TEL), a travelogue, is rooted in the letters she wrote and the journal she maintained. The present work considers Jack Malcom’s edition besides Halsband’s text. The literary features of TEL, comprise both its content and form. This study puts it in three: (i) Text Analysis, (ii) Content Analysis, and (iii) style, including the literary devices.

Different editions of TEL offer slightly varying coverage, with a total of 58 letters in Malcolm’s edition. The text in Halsband gives O.S. version, and adds ‘Heads of Letters’. The text in Halsband is ‘original’ but Malcolm modernizes spellings. Usually, Lady Mary shares general information on weather, scenario, customs, ceremonies etc., with her sister and friends but reserves serious topics, literature, polity or history, for Alexander Pope and Abbe Conti. Her audience included posterity. Among the immediate audience, she addressed 7 letters each to Abbe Conti and Alexander Pope and Lady Rich, 5 to Anne Thistlethwayte, and 14 to Lady Mar. The significance of the audience lies in why she wrote and to whom she wrote. Her
discerning mind usually made intelligent correlation between the addressee and the content. She deployed two tools for arousing the addressee’s interest, the opening of the letter and sensitizing and titillating the audience instead of stereotyping.

As per the structure of TEL, it richly documents only the body text. And each letter necessarily ends with ‘etc.’ In her cultural discourse in TEL, she has spoken about her motives and objectives for writing these letters. The analysis of TEL’s contents shows that she presented her ‘self-image’ as ‘the first Christian’, a faithful wife, in Turkish habits and an inmate of Mohammad’s paradise but was obsessed with self-pity. Her class-consciousness is shown in her description of princes, aristocracy, peasants, vulgar Turks, beggars, and slaves. As an advocate of feminism, she dwelt on women’s plight, male dominance, state of widows, practices of libertinism and child marriage, besides referring to dual marriage (cicisbeismo). Her social critique addresses the issues concerning popish trends, Christianity and conversion, magic and superstition, and frugality and expensiveness. She propagates moral relativism. Lady Mary has been parsimonious in expressing any political opinion. TEL covers her views on liberty, military government, janissari, volunteers, princely states and war. She also had great powers of scientific observation. Her style excelled in every respect and transcended contemporary norms.

Chapter III

‘Orientalism’ is but a representation. Said traces the beginning of Orientalism to a decision of the Church Council of Vienna in 1312. According to Said, literary Orientalism originated in either Britain or France and then the Germans elaborated upon it. With the advent of Romanticism, every Romantic poet spun fantastic Oriental
tales. Literary Orientalism played an important, formative and varied role in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe. With the inclusion of imaginative geography came ‘Geographical Orientalism’ as a precursor of ‘Political Orientalism’. The coverage and brilliance of Lady Mary’s infectious and effective Orientalism surpasses these strands by setting many precedents and advancing an agenda of change. Her Oriental themes are wide and varied, her narration devoid of previous errors and prejudices, and her Oriental diction more proper. The analysis of Lady Mary’s points of reference displays that she opts for English nationalism in common discourse, Christianity in moral and ethical domain, Greco-Roman civilization ideologically and the values of Enlightenment and the Age of Reason, Her rhetoric based on these reference points may be viewed as rhetoric of difference, rhetoric of identification or likeness (‘as it is with you’), rhetoric of tolerance, rhetoric of compassion, rhetoric of semiotics (of natural scenes, Turkish architecture and), rhetoric of otherness (‘their religion’, ‘their law’, or ‘that nation/ country’, ‘that religion’ or ‘that people’), rhetoric of reason, rhetoric of savagery, rhetoric of erotica and rhetoric on Islam.

Her variety of Orientalism as presented in TEL casts a deep influence on later Orientalist writers, especially on Byron and Moore. Byron’s Oriental diction has much in common with Lady Mary’s diction.

Chapter IV

When the Levant Company engaged Wortley, he was entrusted two tasks, a diplomatic mission and the Levant Company’s commercial representation. He
succeeded in one and failed in the other but Lady Mary, the traveler, succeeded in reporting on both.

Travel is not only intimately personal but stems from an individual’s inherent need to resolve the mystery of the ‘Other’. It ensues from some individual curiosity, a movement within individual psyche. Travelers from the West in particular have journeyed to the Orient for a variety of motives. They have travelled on pilgrimages, they have set out in pursuit of knowledge and power, diplomacy and trade, to plunder and discover the exotic or simply for pleasure and adventure. Lady Mary travelled in a diplomatic capacity as wife of the ambassador to Turkey. On their way to Turkey, the Wortleys actually undertook the route prescribed for the Grand Tour. They returned via Tunis-Genoa-Turin-Paris to London.

As a special type of Travel Literature, a travelogue describes a traveler’s intercultural contact discovered in exotic spaces. Its history starts from Pausanias’ Description of Greece penned in the second century. Bellie Melman sees a travelogue as the product of rhetoric and representations of the manners, especially Muslim women’s social behavior, in this case. In terms of gender, Lady Mary’s social status as a traveler was that of a woman traveler- weak, vulnerable and insecure, but it also gave her easy access to insider information which made her travelogue more authentic, besides providing her with the opportunity to contradict previous male writers.

Narrations and descriptions given in TEL include historical insights (on Hungary’s past, Christian Bulgaria, old castles, ancient Greece, and Church of Annunciata). In
TEL, she mentions a number of novelties, (camel, stork, court dwarf, mummy, Greek medals) in a very interesting style. Her narration of ceremonies and feasts (May Day dance, private audience with the Empress Amelia, waiting on the empress, Grand Vizier’s dinner, Lady Kabya’s dinner, Mother Earth celebrations, Viennese carnival, and parade at the camp) are equally fascinating and rich in detail. In describing cities and regions she gives importance to Vienna, Adrianople, and Constantinople though the Holy Land and Tunis are also mentioned in TEL. She gives sufficient information on Turkish markets, exchanges and merchants.

Lady Mary’s description of natural scenes is rather weak and cursory, as is her description of architecture but she has given fine details of Turkish ethnography including The Turks, Jews, Christians (Roman Catholics, Paulines, Greeks, Armenians). She also describes the Arnounts and dancing Dervishes.

Chapter V

This discussion helps in drawing these pertinent conclusions:

1. In spite of restrictions imposed on her by aristocratic traditions (lack of formal education and limits set for women) and class rigidities (in disciplining and social contacts), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu lived a rich personal life without compromising on her freedom of choice, though she paid in terms of social distrust, sentimentality and ennui. Yet she succeeded in life by trusting her intellect and instincts.

2. In her family life, her philosophy was based on ‘passive obedience’.


3. She was a beacon of the contemporary feminist movement.

4. In keeping with the spirit of the Age of Reason, she introduced and promoted the Inoculation drive in England.

5. As a member of the enlightened society, she advocated the advancement of education, knowledge, self-control and open-mindedness.

6. Her literary career was a reward for her dormant life in later years.

7. Inspite of the fact that considerable amounts of her works were destroyed by well-meaning family members, she left a considerable literary heritage, especially the *Turkish Embassy Letters*, published posthumously. This treasure-trove left behind by her rightly places her between Aphra Behn and Jane Austen.

8. **TEL** comprises Lady Mary’s Orientalism, her travelogue and her stature as a traveler. It shows that her Orientalism is radically different from that of the male writers who came before her.

9. In **TEL**, she inaugurated a new cross-cultural discourse that shows that she is not a run-on-the-mill type of ordinary travel-writer.

She will be remembered long as a writer, an opinion-maker and a human being of forbearance, tenacity and persistence.