CHAPTER 5

Travellers' Tales

I beheld through the door the natives' terrific countenances
and heard them incessantly calling "ao, ao."

—Eliza Fay

Mrs Fay is here describing how Hyder Ali’s soldiers were waiting to conduct her
to a place of confinement. I use the imagery to indicate how India itself has been
pictured as calling “ao”—"come"—through the ages, a call to which numerous travellers
from abroad, both men and women, have responded. This chapter deals with the travel
literature produced by British travellers in India between 1757 and 1857. The texts are
surveyed from a dual perspective, as works belonging to the genre of travel literature and
as documents inscribed within a colonial context.

The O.E.D definition of travel is relevant in this context. After the simple initial
definition of "go from one place to another" the elaborated meanings include "pass in a
deliberate or systematic manner from point to point." This is a suitable way to describe
the voyages of our colonial travellers—deliberate and systematic even in the most
apparently impulsive wanderings. Constantly observing and narrating, the colonial
traveller especially figures as "a kind of collective, moving eye, which registers the
sights/sites presented in a descriptive sequence" (Pratt 1985: 123).
Indeed, to a large extent, the individual element would seem to be strongest in travel accounts, centered as they are around the I/Eye concepts, around the fact of actually having "been there" and the process of eyewitnessing. Stephen Greenblatt refers to "the primal act of witnessing around which the entire discourse of travel is constructed" (1991: 22). The statements gain their power from the fact of the author's personal presence, the stamp of the individual existence on his utterances. From this perspective, these texts may seem to meet the criteria of "personal statement" that Edward Said suggests as a corrective to "Orientalism":

Contributions to the library of Orientalism and to its consolidation depend on how experience and testimony get converted from a purely personal document into the enabling codes of Orientalist science. Within a text, there has to take place a metamorphosis from personal to official statement; the record of Oriental residence and experience by a European must shed or at least minimise its purely autobiographical and indulgent descriptions on which Orientalism in general ... can draw, build and base further scientific observation and description.

(1978: 157)

"Personal statements" are here presented as comparatively less "Orientalist". The travel documents considered in this chapter, except perhaps Burton's works (which were sidelined due to their unorthodox nature) and Sleeman's productions in his official capacity rarely underwent conversions to official status. This is especially true of the texts produced by women travellers whose works were certainly not even considered "serious" let alone required reading unlike the productions of the Indologists or Mill. To a large extent, therefore, these texts remain at the level of personal articulation.

Meeting the requirements to be regarded as "personal statement" however, does not implicate these texts any less in the colonial process. Each text here considered is individual and different from other texts, but "these differences occur within larger discursive frameworks" (Mills, 1993: 197). Travel writing despite its intensely personal characteristics was part of the colonial paradigm and it is essential to keep that discourse at the back of any analysis. As Foucault points out, eighteenth century travel writers had "schema" for collecting their data (1980: 74). Their descriptions were articulated from a
particular position which had been constituted by colonial discourses, large scale constructs which determined what one "could know" or "see". We cannot argue that these travel texts were not implicated in the colonial paradigm. At the same time, it is unnecessary to insist that they lose their personal character so as to be fitted into the colonial framework. As an analysis of these texts will indicate, the personal as personal could co-exist with the Orientalist statement.

However, no simplistic explanation of these texts as racist or imperialist or even "Orientalist" in the Saidean sense will encompass the dichotomy seen within them. Dennis Porter in "Orientalism and its Problems" argues that the very nature of writing about another culture entails a discourse marked by gaps and inconsistencies, in addition to which travel writing itself is subject to such a wide range of motivations as to render it inevitably heterogeneous (Porter 1982). We cannot read travel writing merely as one more contribution to the colonial archive. Critics who consider travel writing as History adopt a path fraught with difficulties:

These socio-historical studies face a methodological problem that renders their findings ambiguous at best and misleading at its worst. By ignoring the literary conventions that govern what an author says, they assume that these accounts display the immediate personal experience of travellers and that these travellers in turn reflect the taste of the century in general.

(Batten 1978:4)

The literary conventions that govern travel writing cannot be ignored, even though the genre has only recently been granted a respectable status. The texts under consideration are all cast in the form of letters, diaries, or at the most reconstructions from journals. The assumption of this individualistic tone, the rambling form of narration, scattered quotations, numerous digressions—these are all aspects characteristic to the genre to which the individual writers conform. Interestingly the techniques are calculated to disarm the reader as the confessions of lack of scholarship or literary technique on the title page indicate. But, as Percy Adams points out, these very features, like the digression for example, actually serve to authenticate the record. "What may be called
digressions in some forms of literature are, for travel accounts structurally inherent (Adams, 1983: 109). The travel texts considered here have a claim to objectivity, as they were supposedly dealing, at an individual level, with verifiable facts of Indian life, with no ulterior motives. Though the authors explicitly disavow claims to scholarship, the texts are not avowed fictionalisations either. In fact these travel records make an ideal transition point from the scholarly Indological texts and Histories discussed earlier to the study of more 'literary' forms like the epic or the novel. Despite the claims to first hand authenticity, however, these texts reveal more about the observers and their attitudes than about any monolithic India which they all observed.

While considering the texts of colonial travel writing in India as belonging to a discursive pattern, we cannot afford to overlook the inconsistencies produced by gender and class distinctions within that discourse. Though all Englishmen and women definitely belonged to the ruling elite in India as compared with the natives, the English society in India was itself highly fragmented on class lines. Eliza Fay was an adventuress with no money and no connections and no institutional backing in India. James Forbes also occupied an inferior position as a Company writer in his early tenure before being promoted to higher posts. Sleeman, Broughton and Williamson as army officials and Harriet Tytler as a captain's wife shared roughly the same status. Burton's official status was of course considerably elevated, but he was generally regarded as an eccentric outcast who did not conform to social codes. Isabella Fane the daughter of the Commander-in-Chief, and Honoria Lawrence, whose husband Henry Lawrence was "the virtual ruler of the Punjab" occupy very high positions on the social ladder. Acland and Martyn were both clergymen though of different personalities altogether—Acland being the archetypal jovial parson and Martyn a soul incessantly tortured by a sense of spiritual inadequacy. Heber as Bishop headed the ecclesiastical strata in India. With Emily Eden, sister of Lord Auckland, the Governor-General, we are at the topmost level of the social hierarchy.

Williamson in *Oriental Field Sports* openly asserts that digressions are essential since a certain pleasure is afforded only by the "admixture of the curious anecdote" (1810: II 239).
These differences of social position are to be clearly seen in the works of these travellers. For instance, Eliza Fay adopts a tolerant, not very snobbish attitude to India when compared with Miss Fane in whose case, snobbery reaches such heights that she never even condescends to once mention India or Indians without a sneer. This attitude is elevated into good humoured irritation and patriarchal patronage in Miss Eden's case; who generally does not feel that the natives are worth even the trouble of despising; the same tone is used for favourite lap dogs and for natives.

The society to which these writers belonged was also fragmented on gender lines. The involvement of women with imperialism has always been a vexed question. Sara Mills refers to the women writers' problematic status in a colonial situation; "caught between the conflicting demands of the discourse of femininity and that of imperialism" (1993: 21). The Memsahib in India was criticised as being responsible for the crystallisation of racial attitudes; of driving a wedge between the natives and the white men. At the same time, in keeping with the discourses of femininity, women were seen as occupying a higher moral level than men; as more interested in philanthropy, sensitive and also sympathetic, in fact "God's police" in Kay Schaffer's phrase (quoted in Mills, 1993: 44). Their position as members of the ruling race and the sympathy they were supposed to feel as women produced a certain extra ambiguity in the texts produced by women. Isabella Fane tries to deal with this by identifying entirely with the colonial discourse, but Emily Eden's text clearly reveals a struggle between these concepts throughout "Women's texts are, just as men's texts are, about the colonial situation, but their relation to the dominant discourse differs" (Mills 1993: 39).

On analysing these texts we find to a certain extent a desire to conform, to confirm what has been said before. As Stephen Greenblatt remarks "In a sense, then, the best voyage will be one in which one learns next to nothing; most of the signs will simply confirm what one already knows" (1991: 88). Emily Eden writes: "In short, just what

---

2 Greenblatt quotes Jonson's poem to William Roe:

This is that good Aeneas, passed through fire
Through Seas, storms, tempests, and embark'd for hell
* Came back untouched: This man hath travelled well.

(1991: 179-80)
people say of India, you know it all, but it is pretty to see" (1930: 12). The suggestion is that despite her many pages, she really has not much to add; all that it is necessary to know is "already known".

The tendency of these travel writers to quote at length from earlier texts can be attributed, to this desire to have their works bolstered by authority and to confirm what has already been said. "Most colonial writers portray members of the other nation through a conceptual and textual grid constituted by travel books. This close intertextual relation, with other accounts can be seen in the fact that travel writing has always appropriated other writing, sometimes explicitly, but often by plagiarising" (Mills 1993: 74).

The Indian travel writers are in no way behindhand in this matter of appropriating other written accounts. Sleeman in his *Rambles and Recollections* devotes eight entire chapters to a detailed historical account of the contest for empire between Shah Jahan's sons. This entire account is practically a literal translation of Bernier's history, a fact which is not acknowledged by the author, but is pointed out in an editorial footnote in the 1915 edition. Sleeman also quotes extensively from Sir Thomas Munro, to the effect that Indians were not totally uncivilized. James Forbes' *Oriental Memoirs* abounds in lengthy quotations from many sources. So slight an occasion as a brief reference to the "Madhavi" creeper brings in an elaborate quote from Jones' translation of the *Shakuntala* (1988: I 31). Jones is quoted with regard to the *Manu Smriti*, the Vedas and references to Indian deities evoke long passages from Southey's *Curse of Kehama*. Jones' entire "Hymn to Camdeo" is quoted and a long extract from his translation of the *Gita Govinda* is included. Lengthy extracts from poems by Charles Grant are also included with regard to Vedic beliefs, conversion and imperial responsibility. These quotes form

---

3 Munro says (quoted by Sleeman) that he "does not really know what is meant by civilising the people of India" as he does not assume they are uncivilised to begin with (Sleeman 1995: 3).

4 Jones is initially quoted to praise the *Manu Smriti*, but later when Forbes' evangelism takes over, he is used to authenticate the entirely opposite argument.

One of Grant's poems quoted by Forbes begins:

"Britain, thy voice can bid the light descend
On thee alone the eyes of Asia bend."
authenticating devices and enforce the writer's view while their inclusion simultaneously confirms their own validity.

However, we can see a tension in these texts between the pressure to confirm the known and to seek out and describe the exotic and the strange. Paul Fussel considers that the 'anomaly' is central for the travel book, that travel writing is in fact an "implicit quest for anomaly" (1980: 167), a search for something strange to describe:

Like any genre, the travel book carries about it the marks of its origins and if the Wonders of Antiquity, the Middle Age and the Renaissance have in the full bourgeois age attenuated to mere anomaly, these anomalies are still a necessary element in travel writing.

(Fussel 1980: 166)

The search for the exotic is of primary importance in the colonial context, where the colony is to be established, partly at least, as the Other, the natives, as different from the white spectators. Even more than searching out strangeness, narrative techniques are employed to render whatever is actually seen as strange; in fact to invest it with the necessary criteria of becoming an anomaly.

Meticulous description, as if of some other world and species altogether is one of the defamiliarising techniques employed in these texts to make India appear as "different". The coconut tree and the betel nut, are, for example, described in excruciating detail by Forbes, as alien creations which can exist only in an alien/exotic land (Forbes 1988: 1 22-74). The animals, birds, fishes—even the wasps are described for pages at length, the emphasis being on their "strangeness". Miss Fane's description of an Indian bearer deserves to be quoted at full length as a prime example of the defamiliarising and distancing technique, by means of which she seems to be not discussing a human being at all:

There was a figure in the pit which afforded much amusement. It was a character known here by the appellation of bearer ... These beauties wear nothing in the shape of clothes but a piece of coarse cloth in which they envelop the whole of their person ... A figure of this sort, I suppose he must have had a musical turn; actually came into the pit, holding on to the skirts of a half caste. Down
he squatted himself upon one bench, with his chin resting on another and during the whole of the performance he never stirred, but appeared in amaze or pleasure or some indefinable feeling.

(my emphases; 1989: 38)

Sara Mills remarks that a "further way of 'Othering' a people is not to describe them as full individuals; but as composed of separate parts of the body" (1993: 89-90). Such a description is at work in Honoria Lawrence's description of Indian boatmen:

These men were very dark, nearly naked and very repulsive looking. Among them all, I did not see one countenance that had a decidedly human expression; all looked like mere animals.

(Lawrence 1980: 33-34)

The boatmen seemed to have the facility of articulating without shutting their mouths, for while they chattered, there seemed no closing of those awful chasms, a ring of black lips on the outside; a rim of white teeth and within this setting a tongue and throat dyed red by the stuff the natives constantly chew—called paan.

(my emphasis; 1980: 39)

India is characterised as "such a talkative nation" and the natives' conversation itself described as "quite unintelligible and an unearthly noise" (Fane 1989: 110). Other techniques of alienation such as presenting the natives as mere children who have to be humoured are also used frequently. The stereotypical reference to the "dirty" native is also present. [Here. Forbes strikes a different note. He actually refers to the cleanliness of the natives: "The Hindoo religion requires frequent ablution, which is a custom wisely introduced in a warm climate, where cleanliness is very conducive to health" (Forbes 1988: 183)].

Sleeman refers to the fact that European women can travel alone in India, without any harm coming to them. But then, this not due to any particular virtue on the part of the natives, in fact it is treated as a testimony to the virtues of British rule: "Would men trust their wives and daughters in this manner unprotected among a people that disliked them and their rule? .... We know and feel that the people everywhere look up to and respect
us in spite of all our faults" (Sleeman 1915: 3). Eliza Fay who was unlucky enough to have come to India when the British had yet not attained paramount power, when she was captured along with her husband by Haider Ali’s troops, exclaims incredulously and indignantly:

> It is true we were in the hands of the natives; but little did I imagine that any power on the continent, however independent would have dared to treat English subjects with such cruelty as we experienced from them.

(Fay 1986: 119-120)

Indeed, the establishment of British rule is presented as the best thing which happened to India and the natives are shown as actually courting British rule. Forbes describes as a very favourable native trait the generally affectionate and grateful attachment, which rising above religious and caste prejudices they show to their English rulers. Anyone who deviated from this pattern is stigmatised as ungrateful (1988: III). Broughton refers to the high esteem in which the natives supposedly held Englishmen. "They all expressed themselves in terms of the highest admiration of the prowess, humanity and justice of the British government" (1977: 6). In the Punjab, the child-ruler Dhuleep Singh was only King in name and Henry Lawrence for all practical purposes was the ruler. In her Journal, Honoria Lawrence seriously hopes that "some time, perhaps little Dhuleep Singh may know how much better off he is, brought up safely under kind instruction, then if he had still been called a King, with a daily chance of being murdered" (Lawrence 1980: 200). Quite evidently there is a consensus of opinion that the British are doing the natives a favour by ruling them. Sleeman indeed is so confident about British rule that he can even advocate leaving the few remaining native states independent, because:

> First, it tends to relieve the minds of other native chiefs... and secondly because by leaving them as a contrast .... We

---

6 In the much later Introduction to Broughton's letters, Grant Duff indicates this impatience with "ungrateful natives" who should be exposed to the horrors Broughton describes in pre-colonial India so that they would appreciate British rule (Broughton 1977: xxv-xxix).
afford to the people of India the opportunity of observing
the superior advantages of our rule.

(Sleeman 1918: 186)\(^7\)

Yet another effect of this confidence in colonial rule is that the writers’ presence
in the country is taken as perfectly natural and rarely questioned. The fact that the
colonial situation enabled these travels is hardly ever remarked on nor is it supposed that
the effect of such travel—its collective consequences—could be anything but highly
positive. There is an exception to this trend to be found in Emily Eden's criticism of
British globetrotting and overly commercial mentality:

\[\text{In short, Delhi is a very suggestive moralising place—such stupendous remains of power and wealth passed away and passing away and I somehow feel that we horrid English have just gone and done it, merchandised it and spoilt it all. I am not very fond of Englishmen out of their own country.}
\]

(Eden 1930: 98)

The theme of evanescent glory, especially as exemplified by the fall of the
Mughals leads to frequent emphasis on mutability as a particularly Indian theme. For
example, Sleeman gives a vivid account of the present deprived state of the Delhi royal
family as opposed to their earlier greatness and philosophises on it.\(^8\) Ironically, this
theme co-exists with the notion of the unchanging traditional nature of India. Indian
customs, especially the daily tasks indulged in by the women are described as being
"exactly identical to descriptions of the patriarchal age" (Forbes 1988: 152).

Religion, of course, is a topic of primary interest in these texts. Among the
clergymen considered here, Acland maintained a good humoured tolerance towards
native customs. He was actually rather impressed by the asceticism of the Hindu sages
which he contrasted to the "unwillingness of Christians to do even a little to please the
ture God" (Acland 1879: 119). Bishop Heber also does not go into any frenzies against
"heathenism," indeed he openly accuses many missionaries of "being too intolerant"

---

\(^7\) Sleeman reiterates the same idea when he comments that the misrule of native kings has its uses—seeing it, "the people are fair disposed to estimate the advantages of living under our rules" (1915: 519).

\(^8\) “Here are crowded together twelve Hundred kings and queens, ... literally earing each other up!” (Sleeman 1915: 519).
He gives a generally favourable account of the people and adds that "If it should please God to make any considerable portion of them Christians, they would, I can well believe put the best of European Christians to shame" (1985: II 309). We also have accounts of the Bishop visiting temples and mosques and behaving in a perfectly respectful manner.

The case is very different with the Reverend Henry Martyn who seems to have taken the entire responsibility for converting the heathen on his own shoulders. His initial reflection on India is: "I looked towards India and remembered that they were heathens, perhaps ten times worse than anything I had seen." (Martyn 1837: I 302). The sight of a new temple fills him with horror and anger; tolerance is quite out of the question.

As we walked through the dark wood which everywhere covers the country, the cymbals and drums struck up and never did sounds got through my heart with such horror in my life. The pagoda was in a court surrounded by a wall and the way up to it was by a flight of steps on each side....In the centre of the building was the idol-a little, ugly, black image, about two feet high, with a few lights burning around him. I shivered at being in the neighbourhood of hell; my heart was ready to burst at the dreadful state to which the devil had brought my fellow creatures. I would have given the world to have known the language to have preached to them.

(1837: I 449-50).

It is by no means the clergymen alone who were interested in religious questions in India. The last Chapter in Forbes' Oriental Memoirs is frankly apocalyptical in tone and ends with a vision of India as the Great Other, desperately in need of reclamation through conversion. "We see in Forbes almost a schizophrenic split between a romantic attraction towards India, and an Evangelical revulsion from Hinduism" (Dyson 1978: 31). The early volumes of Forbes' work reveal tolerant on-the-spot responses to India. But since the work was put together for publication a long time after it was actually written, the last part is added on with the express intention of justifying conversion. A positive bundle of comments by "impartial authors are gathered together in this volume by Forbes to testify to Hindu depravity and aid the cause of Evangelism. Forbes defends
himself against the charge of inconsistency by claiming that "My sentiments changed progressively as I became more and more acquainted with the higher castes of Hindus. I first admired the Brahmins, but then was shocked." (Forbes 1988: IV 300) The allowed "sublimity" of the Vedas is counterbalanced in Forbes by their "acknowledged puerility." (1988:IV 57).

Miss Eden does not indulge in religious prejudices to any great extent. She does confess to an "instinctive recoil" when the native servants wish her a Merry Christmas. (1930:54). Isabella Fane is far more amused than disgusted or distressed by Hindu customs. Her only remark on the issue of religion is to remark after watching the ceremony of swinging by hooks: "poor benighted creatures, what a pity it is that they can't understand that such tortures are quite needless" (Fane 1985:74). There is not a single reference to conversion in Eliza Fay's work. She does refer to "our purer religion" and claims to have been told that the Hindu idols (which she has never seen) are "very ugly indeed" (1986:204). But she also accepts that the Indians were very sincerely attached to these idols and feels no moral compulsion to compel them on to salvation. Indeed, as a private citizen with no institutional backing Eliza Fay was too busy with the problems of survival to spend much time on either criticising or saving the natives. Harriet Tytler on the other hand seems to have come to India with specific missionary aims already well formed in her mind:

I said to myself, when I grow up to be a woman, I will save all the little starving children and bring them up as Christians, and aspiration which never left me until thirty three years later, when God in his goodness permitted me to carry out my heart's desire.

(Tytler, 1986:10).

The condition of women in India and especially the custom of Sati were topics which evoked much interest and comment. Interestingly, this is also the area where the texts by women writers differ sharply from those by men. In colonial iconography, the Oriental woman occupied a much more complicated position than her male counterpart we have a very powerful discourse which posits the image of the Oriental woman as the Archetypal Other, alluring and dangerous precisely because of her Otherness. At the
same time the pervasive notion of the entire colonial enterprise as a civilising mission rendered it imperative that the colonised women be also represented as an oppressed and silenced group who looked towards the colonisers for rescue and help. We also have to contend with the wholesale feminisation of the Orient as such which created "feminine men" and rendered the real women's situation even more ambivalent.

In keeping with their need to posit colonisation as a lofty, self sacrificing mission, the male writers, even though they confessed (on occasion) to an attraction for native women, usually followed it up with a qualification or disclaimer. James Forbes' comment that the "Hindu women when young are delicate and beautiful, so far as we can reconcile the idea of beauty with the olive complexion" (my emphasis; Forbes 1988: I 73) is a useful illustration of this trend. Soon after describing the "usefulness" of concubinage with native women, Burton remarks: "the women may be described as very fine large animals; we never saw a pretty one among them" (Burton 1851: 347). However, such covering up techniques are often very transparent. Indeed, the threat posed by the sexual attraction of the native woman is a constant irritant which is a major motivation behind certain white women's jocular or contemptuous dismissal of miscegenetic relationships. Isabella Fane's sneer at the Governor-General's sexual preferences is an example of this trend:

> Among the presents for the Governor General there was a tiger which had been nursed and brought up by a native woman. Woman and all are presented, I hear. As Sir C— has the reputation of not caring for colour in his little amours, she may prove a most acceptable present.

(1985:48)

Though he often speaks of the British duty of "liberating" Indian women, Forbes on occasion gets carried away by his version of docile and malleable femininity and argues in true patriarchal fashion that the seclusion of Indian women has many advantages which adequately compensate for the lack of liberty" (1988: I 103). The implication is that precisely because of their secluded life and the docility which it engenders, Indian women are ideally "feminine" creatures. Of course, this was not an

---

9 Forbes argues that seclusion keeps women from "many delusions and temptations" which leave the mind free from later "regrets and remorse" (1988: II 103).
officially acceptable view for a British official from a supposedly liberal culture. So the effect is underplayed with references to Indian women’s intellectual inadequacies. However, in spite of this anticipatory bail, the undercurrent of attraction comes through loud and clear.

This seems to be the spur behind the nearly total tendency among the British women writers to ignore the physical appearance of Indian women or restrict it to some accidental mention in passing. Emily Eden refers to the extreme seclusion of Indian women only to remark that "this must have made them very dull companions indeed" (1930: 211). Isabella Fane is seriously worried that her nephew may turn out to be "very black" as he had a native wet nurse. (1985: 67). Eliza Fay criticises Indian women for using too much art and thereby spoiling "whatever little beauty they naturally have" (1986: 205). These women writers are fierce champions of the emancipation of Indian women, the abolition of Sati and similar causes. But the line is firmly drawn at accepting a physical or romantic relation between "their" men and Indian women.

The notion of emancipating the native women was fundamental to the discourse of colonialism as a civilising mission. In fact, the "liberty and protection" accorded to women functioned as a graph for plotting the success or otherwise of this mission. In Gayathri Spivak’s formulation, the constant theme was that of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (1988: 296). This formulation confers a very limited subjectivity on the native male as agent of oppression but freezes the native woman as object of both native oppression and the coloniser’s rescue. In the Indian context the custom of Sati was the ideal example (in its prohibition) of the colonial succor of native women. All texts included at least one detailed reference to Sati, either an eyewitness account or one based on hearsay.

Forbes includes a long eye witness account of Sati, where he finds himself compelled to admire the "heroism" of the Sati and his only regret is that she did not have the Christian morality to teach her the futility of such an act" (1988: II 326). The entire incident is described as a grand spectacle. Forbes also records another occasion
where British officials were able to persuade a woman not to commit Sati. The incident is presented as a triumph for British enlightenment, but the note of admiration is definitely absent. The same pattern of awe and admiration for a successful Sati and a more sedate account of a prevented one is to be seen in Sleeman also. As Lata Mani points out:

\[
\text{It is her [Indian woman's] apparent willingness to attempt immolation, not her courage in rescuing herself that is seen as heroic. Her escape is rewritten as rescue. The escape is described as being primarily by physical processes and not one that implies both mind and body.} \\
\text{(Mani 1992:394)}
\]

Emily Eden refers to the Sati committed by two of Ranjeet Singh's queens, whom she calls "those poor dear Ranees" and dubs their act as one arising out of "obstinate courage". She also remarks that "they would have given it up if they had been sure of kind treatment" (1930: 309-10). Eliza Fay argues with a feminist zeal that "this rite (Sati) is but a part of the schemes of men in most countries to invent a sufficient number of rules to render the women subservient to their authority" (1986: 202). At the same time, she also adds that the element of courage was over-emphasised to describe what was mainly a "result of custom and usage" (1986: 203)." The colonisers as a whole stressed the need for abolishing Sati. But the British men were more susceptible to the heroic and romantic associations of the ritual than the women who regarded it indignantly and impatiently. It is possible that the implicit suggestion that within certain paradigms, even British men were willing to glorify Sati was a disconcerting thought which led the women writers take all possible chances for condemnation. Sati, for them, was not just an exotic and barbaric practice, it was a potential threat.

The issue of Sati though most prominent was not the only issue in the discourse of saving native women. The susceptibility of the Indian women to "holy men" (who are invariably presented as sex crazed impostors) the misery of a widow's life, the Devadasi system, the lack of education and the extreme seclusion of Indian women are also noted and criticised. However, there is also the suggestion that all these precautions still do not

---

10 Forbes' eyewitness account of the Sati describes the woman as "rushing onto the bower and embracing her husband" (1988, III 225).
serve to uplift the depraved Indian morality. In a characteristic digression in his *Oriental Field Sports*, Williamson comments:

The world is egregiously duped by the opinion that seragrios are conducive to security. Experience proves what reason would suggest; that where we repose trust in locks and walls, we are most frequently disappointed; and that the most private places are the most suitable to intrigue. Hence we find that in the boasted zenanas of India, libidinous practices are most prevalent.

(1810: 159-60)

Native men are generally accused of deliberately and systematically denying women the chance to grow and develop into rational companions. Emily Eden refers to the native desire to ensure that women remained silent as one of the most difficult stumbling blocks on their road to progress. A servant of Harriet Tytler complains that as a result of the Western rule, his wife had actually threatened to take him to court; for which reason he found such trends which might enable women to break their silence a malignant influence (Tytler 1986: 27).

The process by which Indian women were denied subjectivity and were restructured as objects by the colonial discourse has been noted. This process was applied to the entire colony by means of a general feminisation. The coloniser's masculinity showed to the greatest advantage when counterpointed by the ascribed femininity of the colonised. Ashis Nandy points out that "colonisation too was congruent with the existing Western stereotypes and the philosophy of life which they represented. It produced a cultural consensus, in which political and socio-economic dominance symbolised the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity" (Nandy 1989: 4).

Forbes describes Indian men in the following fashion:

In India, a people present themselves to our eyes, clothed in linen garments and somewhat low descending, of a garb and gesture we may say maidenly and well nigh effeminate,

"Eliza Fay argues that if Sati had been the custom in Britain and linked to a woman's fame as in India, then many Englishwomen who had never loved their husbands would still "mount the funeral pyre with all imaginable decency and die with a heroic display of fortitude" (1986: 203)."
of a countenance somewhat estranged yet smiling out a
glozed and somewhat bashful familiarity.

(1988: 155)

Shy, bashful, maidenly and quite explicitly effeminate—we can easily trace the process and progress of feminisation here. Rather ironically, the British women writers also often adopt such techniques, thereby reasserting the idea of inferiority associated with femininity. Eliza Fay refers to the lack of strength in Indian men, who approximate female status when compared to the masculine Englishmen. She quotes a Bengali servant who told her he could not do some heavy work as "Oh, I no English. I Bengalman, I no strong like English; one two three Bengalmen cannot do like one Englishmen" (Fay 1986: 177-78). It is possible, of course, that the "Bengalman" was using his supposed weakness as a convenient excuse—an example of Homi Bhabha's "sly civility." However, the emphasis is to be laid not on what the Indian said but on the white woman's unquestioning acceptance of it. Obviously there is a consensus that "Bengalmen" actually could not do what Englishmen could.

In fact the white women seem to place themselves in commanding "masculine" positions in relation to the subservient, docile and feminine positions allotted to the Indian men. Honoria Lawrence and Isabella Fane both refer to the Indian men's incapacity for open fights and accuse them of resorting to secret political intrigues which are represented as subterranean, more suited to women and yet (or perhaps therefore) peculiarly "Indian". Emily Eden juxtaposes an account of “oversentimental” Hindu women falling at her brother's feet and embarrassing him with a description of two dismissed Indian servantmen falling at her feet to beg pardon. She finds them so very feminine/childish that she "could not deny them anything" (1930: 143).

The accounts which indicate the feminisation of India should be seen as an ideologically well structured project intended to make the colonial rule seem "natural"—as "natural" as male domination. This process obviously rendered the position of both native and white women ambivalent. The native women (those who came into contact with Western trends at least) were continuously confronted with supposedly "rational" discourses which presented a constructed image of native men as feminine. They were not offered a choice of liberty or individual agency, but were constantly urged to opt for a
change of masters. At the same time, the white women, as collaborators in the colonial enterprise were often forced to submerge their female identity and denounce the feminine as inferior. The feminising of India implicit in these texts created problems for natives as well as for white women, but of course the complications were very different in nature and implication.

In keeping with the discourses which govern the kinds of texts which men and women are supposed to produce, we see that there are more of domestic details in the women's texts. Eliza Fay dwells for a long letter on the trickery of Indian servants; though she seems to regard the entire process as a battle of wits in which she enjoys triumphing (1985: 179-187). Such domestic details are found in most of the other women's texts also, while they are practically absent from male authored works.

On the other hand, specific statements or discussions on political affairs are hardly to be found in the women's texts. Miss Eden's laconic statement that "Another man has been set on the Khelat throne; so that business is finished" is an indication of the trend. Much more obvious and detailed statements are to be found in the male writers. Forbes and Sleeman both discuss administrative affairs in detail, often revealing both complacence and anxiety in turns. For instance, Forbes worries over whether Anglicisation could result in a bid for freedom and then consoles himself that internal squabbles would prevent any such attempt (1988: II 266). Sleeman argues that the natives themselves are not even keen on having Oriental systems followed and are perfectly happy with British methods if justly implemented (1915: 65-66). Burton gives us a hint of the political situation at "Home" also when he talks of Sind "as an Eastern Ireland on a larger scale" and of the inhabitants as "Hibernian like" (1851: II 125). Broughton advocates English rule on the ground that native governments are made up of measures as much distinguished by weakness and rapacity as they are deficient in justice, honour and good faith" (1977: 1451).

\footnote{It will be seen in a later chapter that parallels between India and Ireland are drawn by Wordsworth and Byron also. This should enable us to consider political/racial problematics as not entirely trapped between a black/white binary opposition.}
These descriptions, whether they be of practical politics or domesticities both contribute to a large picture of "India" and "the natives". As Edward Said points out, generalised statements are one of the most effective techniques of "Othering". The writer in a colonial situation "tends to speak in vast generalities, seeks to contain each aspect of Oriental or Occidental life into an unmediated sign of one or the other geographic half (Said 1978: 246-47). Mary Louise Pratt substantiates this view when she says that the task of the writer within colonial discourse is to "incorporate a particular reality into a series of interlocking information orders... to make this information seem natural ... rather than as products/producers of European knowledges or disciplines" (my emphasis; 1985: 125).

There are no shortages of generalised statements in the travel texts discussed here. Not only the physical appearance (as seen earlier) but also character and behaviour of the natives are described in generalised/essentialised terms. According to Forbes, the Muslims (as a whole) are "robust and hardy when compared to the disciples of Brahma". The Hindus are "avaricious, indolent and effeminate" and "if to the two former vices we add ambitious valour and jealousy we have the Muslim character" (Forbes 1988: I 94). The virtues of the natives are no less essentialised than their vices. Burton, describing the affection of a Hindu mother for her child essentialises and over emphasises to such an extent that the effect is absurd—"The Hindoo mother sees her child as everything. From the hour of his birth she never leaves him ... nor does this cease when the child ceases to be a toy..." (Burton 1851:1248).

The description of the landscape in these texts is also significant. The system of alienating by overly minute description is extended to the scenery also. Of course, the tone varies from each individual text to another. For Honoria Lawrence, the landscape is disappointing and threatening with "nothing to give the idea of a home where the heart could live" (1980: 33). The initial description given by Forbes is in striking contrast: "The town of Cochin is pleasantly situated near the road, with woody hills and majestic mountains forming a noble boundary" (1988: I 13).
This difference of judgement based on difference in perspective is to be found in
the meagre accounts we have of Indian art and literature. It is only in Forbes and Sneeman
that we find any references worth mentioning to Indian literature and even here, the main
impression left is one of factual misinformation producing unintentional comedy. 13 As
far as architecture is concerned, these travel texts illustrate Sara Mills' statement that
there was a prestructuring of sites/sights which governed what could actually be said.
"Before the traveller had even arrived, the site was already categorised" (Mills 1993: 83-
84). The Taj for instance is always praised, that too in identical terms, by everyone,
including those like Miss Fane who had already made it quite clear that they detested all
Indian art on principle. This tendency can be seen in historical accounts also—in every
condemnatory tirade on Oriental despotism—an exception (with often no stated reason)
is made for the "great Akbar".

There is a certain (minimal) amount of self criticism in the texts. Emily Eden
mocks the overconfidence of the British troops, who after they have been routed by
Ranjit Singh's Sikhs in a display can only assert that "they are sure the Sikhs would run
away in a real fight" (1930: 209). Sleeman argues that the notorious Indian "perjury" was
a direct consequence of foisting alien British systems on them (1916: 388). Burton clearly
states that in many parts of India, far from welcoming British rule, the Indians looked
upon the white men as "horrors which had to be endured; endemic calamity" (1851: I
212). Emily Eden expresses herself as sincerely wondering "why the natives do not cut
all our heads off and be done with it" (1930: 294).

The style in which these texts are written and certain linguistic choices are also
interesting. Mary Pratt points out that the process of "Othering" is achieved through
language structure also—with the people to be Othered "homogenised into a collective
"they", distilled even further into an iconic "he" and made the subject of verbs in a
timeless present tense" (1985: 20). This trend can be seen over and over in the travel
texts. There is no appeal against recurrent statements like "They are dirty" or mendacious

13 Forbes confuses the honorary epithet Veda Vyasa (meaning compiler of the Vedas) bestowed on the saint
Vyasa as referring to two distinct persons he calls Vedom and Vyasa. He calls these two "friends of the
Pandavas" and adds that "some of the most respectable Hindus of the present day still believe that the rock
inscriptions in India are messages for the Pandavas left by Vedom and Vyasa" (1988: II 448).
or even positive qualities as the case may be. The statements are absolute and the tense is for all time—All natives for the past, present, and the future.

At the same time, as Greenblatt points out, "to be accused of lying is the travel writer's greatest fear" (1991: 147) and so the texts abound in authenticating devices. The authors have attempted to disavow literariness and subjectivity; as Percy Adams argues, "the more of personality they include, the more they approach the novel and seem to be lying" (1962: 97). A considerable effort has gone into making the works look effortless, but the literary conventions are still present below the surface.

Travel writing, given its ambiguous position on the borders of literature can be described (to adopt Sara Mills' definition) as "a form of writing whose contours both disclose the nature of the dominant discourses and constitute a critique from its margins" (1993: 23). Within the colonial discourse, the texts analysed here do subscribe to the dominant paradigm. But there are moments of self-doubt, criticism and awareness. Also significant is the fact that even accommodation into the same paradigm is negotiated in widely differing ways by each text. We should not allow our notion of the colonialist structure to be so homogenous as to render it unproblematic. Only then can we see how the contradictions as well as the similarities in these texts moved towards destabilisation; but at the same time sustained and enabled the edifice.