INTRODUCTION

One thing is certain. Sex is at the very heart of racism. Racism is not caused simply by sexual apprehensions, and there are many other factors involved, such as fear of the unfamiliar, fear bred by memory of historic conflicts, fear of demographic swamping by the superior numbers of a culture perceived as alien and inferior, fear of disease, fear of economic competition for limited resources—but the peculiarly emotional hostility towards black men1 which it has so often engendered requires a sexual explanation.

Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality* (1990)

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Western women started coming to India even before the battle of Plassey. The first arrivals were Mrs Hudson and her maid Frances Webb, who came to India in 1617. This, however, should be taken as a discrete event as until the nineteenth century The East India Company was quite reluctant to allow white women to travel to India. They were afraid that it might threaten the stability of their relationship with the Indian rulers. Secondly, the company did not consider India a safe enough place for British women. The Company, therefore, required all women travellers to obtain a clear permission prior to travelling. Miss Campbell, one such woman traveller who failed to obtain the Company’s permission, was ordered to be returned to England in January 1755 at the expense of the owners of the boat which had brought her from Madeira to Bengal2.

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1 Even though in post enlightenment western discourses of imperialism and colonialism the word man symbolically stands for mankind including women, postcolonial scholars have shown how the black men constituting the colonised races of the Orient were collectively feminised in relation to the white racial superiority of western civilisation. But this thesis attempts to focus on the relationship between white British women and Indian women in particular, just as Ronald Hyam (in the excerpt quoted in page3) also makes a gendered distinction between the attitudes of British men and British women in the colonies.

In consequence of the East India Company’s policy, the number of European women visiting India was extremely limited until the late 1830s. Some socio-political and legal developments changed this scenario and necessitated the arrival of white women in India in large numbers by the turn of the century. First, from the 1790s, a series of social, administrative and military regulations distanced the British rulers from the native Indians. Domestic anxieties that centred on mixed-race marriage and miscegenation were responsible for several administrative changes due to which the British men were restricted from marrying across the race. A study by Ronald Hyam shows that in the mid eighteenth century a large number of British men in India were married to Indians or Anglo-Indians, but by the mid-nineteenth century inter-racial marriage has officially ceased. The company that had initially discouraged women from coming to India now started to encourage their coming in an attempt to establish social and domestic distance from Indians. Secondly, the period from the 1790s to the late 1820s also saw a growing debate over the allowances to be paid to men with families. In 1797, a small provision was made for the wives of European soldiers who had accompanied their husbands from Europe; but in 1825, an allowance was suggested of Rs 5 per month for European wives and Rs 4 per month for ‘Half Cast’ wives, with the specific proviso that ‘women of colour’ were to be exempted. Naturally, this sudden change influenced British men’s marriage decisions and the presence of British women in the colony. Thirdly, the journey to India became much safer and shorter in the early nineteenth century. In 1830 the first steamer was put into service between Suez at the head of the Red Sea, and Bombay. In 1840, the Peninsular and Oriental Steamship Company signed an agreement with the Government of India to provide a regular service between Suez and certain Indian ports.

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Finally, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 helped to shorten the trip to four weeks, which facilitated the coming of a large number of British women to India.\(^5\)

White women who came to India during the colonial period were not a monolithic group. A large number of them came as wives of British officers, as missionaries, as reformers or as travellers. Together they produced a large bulk of writing on India and Indians. A number of novels, memoirs, letters, journals, travelogues, household guides and diaries written by these women illuminate various dimensions of colonial life in India. Though their writings bear the clear mark of their participation in the colonial enterprise, yet strangely enough, they have been completely muted by the male canon represented by writers like Forster or Kipling. While the men were engaged in public demonstration of colonial power these women’s assumption of qualified power within the domestic sphere was metonymic of the colonialist’s own position. The private actually operated as an important metaphor of the public realm in colonial encounters. While British women were often the public face of colonial rule as they were pronounced social benefactors through cultural missions, they were also accused of complicating and worsening interracial relationships. As Ronald Hyam writes in *Empire and Sexuality*:

> It has long been said that the biggest mistake the British made in India was to bring their women out, thus making it impossible to meet Indians as friends. New standards of racial prejudice were, it was said, imposed by hostesses drawing intricate distinctions between shades of colour, as the memsahibs elaborated an imperial social etiquette. They combined an exhaustive knowledge of precedence within European society with a lamentable ignorance of anything outside it.... Moping and sickly, narrowly intolerant, vindictive to the locals, despotic and abusive to their servants, usually bored, invariably gossiping viciously, prone to extra-marital affairs, cruelly insensitive to Indian women and hopelessly insulated from them—such is the memsahib stereotype.\(^6\)

\(^6\) Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, 119.
In the history of British occupation of India the year 1857 is a momentous date as it witnessed the first comprehensive military uprising against the British for freeing India. The sepoys serving under the East India Company revolted against the British and declared Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor, as their sovereign king. The rebellion was joined by many Indian states. British residencies like Cawnpore and Allahabad were captured by the sepoys and, as per the colonial narrative, the white men and their wives were massacred. However, the British subdued the rebellion with tremendous brutality and better military planning. Bahadur Shah was tried before the British court. Other rebel leaders were shot or hanged. In the year 1858, the governance of India was officially taken away from the mercantile enterprise of the East India Company by the imperial rule of Queen Victoria. The Government of India Act was passed in 1858 and the Queen’s Proclamation declaring the colony of India as a part of the British Empire and including Indians among her subjects was issued on 1st November, 1858. The new status of the British rulers as responsible officials of the Empire necessitated a new racial and cultural identity for them which would definitely distance them from the natives and establish supremacy over them. For that purpose the British travellers became agents of circulating various myths to strengthen the binaries in the relationship of the ruler and the ruled.

While the British government was said to have used brutal power to subdue the rebellion, it also established the myth that the British were superior to the Indians who had been more brutal in their massacre of British women and children. Bernard Cohn suggests that the mutiny was a ‘heroic myth’ strengthening the central values of the British people which justified to themselves their right to rule India. The British are widely said to have seen themselves as dispensers of divine justice and, given the initial atrocities committed by the

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mutineers, to have viewed their cruelties as simply repayment in kind. As Arun Mehta observes,

As myths of the mutiny grew, every dead British child became a slaughtered angel, every woman a violated innocent, every sepoy a black-faced, blood-crazed savage.\textsuperscript{8}

Such myths inexorably changed the ruler-ruled relationship in colonial India and crucially affected the cultural system of the English and the Indians. The war redefined the status of the Indian subjects to the rulers, leading them to determine a newly acceptable relationship between the two and set new goals for the imperial government to implement necessary changes of cultural institutions for them.

The East India Company was successful in creating a firm belief in the Company as a generous master who enjoyed the unwavering loyalty of its Indian servants, especially the sepoys who actually enforced British rule over India. The British in England were so shocked by the initial news of the uprising that even they chose to disbelieve the brutality of the uprising, the stories that the natives could burn colonial bungalows and slay white men. The structures of colonialism were at stake in the early days of the rebellion. British writers before 1857 usually portrayed Indians, and the Hindus in particular, as a mild and gentle race which needed guidance and protection. This so-called mildness of the Hindus helped them to construct the history of India as a conquered nation, a favourable ground for successive foreign rulers. Therefore it was natural for the British to come to rule India in the course of progress so that they could save the Indians from oriental despotism by teaching them the virtues of better civil life, duties and rights which became the cherished ideals of European civilization by the end of the eighteenth century. The dissemination of this Enlightenment ideology produced a desire among the natives for European knowledge, to be acquired from European civilization. A learned and urban native was the perfect subject whom the British

\textsuperscript{8} Arun Mehta, \textit{History of Modern India} (Jaipur: ABD, 2004), 93-94.
colonizer loved to keep at hand. A certain relationship of cordiality existed between the
Indian elite and Englishmen and such learned pro-European subjects also helped to establish
the legitimacy of colonialism. After 1857, however, Indian participation in the uprising
across classes led the British to resort to a new stereotyping of colonial subjects en masse as
treacherous, unreliable, brutish, and so on and so forth. A conscious attempt can be seen to
change the pre-existing stereotype of the mild Asian who nevertheless had streaks of
duplicity and treachery, into a more sinister image of the racial other so that the stories of
violence during the colonial insurgency could be accommodated in it. The following lines
from Alexander Duff’s letter no. VI to Dr. Tweedie written on 10th July, 1857 bear testimony
to such an image:

Throughout all ages the Asiatic has been noted for its duplicity, cunning, hypocrissy, treachery; and coupled with this...his capacity of secrecy and concealment. But in vain will the annals even of Asia be ransacked for examples of artful, refined, consummate duplicity, surpassing those which have been exhibited throughout the recent mutinies.9

The natives were viewed as intellectually inferior yet cruel, savage and duplicitous. A more radical distancing took effect after 1857, largely disrupting the earlier harmony between them and the British colonisers.

After the Indian Mutiny in 1857, the government resorted to a policy of encouraging the presence of British women in the hope that it would help to build up an imperial identity that was becoming ever more necessary to maintain the superiority of the ruling race. Domesticating the empire to provide ‘legitimate’ and ‘natural homes’ for colonists depended not only on masculine discourses of imperial adventure and energy but also on more feminized discourses of domesticity. British homes in the empire could only be established and maintained as legitimate and natural when they housed British wives and mothers. J. E.

Dawson wrote in the *Calcutta Review* that only the presence of British women as wives and home-makers in India could help to alleviate the nostalgia of their husbands for domestic comforts:

> Among [whom] are hardworking, home loving men [whose] ideal of bliss is to consort with one to cheer them in health and nurse them in sickness,... who will tend their houses and administer their homes with discretion. All are Englishmen, and they love in their wives what is essentially English.\(^{10}\)

According to Dawson, British wives and mothers in India helped to create homes that were superior to the confined spaces of Indian women who were ‘immured from infancy to age, within the bare and silent walls of those castles of ignorance and listlessness they call their homes.’\(^{11}\) British homes in India were seen by the *Calcutta Review* to foster appropriate gender roles, national virtues and imperial rule. Imperial domesticity, its supposed superiority to Indian domesticity, and the place of British women in maintaining such domestic superiority were all thought to bolster the success of imperial power.

A male-defined, middle-class ideology of gender had come to dominate Victorian culture, which prevented women from entering the male-dominated fields of education and professional life. The issues of patriarchy and the conditions of women were treated in various contradictory ways in Victorian society. There were debates in Victorian society on the proper role and education of women which continued from the Age of Enlightenment. Whereas Ruskin in his “Of Queen’s Gardens”(1865) attests to his belief in the subjection of wives, in the same period Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) thinks that home is the centre for domestic slavery. Mill rationally and eloquently attacked the deficiency of education system and the stifling ethic of wifely subjection and demanded similar education for women as well as men in every branch of arts and science, to open professional learning


\(^{11}\) ibid
for them and enable them to enter professions which had been reserved for men. For Ruskin, who also endorsed women’s education, female education should be directed not for women’s self-development but for self-renunciation. Understanding that these two documents are central to the sexual politics of the Victorian period, Kate Millet comments, “Compressed within these two statements is nearly the whole range and possibility of Victorian thought on the subject.”

**THE CONDITION OF BRITISH WOMEN IN THE COLONY**

The projection of colonial women as paragons of virtue matched with the nineteenth century Victorian cult of domesticity which treated women as somewhat paradoxical creatures of the body as well as ‘angels in the house’ as Coventry Patmore suggested in his poem. Patmore clarified the role of the domestic angel-wife as a slave who must always submit herself to her husband’s will:

> Her will’s indomitably bent/ On mere submissiveness to him/ To him she will cleave, for him forsake/ Father’s and mother’s fond command! / He is her lord, for he can take/ Hold of her faint heart with his hand.

According to Patmore the conquest of the angel, the woman’s body and that of the foreign territory was part of the same process:

> A woman is a foreign land,/ Of which, though there he settle young,/ A man never quite understand/ The customs, politics, and tongue,...The most for leave to trade apply,/ For once, at Empire’s seat, her heart...

Even apart from this reference to the Victorian woman’s virtue in subordinating herself to the will of the British man and the masculine imperialist project, in other Victorian writings by both male and female authors, there were direct references to the British Empire’s moral

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superiority as reflected in the virtue of colonial women. Maud Diver quoted Count Von Konigsmark’s comment in her book *The Englishwoman in India* (1909):

What would India be without England, and what would the British Empire be without Englishwomen? To these women are due gratitude not only of their country but of the civilized world. Fearlessly the woman of British birth looks in the eye of danger. Faithfully and with willing sacrifice she upholds the standard of the King-Emperor—the standard of culture and of service to humanity.  

In the same vein, John Ruskin insisted in his influential essay *Of Queens Gardens* (1865) that men and women were ‘in nothing alike.’ The man was ‘the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender’ while the woman was for ‘sweet ordering’ and ‘arrangement’. Ruskin mentioned that it was the duty of woman to make a ‘home’ which was the ‘place of peace, the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division…a sacred place, a vestal temple.’ Ruskin seemed to be conscious about the role imperial wives were expected to play when he commented: ‘…Wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her…home is yet wherever she is; and for a noble woman it stretches far round her…’ While admitting that the home was woman’s true place and power he denied woman the supreme authoritative position even inside the home as he went on to say that the woman

must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she never fail from his side: wise, not with the narrowness of insolent and loveless pride but with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable modesty of service—the true changefulness of woman.  

Ruskin’s essay made it very plain that in Victorian society women were expected to remain in an inferior position, dominated by their husbands, if they were to remain good home keepers.

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In the empire too, the perspective was not very different. Many feminist histories of gender and imperialism written from a western perspective have emphasized the point that the journey of the English women to India was emancipatory for them. Western feminists usually regarded their leaving home as a necessary first step to emancipation. In “Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse”, Caren Kaplan articulates this politics of location recently in the following terms:

We must leave home, as it were, since our homes are often the sites of racism, sexism, and other damaging social practices.  

Englishwomen in the British Empire in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century served as useful examples of such excursions outside the home. For the Englishwoman out in the world, colonialism provided an authoritative mode of self-projection associated with the modern female subject. The very word ‘memsahib’ (Madam-Sahib) suggests that connotations of colonial power, privilege and status were being placed upon the sahib’s wife as much as on him. This authoritative self was defined against a racial other in encounters that were located in a space which was paradoxically domestic as well as public since it was an ‘English home’ in the colonies. The colonies offered a legitimate public performance of domesticity to late-Victorian and early twentieth century Englishwomen that required the most imaginative skills of the homemaker and yet held out the promise of inclusion in masculine public life. But this western feminist assumption that the white women transcended the boundaries of their home in order to go to a foreign or alien country and enter the man’s world of empire building is not entirely acceptable as in the empire they were also used as model wives – right in the spirit of Victorian domestic ideology. The patriarchal imperial system constructed by European men always used women in its own interest by

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19 Indrani Sen, Woman and Empire: Representations in the Writings of British India (1858-1900) (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2002), 10.
making the woman believe that the successful running of the empire required her womanly
skills in household management.

It seems more likely that the imperial occupation of India allowed for the prescription
of the domestic as the most fulfilling arena in which a modern female subject could operate.
Hence, while in England the ideology of domesticity was being challenged by feminists in
this period, the colonies provided a contemporary situation in which housework and home
management were considered valuable national contributions. The white women were
indispensable in the colonies as they preserved the social and racial integrity of British
colonial communities. Jenny Sharpe observes that the British home in India was ‘a space of
racial purity that the colonial housewife guarded against contamination from outside’20 The
oversimplified relationship of oppression of the colonized by the colonizer needed to be
qualified when white women were taken into consideration, because European women
occupied a more ambiguous position as members of the inferior sex but superior race.

In their separate articles on British women in Malaya and Uganda, Janice Brownfoot21
and Beverley Gartrell22 have concluded that European women were less influential than
European men in constructing and maintaining the colonial social order. Brownfoot has even
argued that British rule depended as much on the subordination of European women as on
that of Asian men and women. Similarly, Gartrell has theorized that white women in Uganda
were even more constrained and oppressed by a white, male dominated structure of hierarchy
than were the women of the same class in Britain. Both of them observe that while European
women were integral participants in the exercise of British rule, they were not responsible for

20 Jenny Sharpe, Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text (Minneapolis:
University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 92.
and Protectorate, 1900-1940”, in The Incorporated Wife, eds. Hilary Callan and Shirley Ardener (London:
Croom Helm, 1984), 186-210
22 Gartrell Beverley, “Colonial Wives: Villains or Victims?” in The Incorporated Wife, eds. Hilary
Callan and Shirley Ardener (London: Croom Helm 1984), 165-185
the existence of the empire. This thesis will contest their claim and suggest that their simple portrayal of colonial women as victims oversimplifies the relationship between European men and women as well as the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Another set of critics including Helen Callaway, see the European women in the colonies as benevolent philanthropists or reformers. This thesis also attempts to show that British women’s writings in general do not represent them altogether as benevolent imperialists. In fact, my finding, as stated in the Conclusion, is that their constant references to sexual anxiety mark a distinct position that also appears to subvert the reformist aims of benevolent imperialism.

The memsahib was thus expected to make a ‘home’ out of a rented house that she would probably be required to vacate within a year or so, use furniture and rugs that were hired or made by convicts at the local jail, make something of a garden that would remind them about the English countryside, employ servants who stuck rigidly to the narrowest of demarcation lines owing to the Hindu caste system, bring up children and nurse them through every possible kind of sickness, knowing that within a few years they would also be taken from her and sent back to England. All these requirements and the uncertainties that came in the path of leading a fulfilling life in the colonies put a tremendous amount of emotional and psychological strain upon the women. Kumari Jayawardena describes the ‘reality of the colonial wife’ as ‘living in a sort of doubly refined bondage—isolated in the home as a woman and alienated in the colony as a foreigner’. The nervousness of most of the women about a new land impelled them to read and know about the land even before they arrived there. They collected information about India from the books available at that time in England, as well as from hearsay – that vast network of informal sources of information that has helped to create ideas about places long before they are visited.

Foucault, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) and *Discipline and Punish* (1977), explored the contiguity of power and knowledge. He wished to explicate the ways in which knowledge transforms power, redefining power not as accumulated within the monolithic apparatus of the state, but as a web like force which is confirmed and articulated through the everyday exchanges of ‘know-how’ or information which animate social life. The person with some knowledge about something ultimately has some power over that object. Power operates at every point where someone who ‘knows’ is instructing some other who ‘does not know’. Drawing on Foucault, Edward Said in *Orientalism* showed that ‘knowledge’ about the non-Europeans was part of the process of maintaining power over them. In her own untrained fashion, the would-be memsahib tried to gather knowledge about India before arrival there, so that she could achieve the feeling of relative empowerment. British women planning to come to India read guide books written by other women to assert their power over native Indians but, in a way, they were themselves overpowered by the knowledge provided in the guide books. Even before their arrival, this reading biased them against India and the Indian natives. The books of ‘sound advice’ conditioned their attitudes, and they were so strongly controlled by these that even after arrival they could neither break out of the ‘memsahib’ stereotype nor think beyond the stereotyping of the natives. The travelling or displaced woman thus does not comfortably fit the profile of the ‘western oppressor’; various gender and cultural issues situated her in a position of limited power confined to fixed kinds of spaces.²⁴

The publishing trade also responded to a growing market for ‘women’s guide books’ teaching the art of survival in the outposts of the Empire. The period between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the publication of an unprecedented number of household guides which were written for the second generation of British middle class

women to help them combat Indian adversities after the suppression of the 1857 mutiny. Various guide books, apart from letters written from India, and occasional advice from ‘old India hands’ were available to provide women with a list of things to do and not to do during their stay in India. The authors of these publications provided information about India from their ‘superior perspective’ as members of a ‘master’ race. The tone of contempt for India in their writing cannot be missed. The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook, for example, warned the British ladies against Indian servants’ uncleanliness by stating that the British ladies’ ‘appetite for breakfast might be marred by seeing the khitmatghar using his toes as an efficient toast rack (fact); or their desire for dinner weakened by seeing the soup strained through a greasy pagri’.

Augusta King also writes about the ignorance of the servants in her letter. She goes to the extent of comparing the native servant with dog: ‘most of the servants in hanging a picture would hang it upside down, so little can they see any meaning in it. I suppose it is chiefly a matter of education. I wonder if a dog would be taught to recognize a portrait?’

Throughout the nineteenth century, the growing enthusiasm for evangelicalism in Britain changed the outlook of the British women towards India (as well as other colonies). In 1813, the Evangelical missionaries got the permission to carry their war against ‘heathenism’ to India by the large scale conversion of Indians to Christianity. India-bound missionaries first received limited permission to work in British controlled territories by the East India Company Charter Act of 1813 and were given unlimited freedom twenty years later in the Charter Act of 1833. This development was a victory for the Evangelicals against the powerful anti-missionary lobby in the parliament led by Company Director Sir Stephen

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Lushington who believed that evangelistic activity in India would threaten British material interests. The East India Act of 1813 provided for the appointment of a bishop for India with an episcopal seat in Calcutta that included all ‘British territories in the East Indies and Parts aforesaid’. In 1817, the island of Ceylon was added to the diocese followed by Australia and New Zealand in 1823. The new Bishop of Calcutta was the First Anglican Bishop ‘east of Suez’ with three new Arch deacons assisting him in the Presidency Capitals.²⁷

After the 1857 mutiny, rumours about the slaughter and gang rape of British women by Indian mutineers, especially by Nana Sahib’s men in Kanpur, had spread rapidly – giving rise to trauma and hysteria among British women. Thereafter, the memory of 1857 left a permanent mark on their writings.²⁸ The writings of the women of the Raj in the second half of the century were troubled with the anxiety of physical vulnerability and powerlessness. To counterbalance these feelings of insecurity, many of them emphasized an attitude of hatred and arrogance towards native culture and society. The ideas they expressed were representative of their own alienated standpoint. On the one hand the revulsion towards a foreign culture and society which to them was repeatedly represented as barbaric, and on the other the irresistible ‘spell’ of the East, the mystery of India with its magical climate, made them feel at once threatened and enchanted. British women writers did not want to possess India like the male imperialists, but their desire to understand India was complicated by their inability to comprehend its clime and habitats, traditions and intellectual heritage and so any true knowledge of India was hardly possible. A genuine and empathetic comprehension could never be attained by them. British women in the colony were positioned in a situation that might rival the image of the orient as a feminine space in the colonial imagination. British women’s sexual anxiety, as represented in British women’s writings on India, appears to stem

from the pressure of this competitive femininity which sought to project an image of colonial women to counter the more disturbing implications of oriental femininity.

In contrast to the British women travellers in the 1820s, the memsahibs in the 1870s remained totally unacquainted with native languages – which further cut them off from the culture of their surroundings. Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardiner in their guide book for Englishwomen coming to India even suggested that the memsahib should not call her servants by name and should not order them in full sentences. For the exhibition of authority it is best to speak truncated sentences to the servants. Thus a gradually growing social distancing was effected between white women and the natives. As Inderpal Grewal comments, ‘most Englishwomen lived in English communities along race and class lines without associating with the natives.’  

One reason for this was that the wives of British Other Ranks (BORs) did not get much encouragement or opportunity to get closer to the ‘real’ India. The India they came into contact with was the India of the servants, coolies, shopkeepers and ayahs, indeed, an India they had already been warned about before departing from the mother country.

The order of British society in India was very much hierarchical. The hierarchy of colonial governance was customarily maintained even in private and social gatherings. Thus the social privilege enjoyed by the wife of a higher ranking officer was not available to the wife of a low-ranking officer and even the native servants understood the difference between a ‘burra memsahib’ and a ‘chota memsahib’ quite well. The ‘chota memsahib’ recognized the inferiority of her position and felt socially alienated. We can see this very well in the Letters

\[29\] Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 72

\[30\] British Other Ranks or BORs consist of non-commissioned officers. The term indicates the army men who are not in officer ranks.
of Mrs. Eliza Fay (1780), where she states that Mrs. Hastings, who was then the Governor’s wife, was unsympathetic to her misfortune. Mrs. Fay writes:

Those basking in the lap of prosperity can little appreciate the sufferings or make allowance for the errors of the unfortunate, whom they regard as almost beings of another order.\(^{31}\)

Knowing one’s place was of prime importance in India. Elaborate rituals of etiquette developed in the colonial household that determined social behaviour from the order one went in to dinner, from whom one requested leave (the Burra Memsahib — wife of the most senior official present rather than the hostess), and the order in which one left.\(^{32}\)

The ‘memsahib’ who came to India to manage her husband’s Indian household often found that she was merely an extension of the regiment. Her function was to serve the empire. In most cases the husband had no time for his wife. Their private life was sacrificed to the official duties of the empire and the wife was reduced to loneliness. This is the case of Mrs. Evelyn Desmond in Maud Diver’s novel *Captain Desmond, V.C.*, who is married to the eponymous character.\(^{33}\) The Captain and his wife are incompatible with each other. Theo is a good soldier and a man with singularity of purpose. In a momentary fever of love he has married Evelyn, but Evelyn is young, inexperienced, beautiful, and new to India. She could not gauge the hazards of life in a military camp when she married Theo. Evelyn thinks that she will at least have her husband by her side in her difficulties, but she soon finds that private family life is practically impossible in India. After a few months of their marriage Evelyn’s friend Honor Meridith arrives to visit her brother John Meridith, the major of Theo Desmond’s regiment. When John leaves for England on a sick leave and Honor comes to stay

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\(^{31}\) Mrs. Eliza Fay to Friends, Calcutta, 22\(^{nd}\) May, 1780, *Original Letters from India of Mrs. Eliza Fay*, ed. Rev. Walter Kelly Firminger (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co, 1908), 135


with the Desmonds, Evelyn finds a companion with whom she can share the agonies of her life in India. She tells Honor:

I thought India was a lovely place till I came here. Theo warned me it wouldn't be a bit like Pindi or Lahore. But that didn't seem to matter, so long as I had him. Only I am so seldom able to have him! The regiment swamps everything. The men are always in uniform, and always at it; and the aggravating part is that they actually like that better than anything.\textsuperscript{34}

Honor tries to console Evelyn by referring to the fate of the soldier’s wife where the wife should always accept the fact that in her husband’s life she comes only second. Honor says:

I am afraid that on the Frontier, if a man is keen, his wife is bound to stand second; and if only she will accept the fact, it must surely be happier for both in the long-run.\textsuperscript{35}

Evelyn feels that the regiment has taken Theo away from her. She complains:

But Theo seems to be the private property of half the regiment! There's his chief friend Major Wyndham, and the Boy, his subalter, he thinks the world of them; and they seem to live in the house. Then there's a tiresome old Ressaldar always coming over to do Persian with him for his Higher Proficiency exam; and I don't find it half amusing to be one of a mixed crowd like that!\textsuperscript{36}

As a result of all these claims on Captain Desmond the conjugal life of the couple is ruptured. Evelyn blames the empire for everything.

In some literary works written by the women of the raj – like Maud Diver’s frontier trilogy – we find an even stronger apathy among army men regarding marriage as well as towards wives. Wives to the army officers are mere encumbrances who can interrupt their camp life and their male-bonding in particular. In \textit{Captain Desmond V.C.}, Desmond’s

\textsuperscript{34}Diver, \textit{Captain Desmond, V.C.}, 15
\textsuperscript{35}Ibid
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid, 15-16.
marriage with Evelyn is not welcomed by his fellow army officers. They assume that this marriage is likely to ruin Desmond’s career. Even women who are residing at the front with their husbands like Frank disapprove of this marriage. As the novel proceeds the narrative also shows the disastrous effect of such a marriage. When in distress, Captain Desmond is much more comfortable in the company of his friend Paul Wyndham than his wife. Diver highlights the masculine bonding between these two friends which shadows the man-woman bonding and creates tension in the husband-wife relationship. Theo Desmond is completely non-reciprocating to his wife’s demonstrations of affection, which makes Evelyn think that even his horse is dearer to him than his wife. Theo communicates better with his friend Paul Wyndham who understands him and does not question Theo.

For it was a habit, dating from early days, that whenever the pin-pricks of life chafed Theo’s impatient spirit, he would seek out his friend, spend an hour or two in his company, and tell him precisely nothing.37

Thus from the very beginning white women’s desires were thought of as a complete mismatch to the white man’s life in India.

Another cause of anxiety for the memsahib in India was that she could not keep her children with her for long. It was mandatory to send the children to England when they were seven years of age. The memsahib therefore had the option of either following her children ‘home’ or staying with her husband away from her children. Consequently she was bound to fail either as a mother or as a wife. Maud Diver writes about the condition of British women when they had to leave their children:

One after one the babies grow into companionable children; one after one England claims them, till the mother’s heart and house are left unto her desolate. Empty nurseries, empty verandahs; only the haunting music of small footsteps and clear voices still troubles and glorifies her

37 Diver, Captain Desmond, V.C, 15-16.
dreams. Yet in all likelihood she will continue to dance and ride and entertain with undiminished jest.\textsuperscript{38}

Diver even suggests the British woman ‘should register a vow, and keep it—Fate permitting—never to desert either husband or children for more than three or four years at a stretch’\textsuperscript{39}.

Moreover, due to the harsh climatic conditions in India, there was an abnormally high child-mortality rate which also made the British women apprehensive. They had to rely on ayahs or Indian midwives for delivery, and occasional incidents of death at childbirth were accounted for by the superstitious belief that the ayahs knew black-magic. Many short stories like Perrin’s ‘Centipede’ were written on the maliciousness of the ayah figure.

The closed European circles in many outposts around India were little societies where a fresh arrival of marriageable women from ‘home’ created ripples in the minds of the young. These women from ‘home’ provided young Company officers with options and opportunities for getting married. The conditions were also beneficial for women because army officers presented lucrative marriage prospects for them. In such a confined space, the battle for courtship was very tense and very explicit – which made open flirting quite frequent. In Diver’s novel \textit{Captain Desmond V.C.} Mr. Kresney openly flirts with Evelyn, Captain Desmond’s wife. In Flora Annie Steel’s \textit{On the Face of the Waters} a similar situation arises when Mr. Erlton, already married to Kate, unabashedly flirts with Mrs. Gissing.\textsuperscript{40} This naked fight for attraction eroded the white woman’s self-confidence and integrity. British women who had freshly arrived in India felt deprived of their due recognition and honour and felt cornered, as we can sense it through their literary representations. For Stella, in \textit{Star of India 38 Diver, Englishwoman in India, 45. 39 Ibid, 41. 40 Flora Annie Steel, “On The Face of the Waters” in A Raj Collection ed. Saros Cawasjee (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 59.}
by Alice Perrin, the source of her anxiety is that her husband cannot do without Sher Singh, his head servant. Perrin writes,

> It sounded to Stella almost as though he would prefer to part with her than with Sher Singh!  

Even to compensate for this loneliness, the British wives do not have the company of their husbands. When the wives look up to their husbands for the solace and companionship they have come for, they find that their husbands have no time for them. They are always busy in the work of the company. They are always surrounded by their Indian servants, attendants, chaprashis, and coolies. Their home does not exist so far as being together of the two is concerned. In this condition they were averse to the people who are nearer to the husband, the Indian subordinates, men and women. They especially felt antipathy to the Indian women who, they doubted, had more access to the white men than themselves. The rivalry boiled down to the primitive rivalry between women for the attention of man.

**POST-1857 POLITICS**

After 1857, the image of the colonial rulers needed to be reconstructed in such a way as to establish their natural racial superiority over the ruled. As mentioned before, this involved the circulation of certain myths in both public and personal spheres. Domestic life was expected to be lived in the colonies as a public example and the image of the white woman as a sacrosanct figure was central to this project. English womanhood was elevated above colonial relations and any native attack on white women, sexual or otherwise, was held as a sacrilegious act fit for extreme punishment. The rape-script as well as the concealment of severe punishments meted out in such rumoured rapes involved the colonial politics of strengthening the colonial stranglehold. Nancy L. Paxton comments,

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Most British and Anglo-Indian novels that refer to this uprising assert, of course, the colonizers’ overmastering power to rename the victims in colonial rape scripts, to foreclose other readings of the panic and sexual violence that were clearly part of this colonial crisis, and to censor accounts of the savage British reprisals for these rumoured rapes that generated such rage and self—righteousness during and after the uprising. 42

From the very early days of the rebellion, the imagination of the colonizers was seized by the horrifying tales of barbaric natives subjecting white women to inhuman torture. The story went so far as to claim that the natives were systematically raping white women and dismembering their bodies. This rumour spread not only in India but also became popular in England. Although the authenticity of such events was seldom if ever proved, this story became so widespread that the rebellion of 1857 actually went on record as a barbaric attack of mutinous sepoys on innocent women and children. Newspapers, tabloids, pamphlets and journals printed rumours in place of information and imagination was given free play instead of factuality. British readers were so familiar with the passivity of the colonised subjects that any deviation from that stereotype, resulting in the death of a single white man, was liable to be seen as a massacre. The figure of the Englishwoman as an innocent victim of anti-colonial massacre was also instrumental in advancing the agency of colonial power by establishing the rebellion as a violation of its right and reconfirming its authority as well as preparing a ground for the establishment of new authoritative structures. It was the coloniser’s duty to avenge the death of these women by establishing a strong government.

The sensational accounts of the rebellion of 1857 as found in stories, newspaper reports, letters, and diaries all circle around this same motif—the rape of an English woman by a native. The horrific details of the crime not only stereotyped white women as eroticized bodies – ravaged and dishonoured – but the effect of such stories was very like an actual rape. The ravaged female body was constructed as a public spectacle which made the white women

42 Nancy Paxton, Writing under the raj: gender, race and rape in the British Colonial imagination 1830-1947 (New Brunswick, New jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 110
aware of their sexual vulnerability and forced them to exercise strict distancing from the natives. The colonial imagination did not highlight the heroism of any British man or the death of a husband or son, but it was the sexual dramatization of the events of 1857 that imagined the rebellion as a sexual offence against white women, affecting creative imagination and nullifying the possibility of inter-racial relationships for a long time to come. The construction of an inviolable image of the white woman was a strategic move by the British Government to counter any native insurgency. For the same reason the British Government publicized stories of white women raped by natives after 1857. But the myth of such sexual crimes became so popular and attained such a stature of semi-truth that it inexorably changed the dimensions of relationship between the ruler and the ruled. Even more than that, it greatly altered the personal relationship of white men and women with the natives.

The rising of 1857 was thus not regarded by the British as the first national struggle for liberation but discredited as a crime against humanity by creating stereotypical myths of sexual crimes which permanently influenced the creative imagination of British writers. That is why it remains not just a momentous event in India’s history but an event that changed the way the British lived and ruled in India. It is therefore necessary to maintain an analytical divide between the works written before 1857 and the works written after this date in order to facilitate a historicist reading.

After 1857, some laws and regulations were also passed which changed the perspective of British women in the first half of the eighteenth century to a different one in the last half. The ‘New Imperialism’ that emerged in the 1890s intensified the tensions surrounding Victorian gender arrangements. Many social and legal changes were successfully promoted by the feminists and other liberal reformers in this period. Landmark laws like the Married Woman’s Property Act of 1882 and the Criminal Law Amendment Act
in 1885 (which finally raised the age of consent from thirteen to sixteen) accelerated the emergence of the ‘New Woman’ of the 1890s. India was quite responsive to these social transformations. As the women received better education, some of them opted for careers outside the home. India provided options for the upcoming middle-class women to work in professions like governesses and teachers. Maud Diver in her novel *Lilamani* portrays such an English woman, Audrey Hammond, who worked as the teacher for Lilamani, the daughter of an aristocratic family. Likewise the British women writing novels about colonial life in the 1880s and 1890s directly challenged the conventions of Victorian morality that bracketed modesty and silence with domestic seclusion and female honour respectively. Some of the female novelists used ‘male pseudonyms’ – like Maxwell Grey -- but others did not refrain from using feminine names like Hilda Gregg or Flora Annie Steel.

Again, in the mid 1860s, two important legislative measures were taken to control the behaviour of prostitutes who were considered a threat to the British Imperial authority for spreading venereal diseases among their army men. The umbrella Cantonment Acts (Act XXII) of 1864 organised the sex trade within military cantonments. Four years later, the Indian Contagious Diseases Act (Act XIV) of 1868 enacted similar provisions for the supervision, registration and inspection of prostitute women in major Indian cities and ports. Thus, unlike the legislations in Britain\(^{43}\) which extended only to eighteen military districts in and around the British Isles, the Indian Contagious Diseases Act directly affected the indigenous urban population in those cities where the legislation was in force. The contraction rate among the military men was so alarming that in most presidencies, the average annual admission of British troops to hospitals for venereal disease throughout the century was well over 200 per 1000 of average strength.\(^{44}\) Viceroy Lansdowne, writing to

\(^{43}\) British Contagious Disease Act of 1864.

the secretary of state for India in 1893, acknowledged that ‘The strength of British Army in India, as a fighting machine, has been impaired by the disease’. The anxiety ran so high among the colonial masters that they brought in its compass both the military and the civilian population. The fact that the colonial government attempted to control the health of soldiers by controlling the women they slept with, however, is particularly significant in that the men were not directly affected by the law. Another important difference between the British laws and Indian laws was that the rhetoric of British legislation remained doggedly attached to the possibility of redemption. Women hospitalised for the treatment of venereal disease were subjected to religious and moral teachings and, after release, they were urged not to go back to their old profession but to seek refuge in some asylum. No such moral precepts clutter the Indian legislation and little talk is heard of redemption or rescue. It was a strong British belief that prostitution was a hereditary cast profession in Indian society, an assumption that sat very comfortably with the general prejudice about loose oriental morality.

Another important law which contributed largely to the gender ideology and racial conflict of this period was the Ilbert Bill, leading to a major controversy from 1883 to 1884. The Code of Criminal Procedure of 1872 prohibited native civil servants from exercising criminal jurisdiction over European British subjects who lived outside the chief presidency towns. This exclusive authorization of European civil servants to act upon European citizens was a mark of racial discrimination that the Ilbert Bill tried to remove. The bill was introduced by Courteney Peregrine Ilbert, the law member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council in India, on 9th February, 1883 to amend the code of criminal procedure in the Indian Penal Code. The empowerment of native civilians by the removal of racial disqualification of the judges caused huge unrest among the Anglo-Indian officials and non-officials. The reaction against the Ilbert Bill was felt most strongly in Bengal. In particular,

45 Frederick Cooper and Ann L Stoler, “Tensions of Empire”: 614.
the Ilbert Bill controversy marked an antagonism between the Anglo-Indian community and the political aspirations of the native middle class. The Anglo-Indians were anxious of the outcome of the Bill on two grounds. First, they consider Indian civilians as effeminate and disrespectful of their own women folk. It made them unfit to rule men and women of a superior race. The second argument was the possibility of physical threat to white women in India. The British imagination always conceived the white woman as defenceless before the sexual aggressiveness of the native man. So it was suggested that Indian magistrates would take advantage of their position and satisfy their lust for British women at the time of trial.⁴⁶

The advantage that the white people had before a white jury can be elucidated with the case of Hurroo Mehtar.⁴⁷ This case involving Mrs. Hume and the Mehtar was fanned and over-publicised by the Anglo-Indian community until it heightened the prevalent racial tension. The situation was already tense in Calcutta over the sentencing of Surendranath Banerjea to prison for contempt of court. Mr. James Hume was the public prosecutor against some students who had protested the sentencing of Banerjea. On 11th June, 1883, Mr. Hume complained that he had found Hurroo on top of his wife on the bathroom floor. Mr. Hume said that he apprehended the native when he was assaulting Mrs. Hume. The trial was on 30th July, 1883. Hurroo, undefended, was sentenced to eight years of rigorous imprisonment by a mixed jury though he refused to admit his guilt till the end. The case was too public and so a quick settlement was necessary. Even though Anglo-Indian newspapers implicated student leaders and middle class native politicians in the affair, a different picture of this alleged assault case emerged from a private correspondence between a relative of the Humes and Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy of India. Mr. A. O. Hume, an ex-member of the Indian Civil


⁴⁷ Ibid.
Service and one of the founder members of the Indian National Congress, wrote to Dufferin that contrary to the facts made public Mrs. Hume and Hurroo Mehtar had been romantically involved for the last six months. Mr. Hume had caught the Mehter and his wife in a compromising situation and given them a sound thrashing. Later they changed the allegation under the advice of their friends and convicted Mehter of attempted rape. This case suggests some of the dangerous instabilities created in the late nineteenth century when sexuality was racialized and rape laws controlled errant desires of both the colonisers and the colonised. Mrs. Hume’s case exemplifies the way colonial law worked against individuals whose desire for sex and love prompted them to cross racial and cultural boundaries. It also hints at British women’s anxiety to maintain their claims of purity and superiority at the expense of Indian men and women in the colonial scenario.

The significant presence of British and Anglo-Indian women writers in India in the 1880s and 1890s shows how conventional gender norms were changing in the late nineteenth century. But it is very surprising that though there was no dearth of Englishwomen who came to India and wrote from mid eighteenth century till the last decade of the nineteenth century, only a few of them actually wrote fictional accounts of British life in India. Mary Martha Sherwood had written her novels on India before 1857, and from 1857 to 1890 we have only one British woman writer, Florence Marryat, who wrote a fictional work on India after her visit to the country. In contrast to this, in the period after 1890, there was a profusion of novels by British women writers who came to visit India. All these writings can be safely classified as station romances and bear certain resemblances with each other. The majority of these novels portray a British lady as its central character whose interface with Indian men and women constitutes the theme. I consider the year 1890 as another benchmark as it heralded a string of novels written on colonial life in India. A change of tone is also perceptible in the non-fictional accounts of colonial life in this period. This was the period of
British high imperialism and the developments in fictional and non-fictional writings of this period are steeped with racial overtones. But underneath that overarching pattern of racism there can be found a subtext of sexual anxiety in the women’s writings of this period, which considerably modifies the racism of imperialist ideology, as this thesis tries to show.

**LITERATURE SURVEY**

When the field of studies in gender and colonialism was in its infancy, it was synonymous with the study of European women in the colonies. The oft-cited, ground-breaking volume of essays, *Western Women and Imperialism* by Nupur Chowdhury and Margaret Strobel, directed attention to the contradictions faced by European women in the colonies. Traditionally undervalued because they were members of the 'weaker sex', white women benefited from being members of the 'superior races', and were charged with the responsibility of upholding the cultural and moral values of empire. In challenging Kipling's image of the vain, shallow, and inconsequential memsahib, the essays in this volume showed that historical narratives of white women in the empire had been too narrow in their scope. White women in the colonies were travellers, missionaries, nurses, journalists, teachers, as well as wives and companions. Helen Callaway's book on nurses in Nigeria showed how the work of white women was central to running an empire.

Mary Procida's *Married to the Empire*, which is a recent contribution to studies of European women in the colonies, has taken the critique of the image of the lazy memsahib a step further and shown the ways in which being the wife of a British official made demands.

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on women that were quite unlike what they experienced at home. Procida's image of the gun-toting wife is compelling, particularly since it shows women exercising some control over their physical safety in the putatively dangerous sites of the tropics, but this image raises questions about whether women with guns ever successfully destabilized colonial anxieties about black men sexually assaulting white women. As Nancy Paxton and Jenny Sharpe have persuasively argued, keeping white women safe from sexual violence in the aftermath of the 1857 mutiny justified British repression against Indians in the years following the mutiny and after. Although the anxieties were wildly exaggerated, the discourse of the sexually violated white woman, and the putative damage to her purity, chastity, and the embodiment of national honour that she stood for, were crucial to explaining why colonial regimes worked so hard to discipline white women into forms of domesticity (and whiteness) that required that they remain indoors, keeping their clothes and their bodies white, and supervising their servants from an appropriate distance.

Histories of white women travellers and the ways in which they experienced the linked processes of travelling, narrating their encounters with non-Europeans and defining their selves differently from their male counterparts have proved exceptionally fertile ground for scholars of gender and colonialism. A number of books by Mills, Melman and Grewal has analysed these important factors from multiple perspectives. Mary Louise Pratt's influential Imperial Eyes identified 'contact zones', as the “contested space that gives

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52 Jenny Sharpe, Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
rise to travel narratives.\textsuperscript{57} In her complex analysis of new world travel accounts, Pratt demonstrated how travel and cultural contact were crucial means of narrating cultural exchanges on the axes of science and sentimentality.

In negotiating between these two axes, science and sentimentality, where Europe stands for scientific reason and colony stands for uncontrolled sentimentality, travel narratives consolidated various types of social and sexual norms, particularly in texts that compared the primitive and putatively unbridled sexuality of native women with the more demure and sexually restrained European women. Histories of colonial sexuality have also integrated metropolitan and colonial anxieties in a field of analysis. Once represented by a single volume, Ronald Hyam's “Empire and Sexual Opportunity”\textsuperscript{58}, studies on sexuality and the body have come into deeper dialogue with feminist scholarship on race and class. Ronald Hyam's \textit{Empire and Sexuality}\textsuperscript{59} catalogues the sexual history of a group of colonial officials in an attempt to show that sexuality was central to the imperial experience. The argument is foreshadowed in the first edition of \textit{Britain's Imperial Century}\textsuperscript{60} in which Hyam offhandedly remarks that the British Empire owed more to the export of surplus sexual and emotional energy than surplus capital: it was born not in a 'fit of absence of mind' but rather in a 'fit of absence of wives'.\textsuperscript{61} In developing his argument, Hyam agrees with Foucault that sexuality is not an innate experience with universal values as to what is normal and abnormal: it is culturally conditioned and historically specific.

\textsuperscript{57} Durba Ghosh, “Gender and Colonialism: Expansion or Marginalisation?”, \textit{The Historical Journal} 47, no. 3 (Sep., 2004): 740.
\textsuperscript{60} Ronald Hyam, \textit{Britain’s Imperial Century, 1815-1914, A Study of Empire and Expansion} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1976).
\textsuperscript{61} Hyam, \textit{Britain’s Imperial Century}, 141.
Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* 62 and two essays by Ann Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th century Colonial Cultures” 63 and “Carnal knowledge and Imperial power: Gender, Race and Morality in Colonial Asia” 64 link the colonial categorization of racial differences with questions of metropolitan class distinctions and sexual anxieties. Both authors, in their theoretically sophisticated works, draw on a wide canvas to demonstrate that European colonizers were as much concerned about maintaining class and gender distinctions between themselves as they were in constructing their racial superiority over those they colonized. Anne McClintock's work brings together the racialization of class in Victorian England with the classification of race in colonial South Africa. By juxtaposing these two fields, McClintock analyses the ways in which metaphors of sexuality and family were mapped on to material practices, such as the appropriation of middle-class women's labour in England simultaneous to the colonial dependence on African labour under colonial rule. In her earlier book, Ann Stoler revisited Michel Foucault's works on sexuality and situated Europe's emergence into modernity as coeval with colonialism. In order to understand the ways in which bourgeois bodies are disciplined, Stoler focuses further attention on the colonial family and household as a crucial site for regulating sexual and social intimacy between black and white bodies, as well as for creating class norms. Both Stoler and McClintock have built on the works of Foucault, as well as on Marx and Freud, to show how readings of social theory are enhanced by accounting for the sexual and racial politics of empire.

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In one of the most influential early works on control of sexuality in the colonies, Kenneth Ballhatchet\textsuperscript{65} reveals the contradiction between the care the Indian army took to provide facilities for sexual relations between British soldiers and Indian women, and the civil government's attempt to prohibit such relationships among British officials. The aim in both cases was to preserve the structure of imperial power by maintaining the soldiers' virility and the official elite's social distance from the people. Elizabeth Collingham's \textit{Imperial Bodies},\textsuperscript{66} although not primarily about gender, complements some of the themes presented by Stoler and McClintock and focuses on British India as a specific site for the production and regulation of highly racialized, 'indianized', and 'anglicized' bodies. Collingham shows the ways in which political insecurities about the legitimacy of British rule gave rise to a regime of bodily regulation that created the anglicized body as one that 'became an instrument of colonial rule'. The regulation of the body, particularly of the prostitute, is the focus of Philippa Levine's\textsuperscript{67} ambitious study on the promulgation of the Contagious Diseases Acts in four British colonies throughout the late nineteenth century. Bringing together political, social, military, and cultural history, Levine shows that regulating prostitution was a transnational problem, central to the ways in which the British government at home and abroad managed the sexual demands of British soldiers without exacerbating the 'problem' of venereal diseases, which was imagined to emanate from native sex workers.

Mrinalini Sinha's \textit{Colonial Masculinity}\textsuperscript{68} remains a model for understanding the ways in which masculinities interact to produce different kinds of hierarchies based on race and class. Using the idea of an 'imperial social formation' which puts British and Indian social


\textsuperscript{68} Mrinalini Sinha, \textit{Colonial Masculinities: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effiminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).
history within the same framework, Sinha showed how constructions of the 'manly Englishman' were contiguous with the images of the 'effeminate Bengali'.

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

All the works mentioned above have variously contributed to analysing the sexual anxiety that the British women faced in the colonies. The aim of my research is to read British women’s writings (both fictional and non-fictional) from 1800 to 1919 to trace and interrogate the problems that led the white women of the Raj into a crisis of sexual anxiety, resulting in deep racial hatred and making it impossible for them to accede to the feminist ideology of colonial sisterhood. I will be examining the transition of these women’s writings from a stance and rhetoric of maternal imperialism to one of blatant racism in order to show how ideologies of race and gender are both implicated in altering patterns of colonial domination. I focus upon these women’s writings across genres – thus including novels, letters, memoirs, journals, travelogues and guide-books – to show how their representation of the sexualities of colonized men and women change over time (such as, before and after the mutiny of 1857), as well as differ from genre to genre. As Mikhail Bakhtin has argued, the novel has dialogic capacities which enable it to make room for a wider range of voices. The novels written by British women on India exemplify this polyglossia whereas the personal memoirs or diaries are much more cautious to maintain their authors’ individual identities. But though the form of the novel allowed them greater freedom to articulate different ideologies and anxieties about themselves, it is curious that very few novels were written by visiting Englishwomen before the 1890s.

My study has revealed that sexual anxiety in British women, as depicted in British women’s writings, could originate from three situations: (a) when they perceived that British men were interested in native women and kept sexual contact with them either as mistresses
or as wives and realised that the British women had been sent to the colonies as their feeble substitutes; (b) when they themselves felt a secret attraction towards men of the colonized races and were confronted with the competitive hostility of native women; (c) when they felt threatened by the barbaric male of the colonized race. Though the last case has been analysed at length by scholars like Jenny Sharpe and Nancy Paxton, the first two have been rather neglected.

The first and foremost theme of my thesis is the problem of sexual contact between the colonizer and the colonized and its far-reaching impact on the power relationships between a) the men and women of the colonizing race and b) the male colonizers and the colonized. Ronald Hyam has shown in *Empire and Sexuality* that a sexual dynamics operated throughout the framework of the British Empire. The colonies were sites of unfettered sexual opportunity, where masculine self-indulgence could be given free vent. British men often formed homosexual and heterosexual relationships with Indian natives, both male and female, by exploiting their position as members of the ruling race. But by narrating this history of sexual relations only from the male perspective Hyam has neglected the women’s part in the story. British women’s sexual anxiety in India arose not only from the fact that they were encouraged to see themselves as sexually vulnerable but also from the crises they faced within their own family spaces. When they found their men in sexual relationships with colonized people, it gave them an acute feeling of powerlessness. The sensualities of Indian men and women in their nakedness, as well as the acceptance of prostitutes as a cultural facet of life in India, profoundly disturbed British women – and this in turn heightened their feeling of animosity towards the natives. My reading is that the pronounced racial hatred of white women towards natives was the result of an insecurity which arose from sexual anxiety.
British ladies in India were often kept confined to their domestic spaces, like native women, because the public space was viewed as a site susceptible to sexual attack. But the relation between public and private spaces in colonial India was very complex. The home could not be seen as a ‘private space’ in the way that it was still seen in Victorian England or in traditional Indian culture. In the colony, private life always had to be lived as if in public. Every move of the colonizer was closely scrutinized by the colonized people, as if colonial superiority had to be on constant display. This situation was often unbearable to the white lady as she could not live a life of her own choice but had to perpetually play the role of a cultural superior before natives of all classes. The Europeans’ sex scandals, on the other hand, were a constant threat to their supposed superiority. The onus to maintain respectability through an Englishwoman’s proverbial claim to sexual modesty was heavier upon the ladies than on the British gentlemen. In F. A. Steel’s novel *On the Face of the Waters*, for example, a British lady who flirted with other European men was mimicked by a native man in a fairground *tamasha* – which infuriated her. Examples like this abound in women’s writings of this period, showing clearly how white women were burdened with the overwhelming responsibility of assuming the mantle of colonial superiority.

In literary writings about India by women writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the contact zone between natives and colonial women was represented as a problematic arena where different cultures met and clashed. Novels, short stories, letters and travelogues are full of representations of this contact zone as a space of barbarism, mutual incomprehension, mystery and conflict. The most prominent form of contact, I think, is the sexual contact which needs a detailed research – not undertaken so far by scholars in this field. Sexual contact took place in many forms. The white man’s attraction towards an Indian woman was very common – as represented in the story ‘Sunia’ by Maud Diver, in Flora Annie Steel’s *On the Face of the Waters*, Fanny Parks’ journal etc. British women writers
like Emma Roberts, Emily Eden and others were all very critical about the ‘nautch’ girls or performing prostitutes of India. Their explicit sensuousness disturbed the British women as they felt that these ‘nautch’ girls might charm away their men. A sexual competition for male attention and ensuing dissatisfaction are implicit in this general abhorrence for the performing women. Such dissatisfaction is discernible, for example, in Fanny Parks’ description of Indian women’s nakedness or their abominable dress-sense. Parks was a regular visitor in the native *zenana* where European men were not permitted to enter. Her descriptions of aristocratic Indian ladies are marked with a double approach. On the one hand she is attracted to the incomparable beauty of these Indian ladies like any European man (and it has been suggested that it resembles a voyeuristic and erotic gaze\(^69\)); on the other hand Parks cannot suppress her anxiety when she does begin to compare the ladies of India and Europe.

Another serious case is the threat of forced sexual contact, particularly in the stereotypical image of an indigenous male who sexually abuses a white lady. After the cataclysmic event of the revolt of 1857, the fear of rape is even more prominent than the threat to life in the ‘mutiny novels’ written by women like Flora Annie Steel. White women play a central role in the majority of these novels – generally as victims of sexual violence. Even a vicereine like Lady Curzon is not exempt from these fears of sexual contact, as her letters show. In her letter to her father dated 13\(^{th}\) February, 1899 she writes,

> And I think there is no one on our staff who will be a matrimonial danger and I won’t allow any flirtations as here I am a kind of Queen of Seringapatam and can’t have flirtations in my court! George and I are so bottled up that we can never go to any private house to an entertainment but *whenever* the girls go to a dance I will have them chaperoned by Mrs. Dawkins, or Lady Young, the wife of the Lt.-Gov. of the Punjab, so they will always be in good hands.\(^70\)


But in Lady Curzon’s letter of 1st February, 1899, we find the following passage:

We drove out to bodyguard lines at 4.45, Colonel Sandbach and Captain Adam with us, and for the first time Ali Khan, the Afghan who went with George to Kabul, and whom George sent for to come and act as Orderly to the Viceroy, rode beside the carriage. He is a captain in the Guides Cavalry and a good stout specimen to look at and he bumps along beside the barouche with his sword drawn and adds picturesqueness to the cortège.  

She finds Ali Khan as a ‘good stout specimen to look at,’ which suggests a latent sexual attraction to Indian men. In her letter to her father on 16th February, 1899, Lady Curzon again writes,

In driving home by the river I was much astonished to see a fat Native without clothes driving in a landau with both windows closed: his brown skin glistened through the panes of glass and I can’t conceive what possessed him to go driving in this state.

Even from a moving carriage she can see through the glass panes of another landau a naked native with glistening brown skin! What is this if not a kind of voyeurism? Such sexual attraction or covert sexual curiosity is often expressed in scarcely veiled terms in white women’s writings, while a rhetoric of racial hatred usually follows the repression of such feelings. These unacceptable feelings of British women’s own attraction towards the dark native, along with their anxiety about white men’s sexual preference for native women, put into question their own sexual constancy in the eyes of British men. This further enhanced the British women’s resentment which was displaced on to the natives and reinforced their representation as a barbaric race.

Writing on John Barrow’s An Account of Travels into the Interiors of Southern Africa in the Years 1797 and 1798 on the submission of the !Kung, Mary Louis Pratt comments in her book Imperial Eyes: Travel writing and Transculturation that ‘By the end of the eighteenth century the !Kung had ceased to be a serious threat and had acquired the status of

71 Ibid, 30.
72 Ibid, 32.
73 !Kung were the bushmen community, the ancient inhabitants of South Africa.
a conquered people. In European writings, they began to appear not as vicious savages but in a new sentimental stereotype, as benign, ingenuous, childlike victims. An application, to the Indian context, of stereotyping of colonial representation as Mary Louis Pratt refers to would make it clear that the representation of the Indian men as barbaric rapists was conducive to the imperial propaganda in the post-1857 era.

I, therefore, propose to look into British women’s writings from 1800 to 1919 in order to trace the changes in the representation of sexual anxiety in these works, and show how it is not homogeneous with the male discourse of imperialism. To observe this changing pattern of sexual anxiety in their writings I intend to analyse them through three time frames—from 1800 to 1857, from 1857 to 1890 and from 1890 to 1919. Though some of the British women who came to India before 1800, also wrote on their experiences in India [Jemima Kindersley’s letters (1777), Eliza Fay’s letters (written between 1789 to 1815 and published in 1817), Phebe Gibbs’ last novel named Hartley House, Calcutta, published anonymously in 1798, which was based on India], but sexual anxiety as a discourse is not foregrounded in their works. I have occasionally cited Fay’s letters for contextual reference but otherwise I have not looked into these texts.

I have taken the year 1800 as the starting point of my research because the initiation of British women as wives in India commences more or less at the turn of the century. Governor General Cornwallis’s administrative reforms began to take effect from the year 1790 – widening the social gulf between the British and the native Indians. Interracial marriage between British men and Indian women was actively discouraged when the child of mixed parentage was prohibited from holding any civil or military office with the company from the year 1791. Mixed-breed employees were discharged in large numbers in 1795 and

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none were left in the British army by 1808. These laws and the accelerated invasion of India by protestant and evangelical missionaries contributed to a tightening of moral supervision of British society in India at the turn of the nineteenth century. Cornwallis disapproved of open consorting with Indian concubines, and expressly founded the Fort William College in 1800 as an antidote to the lascivious temptation of Indian life. British wives of Englishmen were sent to the colonies for the purpose of keeping their men away from the charm of the native beauties and this practice continued well into the twentieth century.

It is easy to see that 1857 was a landmark year that saw the beginning of a shift in the discourse of British women’s sexual anxiety about Indians – both men and women. Instead of merely offering incentives for marrying European women, the government after the Mutiny of 1857 openly resorted to an ideology of encouraging the presence of British women in India in the hope that it would help to build up an imperial identity that was becoming ever more necessary to maintain the superiority of the ruling race. Domesticating the empire to provide ‘legitimate’ and ‘natural homes’ for colonists depended not only on masculinist discourses of imperial energy and adventure but also on more feminized discourses of domesticity. Domestic life was expected to be lived in the colonies as a public example and the image of the white woman as a sacrosanct figure was central to this project.

I consider the year 1890 as yet another break in the discourse of sexual anxiety as it heralded a string of novels written on colonial life in India. This was the period of British high imperialism and the shift in the discourse of sexual anxiety in fictional and non-fictional writings of this period can be largely attributed to the ideological complexities of high imperialism. A change of tone is also perceptible in the non-fictional accounts of colonial life in this period. I chose the year 1919 as a convenient point to end my reading of sexual

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76 David Brown, for example, of the ‘Famous Five Chaplains’ was appointed in Calcutta in 1786.
anxiety in British women’s writings in this thesis as this year marks another watershed in altering the trend of Indo-British relationship in India. The Gandhian movement of anti-colonial resistance begins from this year and the Indian Independence movement subsequently takes a broader shape which changes the memsahib’s outlook towards Indian men and women. Just as a significant shift in the attitudes of the British women towards Indians can be traced in the writings after the mutiny of 1857, so the year 1919, which saw the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, heralded a crucial change in the dominant concerns of British women writing on India.

The British women writers writing after 1919 were concerned to write about the political violence and their personal bravery. The representation of sexual anxiety is not the main focus of their writings any more. Rather, they represent the political situation of India. Writers like Maud Diver who in her earlier novel *Lilamani* was concerned with the problems of interracial marriage, changes her focus to Gandhian conservatism and the hypocrisy of the nationalist leaders in her novel *Far to Seek* and *Singer Passes*. Later day non fictional writings are also replete with images of the political situations of India rather than personal visits and confrontation with Indian ladies. In their autobiographical narratives of ordinary, everyday occurrences, they discerned a political conflict between themselves and the nationalists, and they interpreted their purported triumphs in these personal encounters as affirmations of the continuing dominance of British imperialism. Beatrix Scott recalled that when she and her husband, an officer in the Indian Civil Service, encountered a nationalist demonstration of ‘hysterical’ youths, ‘We were just going to our baths, and we paid it the compliment of not disrobing ourselves till it was over’\(^77\). According to Barbara Donaldson, the sight of her young son toddling up the driveway with a toy gun on his shoulder was

enough to defuse one ‘Quit India’ demonstration, while Viola Bayley recalled that her Australian terrier ‘took exception to an open air meeting of Gandhi’s and joyfully scattered disciples to left and right with playful nips’.

The growing Indianization of official administration and the rise of Gandhi in the Indian National Congress leading to an intensification of the nationalist movement put British governance of India in a challenge that it had never faced before. In this context, the questions of mixed race marriage and sexual jealousy started to lose currency. In 1925, the Lee Commission decreed that military and civilian officials were entitled to four first class return passages between India and Britain during their career, which enabled the British officers to travel more frequently between the two countries and significantly changed the model of imperial domesticity in India. As we move through the writings of the first decade of twentieth century, we can, of course, identify the changes that were coming. Not only does the literary style of British women writers change from the personal and intimate to the impersonal and objective, but racial and cultural attitudes also undergo a significant change.

I have confined my study to the writings of British women who visited India to make my argument pertinent to the analysis of relationships of direct colonial domination. I have refrained from arguing that sexual anxiety in British women’s writings fits neatly into the paradigm of Orientalism as proposed by Edward Said – where the entirety of colonial discourse has the effect of distorting the feminine image of the silenced Orient – because the purpose of my thesis is to show the disparity of power in colonial relationships of British men and women in their day to day contact with native Indians. Though the general term memsahib applies to all white women living in the colony during the British rule (like

78 Mary Procida, “The Greater Part of My Life Has Been Spent in India”: Autobiography and the Crisis of Empire in the Twentieth Century”, 141.
American missionaries or Eurasian settlers), in my discussion I have used it for the specific purpose of denoting only the British women who engaged with colonial men in familial and domestic relationships. Nor have I included the writings of British women missionaries in my study as it would require a range too broad to be encompassed in my argument. I have also excluded the writings of the British women like Sydney Owenson or Barbara Hoole who never came to India as it seems to me that without directly communicating with Indian men and women they would not have had sufficient scope of encountering the phenomenon of sexual anxiety. The narratives of women travellers or residents in the colony authenticated by their first hand experience of local culture would be substantially different from the accounts of women colonizers in their native land. As Sara Mills observes:

"...British women’s travel writing in colonized countries, together with the accounts of British women in outpost situations, by their very presence alone in the public sphere destabilise notions of a clear female-private/male-public sphere divide."

I have argued along similar lines that the sexual anxiety which is the basic focus of my thesis is most visible in the writings of colonial wives who came to India, stayed in India and made direct communications with Indian men and women. The writings of such women constitute my primary source-material because the positions of these women authors in the imperial order were usually determined by their relationship with their husbands. Anne McClintock speaks of these women’s ‘ambiguous complicity’ in colonial culture in the following terms:

"Barred from the corridors of formal power, they experienced the privileges and social contradictions of imperialism very differently from colonial men. Whether they were shipped out as convicts or constricted into sexual and domestic servitude; whether they served discreetly at the elbow of power as colonial officers’ wives, upholding the boundaries of empire and bearing its sons and daughters; whether they ran missionary schools or hospital wards in remote outposts or worked their husbands’ shops and farms, colonial"

women made none of the direct economic or military decisions of empire and very few reaped its vast profits. Marital laws, property laws, land laws and the intractable violence of male decree bound them in gendered patterns of disadvantage and frustrations. The vast, fissured architecture of imperialism was gendered throughout by the fact that it was white men who made and enforced laws and policies in their own interests. In one or two cases, however, I have made an exception – as when I refer to the writings of memsahibs like Vivian Cory who remained single and did not conform to the status of ‘incorporated wives.’ Though they were unmarried they do reflect upon the status of colonial wifehood in their writings.

The empire is a hegemonic process which, though it always seeks dominance in various areas of lived experience, is never total or exclusive. There are instances of failure also. The instabilities and vulnerabilities of colonial regimes, the internal conflicts among rulers and their anxieties to maintain their racial and cultural superiority are the arenas which, as a student of postcolonial theory, I find interesting. My focus is on the interconnections between race and sex—how in the colonial enterprise white women’s sexual anxiety develops into an entrenched racial hatred. It is at this crossroads of colonial discourse theory and feminist theory of gender and sexuality that I wish to position my study of the white women writers’ works. Rather than concentrating on individual writers, the chapters of my thesis have been arranged thematically to segregate various kinds of relationships that underlie the complexities of interaction between white men, white women, brown men and brown women.

Western feminism has been criticized for participating in the Orientalist discourse of representing the social practices of other races as backward and barbarous, from which the women of black and brown races needed to be rescued by their white sisters. In doing so, it failed to locate the particular needs of third world women. Black feminists like bell hooks,

following Alice Walker’s theory of womanism, have discussed how the racial differences between black women and white women actually pose a barrier to the solidarity of women across the racial divide. Historically, many black women experienced white women’s feminism as an exercise of power over women of colour, often in a manner far more brutal and dehumanizing than the domination of white racist men. hooks writes:

Racist socialization teaches bourgeois white women to think they are necessarily more capable of leading masses of women than other group of women. Time and time again, they have shown that they do not want to be part of the feminist movement—they want to lead it.  

That white western feminists have failed to hear the voices of coloured women is corroborated by postcolonial feminist theorists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who have drawn similar conclusions about their failure to represent the cause of colonized women. Spivak, for example, argues that a first-world feminist is often mistaken in considering that her gender authorizes her to speak for third-world women as her geopolitical location itself is a barrier to understanding or attempting to rescue the voices of ‘subaltern’ women.

Feminists invoke a vision of ‘sisterhood’ among women irrespective of their race and class based on the ground of ‘common oppression’. But such a call of solidarity cloaks and neglects the true complexities of women’s social reality across the world. Women are divided by their racism, sexism, class privilege, and a host of other prejudices. Sustained woman-to-woman bonding can occur only when these divisions are confronted and necessary steps are taken to eliminate them. Divisions will not be eliminated by wishful thinking or romantic

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reverie about common oppression, despite the value of highlighting the experiences that all women share. Third world feminists and black feminists who raise their voice against this false bid for solidarity even think that unity among women is impossible to achieve within a racist and imperialist power structure. The call for sisterhood was often seen as an emotional appeal masking the opportunism of manipulative bourgeois women. It was seen a cover-up to hide the fact that many women were exploited and oppressed by other women.

The vision of ‘sisterhood’ based on the common cause of removing patriarchal oppression that was invoked by western feminism in the nineteenth century neglected the varied and complex reality of women’s situation in different societies. Thus even when sympathetic British women were adopting benevolent positions towards their black and Asian sisters in the colonies, they were unable to see themselves as potential oppressors. Laura Donaldson opines in this respect that

A predominantly white middle-class feminism exhibits not an overt racism that conjures active dominance and enforced segregation but a more subtle “white solipsism” that passively colluded with a racist culture.\(^86\)

A cursory reading of the narratives of colonial women shows that they perceived the orient from the same standpoint that informs patriarchal colonialist narratives. But it will be of critical importance in my research to find out whether the female gaze on colonized women differed from the male gaze. The reach of colonial women writers was mainly confined within the walls of domesticity, but they also had the chance to encounter and interact with native women from a closer vantage point. The experience necessary for a realistic depiction of the problems of colonized women’s life was available to them. Yet their writings follow the same pattern of representing colonized women in a depraved image to establish the superiority of European men and women and thus subscribe to the dominant discourse of the

\(^{86}\) Laura Donaldson, *Decolonising Feminisms: Race, Gender and Empire-Building* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.
male, white, European patriarchy. Referring to Victorian colonial women who depicted the Orient in patriarchal terms in their travelogues, Rana Kabbani⁸⁷ argues that these women were only token travellers, forced by various pressures to articulate the values of patriarchy. What needs to be looked at in greater depth is how notions of gender were bound up with hegemonic ideologies, and how women were both instrument of and complicit with the politics of imperialism.

To understand the gender inequalities implicit in the structure of colonial racism and imperial authority we need to look at Said’s Orientalism. In Edward Said's analysis of Orientalist discourse, the sexual submission and possession of Oriental women by European men ‘stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West’⁸⁸. In this essentially ‘male power-fantasy,’ the Orient is penetrated, silenced and possessed.⁸⁹ In popular Orientalist stereotypes the oriental female is represented as exotic and sexually promiscuous. In western works of art during the colonial period, for example, she was often depicted nude or partially-clothed and presented as a seductive creature of sexual pleasure, who holds the key to a myriad of mysterious erotic delights. Said argues that not only oriental women but the East as a whole is feminized by western writers – deemed passive, submissive, exotic, luxurious, sexually mysterious and tempting; while the west is represented as masculine—active, dominant, heroic, rational, self controlled and ascetic. This trope makes way for a specifically sexual vocabulary for east-west encounters, where the orient is penetrated by the western traveller whose passions it arouses. Gradually the orient is possessed, ravished, embraced and ultimately domesticated by the masculine colonizer. Thus, from the beginning to the end of the colonial period, female bodies symbolize the conquered land. The oriental male is portrayed as effeminate, homosexual or a lusty villain from whom the virile and

⁸⁹ Ibid, 207
courteous European man rescues the native or European woman. Such images of heroic rescue are abundant in writings after the revolt of 1857, when a very common picture in popular discourses is that of native mutineers assaulting the chastity of the helpless white woman and the heroic white man saving her from disgrace. The barbarity of native men towards native women was also presented as a justification for imperial rule and colonial policies were decided on the principle that Gayatri Spivak eloquently describes as: ‘white men...saving brown women from brown men’.

According to Said, this is in part attributable to the masculinist thrust of the discourse of Orientalism. He observes that in Orientalist writings, ‘women are usually the creatures of a male power fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing.’ But Said is silent about the women writers who wrote about the Orient. Women’s apparent absence as producers of Orientalist discourse is never questioned by Said; neither does he discuss the absence of women as agents within colonial power structures. Said’s silence mirrors the traditional view that women were not involved in colonial expansion, but critics like Sara Mills have argued that many women travelled to the colonies and made their own observations which certainly differ from the male viewpoint. It is necessary to reinstate women as agents of colonial expansion as they were not mere spectators located outside the historical and material conditions of the empire. Rather, they colluded with the exploitative structures of power. Occluding the role of women in imperial discourse formation therefore reinforces the masculinist historiography that marginalizes women.

91 Said, Orientalism, 207.
Said’s contention is that the Orient as it is constructed in western texts does not depict the reality of the East; it is made up of a series of images that tell us more about the occident. On a similar vein, European discourses of sexual difference construct woman as an object of knowledge (the other within) and the radical other of man. This does not reveal any truth about women, but simply reconfirms the superior status of men. Western women are also represented as the symbolic inferior in their own society. The question which then arises is that how can a Western woman, who is herself represented as the symbolic other at home, exercise the classificatory gaze over the orient that Said describes. What access does a white European woman have to the enunciative position of a white racial superiority that is implicitly male? Sara Mills points out that this tension between the discourses of colonialism and the discourses of gender has made women’s position special in relation to Orientalism. Colonial women have written under two power systems. First, the power of patriarchy which acts upon them insofar as they are middle class married women and second, the power of colonial rule which operates upon them in their relations with the colonized people. These writers therefore occupy a dominant position due to colonialism, but a subordinate place in patriarchy. Because of these discursive pressures, their work exhibits contradictory elements. If we analyze their travelogues and other writings we can detect the traces of their co-optation into the male colonizer’s discourse. But though they often seem to echo the male colonizer’s voice, they are also disempowered by their ‘subordinate’ position and indeed, we find that the anxieties of colonial womanhood are voiced through their works. Their simultaneous assertion of colonial power and their sense of being trapped within certain codes of gendered behaviour have problematized their position. Neither wholly colonialist, nor entirely innocent of racism, the Raj women’s writings are a fascinating study in their suggestive contradictions.

I intend to explore the complex subject position of the Raj women also with reference to Foucault’s model of micro-power in the nineteenth century, which was constructing
sexuality as both an object and an instrument. The white women’s discourse of sexual anxiety actually enables them to narrativize their experience in a way which is not homogenous with the imperialist discourses of mastery and subjugation. According to Michel Foucault,

Power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations…power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations.\(^{93}\)

Foucault asserts that power is a net like organization—‘it is everywhere not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere.’ Power is not possessed by a dominant agent, nor located in that agent’s relations to those dominated, but is instead distributed throughout complex social networks. In Foucault’s theory, knowledge is produced by power. The Raj women’s position in a network of dissemination of knowledge about the Orient can also be analyzed from this model. Again, according to Foucault, sexuality is an instrument of power not only for the control of bodies, but for producing authoritative knowledge about them. Thus in the colonies also, control of sexuality produced racial distinctions and clarified the notions of ‘whiteness’ as a mark of racial superiority. Ann Stoler\(^ {94}\) thinks that sexuality illustrates the iconography of rule, not its pragmatics; sexual asymmetries are tropes to depict other centres of power. The linkage between sexual control and racial tensions is both obvious and elusive at the same time. While sexual fear may at base be a racial anxiety, we are still left to understand why it is through sexuality that such anxieties are expressed.

Fanon’s schema of sexual difference will also be helpful in reading the representation of racial difference in white women’s writings. To Fanon, the positions of women and colonized subjects are the same in some ways. Both are defined as they are watched by others


and the objectification of Blacks parallels the objectification of women as they are both gazed upon. While the black man’s desire for white women is contextualized and historicized by Fanon, the white woman’s fantasy of being raped by a black man is understood by him as ‘in some way the fulfilment of a private dream, of an inner wish’. Fanon does not use the analogies of race and sex to reconfigure notions of female subjectivity in colonial relations, but his work helps us to understand how ‘race’ and ‘colonial difference’ are both produced and split by gender differences. In my thesis I intend to look at how the narratives of British women writers work as an instrument of power as they follow the colonial discourse of exhibiting the natives as backward and barbaric. But my objective will be to explore how the colonial women writers’ knowing and seeing were determined through large-scale discursive constructs which also prompted them to produce the reality of British women’s sexual anxiety in their writings as part of an imperialist politics of control.

In Chapter 1, I read British women’s writings for signs of their anxious reception of the Indian courtesans or nautch girls. I have divided the chapter into three parts covering three time frames, to analyse the changing perspective of the memsahibs on Indian courtesans. Chapter 2 is dedicated to analysing the British women’s take on interracial marriages between the British and the Indians, as it changes through the years. In chapter 3 I focus on the Indian purdah system as it is represented by British women writers. Again my object of study is to trace the changes in their representations through the three time frames. If the courtesans are seen by the memsahibs as sexually threatening because they publicly use their charms upon men and white women are urged to have fascination towards their art of seductive charm, the mixed race marriage is even more dangerous to the empire itself. In the case of mixed race love or marriage not only are the white men charmed by the Indian ladies, but the white women are also drawn towards Indian men. The difference between the two cases is also another

interesting point to study. I have chosen to study the memsahibs’ representations of zenana women as it also offers a direct comparison between the Indian woman and the British lady by bringing the anxiety that permeates such comparisons to the fore.