Along with male travellers there have been adventurous women of English origin who journeyed among the Arabs, lived and conversed with them in order to know their mores and manners or way of life. Among such travellers Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell (1868-1926) occupies a very prominent place. She was the beloved daughter of a rich industrialist, Hugh Bell. Hugh spent his personal fortunes rather lavishly to help his daughter become a scholar, historian, archaeologist, explorer, gardener and mountaineer. Although a historian by formal education Gertrude seems to have a special aptitude for learning various languages. 'She was', writes a biographer of her, 'fluent in English, French and German, and in addition she could speak and write Arabic and Persian, was passably proficient at Turkish and could hold a tolerable conversation in most part of India, and in China and Japan'. (1) She began to learn most of these languages at home but proficiency was acquired only through travels in the countries where they were spoken. It is hard to say if she travelled across the

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1. Winstone, H.V.r., Gertrude Bell, London, 1978, p. 90. Gertrude learned Arabic with some difficulty. She might have been able to speak and write as Winstone has claimed. However, her Arabic accent, according to Ameen Rihani who met her in Bagdad in 1922, was very bad. 'She speaks Arabic,' wrote Rihani, 'almost without an accent, often mixing it with her English, and emphasising it with a dogmatic though graceful gesture' (Rihani, Ameen, Ibn Sa'ood, London, 1928, P. 6.)
globe with the sole purpose of learning foreign languages. However, there is no denying the fact that she was a travel enthusiast and fortunately had all the means required for such an indulgence at her disposal.

**Contact with Turkey** Gertrude was merely twenty years old when in December 1888 she embarked upon a tour to see Europe. Travelling across the continent she reached Constantinople in May 1889. It was in this city where she first came into contact with the believers of the Islamic faith and witnessed the Byzantine as well as the Islamic splendidors which later on became her life-long obsession. Her feelings were mixed and impression muted. 'The people' she wrote in one of her letters, 'are so fearfully sophisticated, they address you in very bad English, and in order to gain your confidence assure you that they recognize you perfectly and remember having seen often in Glasgow or Liverpool or some other place you have never been to'.

Gertrude, however, did not pass as other travellers of the period usually did, any derogatory or favourable remarks on the religion and politics of the Turks. The reason was probably her liberal outlook that had freed her from Christian bigotry. Or perhaps it was because of the fact...

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1. Quoted in Winstone, Gertrude Bell, op. cit. P. 25.
that by the time she visited Constantinople she was merely a young and passionate traveller, more concerned with sight-seeing than having any interest in religious and political affairs.

Visit to Iran  In 1892 Gertrude found an opportunity to see another Muslim country, Iran which seems to have fascinated her very much. The letters she wrote from various cities in Iran to friends and relatives in England contain vivid pictures of Iranian life and society. She was fascinated by the veils of women, the flowing robes that men wore and the street beggars who wore their rags with a better grace than I my most becoming habit. The Iranian landscape—luxuriant vegetation caused by the water of flowing springs, rose gardens and corn-fields—also made a profound impact on her youthful imagination. 'It is refreshing,' she wrote, 'to the spirit to lie in a hammock strung between the plane trees of Persian garden and read the poems of Haft."

But even more fascinating was the barren desert. 'Oh the desert round Tehran, miles and miles of it with nothing growing, ringed in with bleak bare mountains snow crowned and furrowed with the deep courses of torrents. I never knew what desert was till I came here, it is very wonderful thing to see.'

2. Ibid. p. 27.
it becomes more wonderful and extremely pleasant when in its midst one meets a stranger who proves himself to be a magnanimous and well-mannered host. Gertrude had many such experiences and was moved to write: We have no hospitality in the west and no manners. In sum the charm of the East worked upon her so much that she felt herself a changed personality:

Are we the same people I wonder
When all our surroundings, acquaintances are changed? Here that which is me, which womanlike is an empty jar that the passer by fills at pleasure, is filled with such wine as in England I had never heard of.

Safar Nameh

Before coming over to Iran Gertrude had some knowledge of Persian language. The visit gave her an opportunity to brush it up. She hired an amiable gentleman who inspite of his weak French, the medium of instruction, tutored her so competently that she was soon able to speak and write in Persian.

The immediate result of Gertrude's journey to Iran was a travel book, Safar Nameh: Persian Pictures that

1. Ibido.
she anonymously published in 1694. Although the book was favourably reviewed it failed to win universal acclaim, even though it had enormous charm. 'Charm, but not actual achievement,' (1) commented her friend Janet Hogarth, the sister of famous archaeologist Dr. W.G. Hogarth.

_Divan of Hafiz_ three years later she produced a verse translation of some poems from the _Divan_ of the famous Persian poet, Hafiz Shirazi. The work was well received and deservedly regarded as her first and foremost literary achievement. The introductory essay that mainly deals with the life and works of Hafiz who has been compared with his contemporary Dante, speaks of Gertrude's wide reading and her critical skill and vision. Her translation, especially when viewed in the light of the fact that she had begun to learn Persian just three years ago, was marvellous. Years later in 1947 Gertrude's brilliance as a translator was recognized by the distinguished oriental scholar A.J. Arberry in the following words: 'Though some twenty hands have put Hafiz into English, her rendering remains the best.' (2)

**Arabic Language and the Trips**

It was a practice with Gertrude to try to learn the language of a country she intended to visit thoroughly. It was in this perspective that she began to take lessons in Arabic before embarking upon a journey to the Nile East.

2. Ibid.
However, unlike Persian, she found Arabic difficult to learn, especially its pronunciation. After arduous labour she was somewhat able to write and speak the language though without any accent.

Gertrude first saw the Arab world in 1899 when she visited Jerusalem. From this year onward she spent most of her life in the Arab world. She travelled widely in Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia and central Arabia from time to time. In such journeys she met people from all walks of life and attained enormous knowledge about the history of tribes, their relations with the Ottomans, inter-tribal relations, the sect of the Druzes socio-religious conditions and the Ottoman administration etcetera.

For a shrewd traveller journeys always prove to be keys to invaluable treasure of knowledge. Gertrude herself writes:

To those bred under an elaborate social order few such moments of exhilaration can come as that which stands at the threshold of wild travel. The gates of the enclosed garden are thrown open, the chain at the entrance of the sanctuary is lowered, with a wary glance to right and left you step forth and behold the immeasurable world. (1)

This 'immeasurable world,' as can be imagined, is inhabited by people with their own socio-political order, cultural traditions and religious beliefs. Gertrude saw all these during her journeys among the Arabs and described her experiences in her two travelogues, the Desert and the Sown and Amurath to Amurath. Besides the two books her letters also contain a great deal of information about the Arabs and their rulers, the Turks.

Gertrude has recorded many a witty conversation with both ordinary and notable Arabs which provide opportunities to look through the minds of the Arabs. For instance at the end of her Syrian journey, her cook, Mikhail, in a moving conversation gives her a piece of Arab wisdom. 'Listen, oh lady', said the cook, 'and I will make it clear to you. Men are short of vision, and they see but that for which they look. Some look for evil and they find evil, some look for good and it is good that they find, and moreover some are fortunate and these find always what they want' (1). Mikhail's philosophy seems to be true to a great extent. For most of the English travellers encountered the East with pre-conceived notions and as a result found only what they had intended to attain. Even Gertrude, who was neither missionary minded nor an ardent imperialist (at least before the

1. Ibid. P. 340.
First World War), was not an exception. As a result she saw the Arabs like many of her countrymen, though she differed from them in certain matters.

Gertrude found both merits and demerits in the Arabs. 'The Oriental,' according to her, 'is like a very old child. He is unacquainted with many branches of knowledge which we have come to regard as of elementary necessity, frequently, but not always, his mind is little pre-occupied with the need of acquiring them, and he concerns himself scarcely at all with what we call practical utility. He is not practical, in our acceptance of the word, anymore than a child is practical.' Moreover, the acts of Arab people are guided by traditions of conduct and morality which are as old as human civilization and have remained so in all ages without having undergone any drastic change. Apart from these two shortcomings the Arab, according to Gertrude, is like European races and it is not impossible for foreigners to win his friendship and sympathy. In many respects Gertrude found the Arab better than Europeans. For instance his manners and habits are not fettered by artificiality. Moreover, he is more tolerant than the dwellers in Europe mainly because he lives in a society of diverse elements. There is no denying the fact that the Arab society was still tribal and in many regions they are divided on sectarian

1. Ibid (Preface) P. 1
lines. Many tribes, and sometimes even sects, are at loggerheads with each other. However, despite these drawbacks the Arabs, according to Gertrude, are basically a law-abiding race, they follow their own law and like other people to behave as their law and traditions permit them.

Her Impression of Islam  Gertrude seems especially impressed by the religion of Islam. Once, when she was in Damascus, she went to see the city's Grand Mosque where 'men of all kinds, from the learned doctor of Damascus down to the raggedest camel driver' (1) were standing in prayer. 'Allah, he (the Imam) cried, and the Faithful fell with a single movement upon their faces and remained for a full minute in silent adoration, till the high chant of the Imam began again....Allah, And as the name of God echoed through the great colonnades,... the listeners prostrated themselves again, and for a moment all the church (mosque) was silent.' (2) Highly impressed by the scene Gertrude was constrained to declare that 'Islam is the great republic of the world, there is neither class nor race inside the creed.' (3)

The Turks  By the time, that is, the first decade of the running century, Gertrude visited the Arab world the Turks

1. Bell, Lady, The Letter of Gertrude Bell op.cit. p.198
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
were in control of the land. The Ottoman Empire was big but weak and hollow. Yet for military and political reasons its integrity was important for Britain and that is why they wanted to maintain friendly relations with the Turks. This British policy and desire is naturally reflected in the writings of the period. Most travellers who went to the Middle East in the early years of the present century have advocated even eulogized the Turks despite their numerous weaknesses. On the other hand, the Arabs especially those who aspired for national freedom have been degraded and portrayed as a people unfit for self-rule. For instance Sir Mark Sykes, before turning against Turkey after her entry in the First World War, was an ardent admirer of the Turks and wrote passionately of the achievements of the Ottoman Caliphs. On the contrary his attitude towards the Arabs was very harsh. He degraded them to the level of animals and wrote of them in such a contemptuous language that is hard to be equalled. For instance he describes the Arabs of the Shammar tribe as ‘a rapacious, greedy, ill-mannered set of brutes....These animals are, unluckily, pure Badawin, and have not been tinctured with either Turkish or Kurdish blood, which always has a softening and civilizing effect on these desert tramps’. (1)  

1. Quoted in Winstone, Gertrude Bell, op. cit. P. 111.
Gertrude who was not as much biased or politically committed as was Mark Sykes and rather went to the Arab world without predilections has also admired the Turks, especially before they allied themselves with Germany in the Great War. Besides being impressed by the common Turks, especially the peasants who know 'how to lay down rules of conduct and how to obey them' (1) she seems to have a special word of praise for the polite Turkish officers in the Arab World who are always more than ready to help the travellers who possess proper certificates. They behave properly and bear no ill will even when the travellers provoke them by defying the Turkish law. (2) She even claimed that the best officers in the renowned British administration in Egypt were Turks who 'brought to bear under the new regime the good sense and the natural instinct for government for which they had not much scope under the old' (3) Turkish rule. It was only 'in the upper grades,' wrote Gertrude, 'that the Ottoman Empire' was weak and defective. And the upper grades were 'filled with Greeks, Armenians, Syrians, and personages of various nationalities generally esteemed in the East (and not without reason untrustworthy)' (4).

1. Bell, Gertrude, The Desert and the Sown, op. cit. P. 140. See
2. Ibid. P. 86.
3. Ibid. P. 140.
4. Ibid.
But politeness, patience and other qualities of the Turks apart her travels in Arabia enabled her to become fully aware of the weaknesses of the Turkish government. Indeed the Ottoman administration was so weak that it prompted Gertrude to prophesy that their Empire would disintegrate in the course of next ten years.\(^1\)

Compared with her view of the Turks Gertrude's attitude towards the Arab nationalists who wanted to throw off the yoke of the Turkish rule and push them out of Arabia was highly critical, even inimical. 'Of what value are,' she wrote, 'the Pan-Arabic associations and inflammatory leaflets that they issue from foreign printing presses? The answer is easy. They are worth nothing at all. There is no nation of Arabs, the Syrian merchant is separated by a wider gulf from the Bedouin than he is from the Osmanli, the Syrian country is inhabited by Arabic speaking races all eager to be at each other's throats, and only prevented from fulfilling their natural desires by the ragged half-fed soldier who draws at rare intervals the Sultan's pay.'\(^2\)

1. Quoted in Winstone, Gertrude Bell, op. cit. p. 118

In a later work, *Amurath to Amurath*, published from London in 1911, Gertrude expressed more or less similar views in the following words: 'Nowhere will the Arab nationalist movement,' she wrote, 'if it reaches the blossoming point, find a more congenial soil, and nowhere will it be watered by fuller streams of lawless vanity. Cruel and bloody as Ottoman rule has shown itself upon these remote frontiers (the Ottoman province of Mosul, presently in Iraq) it is better than the untrammelled mastery of Arab Beg or Kurdish Agha, and if the half exterminated Christian sects, the persecuted Yezidis, the wretched fellahin of every creed, who sow in terror crops which they may never reap, are to win protection and prosperity, it is to the Turk that they must look. He, and he only, can control the warring races of his empire.' (p.247)
Gertrude and the Great War Just a few months before the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 Gertrude had concluded an adventurous journey across the central Arabia. She had penetrated to Hail, the capital city of the once powerful but now decadent and strife-ridden Shammar tribe. Since the town was not visited by any European for over one and a half decades Gertrude's journey acquired increased importance in political circles. For the information she had gathered in central Arabia was vital for Britain's foreign policy makers especially at a time when they were engaged in hectic diplomacy to prevent Turkey from allying herself with Germany in the event of a war between the two imperial powers of Europe. In order to achieve this purpose Sir Edward Grey sent Sir Louis Mallet to Constantinople. He was busy in persuading the Turks when in early May, 1914 Gertrude arrived in the Turkish capital. Sir Louis seized the opportunity to interview her in order to collect fresh information about political conditions in central Arabia. According to Gertrude, Ibn Sauc, both politically and militarily, was stronger than Ibn Rashid, hence more important for both the Turks and the British. Later on she expressed the same view in a letter published in the Times (13th June, 1914):
My belief is that Ibn Saud is now the chief figure in central Arabia, although the Ottoman Government was still pursuing its traditional policy of subsidising and supplying arms to the Rashids.\(^1\)

Captain Shakespear, a British spy who travelled across the central Arabia and reached Riyadh, the capital of Ibn Saud, almost by the same time Gertrude visited Hail was in full agreement with the views expressed by Miss Bell. However, the British Government, disregarding the views of Gertrude and Shakespear, decided to support and favour the Sherif Husain of Mecca rather than Ibn Saud in order to instigate an Arab uprising against the Turks who had decided to be a war ally of Germany.

When the War began Gertrude, exhibiting extreme patriotism, volunteered herself to be available to do any service to her country. She organized and ran successfully an office in London for the missing and wounded civilians. But being an Arabist and having widely travelled in the Arab world she was needed by the British Government to do some more important works. In September 1914, just before Turkey joined hands with Germany in the War, the British Intelligence

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office in Cairo requested the Director of Military Operations (D.M.O.) to ask Gertrude to prepare a confidential report on Syria. Gertrude readily complied with the request and on September the 9th sent, through the D.M.O., the required report to Sir Edward Grey in which she had clearly stated that ‘Syria, especially its southern part where Egyptian prosperity,’ brought about by the competent British administration, ‘is better known was exceedingly pro-British’. The French influence in the region, according to Gertrude, was growing but they were disliked by a great majority of the Syrians. In the same report she also assessed the situation in Iraq saying that ‘the presence of a large body of German engineers in Baghdad, for railway building, will be of no advantage to Germany,’ and that ‘Iraq would not/willing to see Turkey at war with us (the British) and would not take an active part in it’. (1)

This was the first of many official reports that Gertrude prepared for her Government. It is noteworthy that even though her journeys among the Arabs, unlike those of Shakespeare and Lawrence, were unofficial (perhaps she was the politically least committed English traveller of the period) she has acquired considerable knowledge about the

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1. Ibid. P. 151.
the political realities of the host countries. Moreover by putting her knowledge at the service of the British Empire she indirectly accepted the peculiar tradition of Western scholarship which was current in her time that knowledge is the obverse side of power or that it is subservient to the State.

Gertrude was formally employed by the British Intelligence in November 1915 and from that time onward she proved herself to be one of the most dedicated servants of the British Empire. She reached Cairo on November 30, 1915 where she was welcomed by Dr. D.G. Hogarth and T.E. Lawrence who took her to the Grand Continental Hotel where her residence was arranged. Her immediate assignment was to fill in the intelligence files with information as to the tribes and Shaikhs of Arabia.

Formation of Arab Bureau While Gertrude was busy in helping Dr. Hogarth her chiefs were preoccupied with plans to establish a special intelligence bureau which was to be responsible for tackling all Arabian affairs. On December 13, 1915, the Director of Civil and Military Intelligence in Cairo, Lt. Colonel Gilbert Clayton wrote to Sir Mark Sykes informing him that he had viewed it fit to create a 'Near East Office' with the sole purpose of handling the political suspects and

countering the Turks' pan-Islamic propaganda. Clayton also sought Sykes's consent to expand the said office, both its staff and its functions.

In his reply Sykes not only agreed with Clayton's idea but also took labour to define the functions of the 'Arabian Bureau'. In his view the Bureau, first of all, should harmonize Britain's political activities in the north-east of Arabian peninsula and provide information about Turko-German policies to various departments of the Government - the War Office, Foreign Office, India Office, the Admiralty and the Government of India. In the second place, he proposed, the Bureau should conduct high level propaganda to win the Arab support for Great Britain without hurting the sentiments of Indian Muslims and the interests of the Triple Entente. Thus the 'Arabian Bureau' was formally created under the headship of Mark Sykes with Lt. Col. Parker as his deputy.

The Bureau immediately set down to its works, established its separate office with a telegraphic address for which the code name 'Intrusive' was chosen. The Bureau also began to establish its own espionage network.

But the formation of the Bureau seems to have caused a serious row between various departments of the British Government. On December 28, 1915 Sykes telegraphed to
Clayton informing him that while the War, Foreign and Intelligence offices were slow, the Admiralty was very quick to react and wanted to annex the Bureau as a part of its own network. Later on the Government of India also resented, especially when its activities were extended to Mesopotamia. To settle the dispute the British Prime Minister asked for an immediate meeting of the Interdepartmental Committee to consider the formation of an 'Islamic Bureau'. The Committee met on January 6, 1961 under the chairmanship of the Director of Military Intelligence, Brigadier General G.M.H. Macdonogh and approved of Clayton's original idea of the 'Near East Office' and of its aims as defined by Mark Sykes except that it was henceforth to be called the 'Arab Bureau'.

While the interdepartmental wranglings were going on Gertrude, quietly and busily, continued to work on Arabia, its tribes, shaikhs and geography. Being at centre of British Intelligence in Cairo she was naturally tempted to involve in and understand the complexities of Britain's Arab policy. Her grasp of political issues was amply exhibited in a long letter that she wrote to Lord Robert

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1. The 'Near East Office', 'Arabian Bureau', 'Islamic Bureau' were in fact terms used by various departments or officers of the British Government to indicate what finally came to be known as 'Arab Bureau'.

2. See the relevant part of the letter in Vinstone, Gertrude Bell, op. cit. PP. 162-6.
Cecil on 20th December 1915 just after a month she had joined the Arab Bureau. In the letter she had, interalia, referred to the nationalist aspirations of the Arabs whom Britain was encouraging through McMahon to rise against the Turks. Surprisingly she did not criticise the British stand on and support to the Arab nationalism while in an earlier work, The Desert and the Sown she had clearly stated that there existed no such thing as Arab nation.\(^1\) The reason is not hard to find. In The Desert and the Sown she had criticised the Syrian nationalists because they were aspiring for freedom from the Turkish Empire, then an ally of Great Britain which she wanted to prevent from disintegration for its own reasons. But in 1914-15 the situation had drastically changed. The Turks were no more Britain's ally, rather had turned against her and become War-ally of Germany. The new circumstances brought about a change in Gertrude's own outlook. She had already picked the strings of an Arab rebellion\(^2\) during her wandering in Syria and Iraq and now along with other members of the Arab Bureau, notably Hogarth and Lawrence, wanted 'to make them articulate.' Thus it can be justly concluded that her support to the so-called Arab awakening,

1. See, Bell, Gertrude, The Desert and the Sown, op. cit. P. 140.

2. In her preface to Amurath to Amurath, published in 1911 she had written the following. 'The sense of change, uneasy and bewildered, hung over the whole Ottoman Empire; it was rarely unalloyed with anxiety; there was, it must be admitted, little to encourage unqualified confidence in the immediate future, but one thing was certain; the moving finger had inscribed a fresh title upon the page.' (P. VII).
contrary to the common belief, was aimed at serving the British interest rather than the Arab cause.

Gertrude's growing political understanding naturally impressed upon her superior officers at the Arab Bureau that instead of merely working on Arabian geography she was capable of being entrusted with greater political responsibilities. It has already been noted that the Government of India had objected to the formation of the Arab Bureau in Cairo and that its suspicions were somewhat removed only after the meeting of the Interdepartmental Committee held on January 6, 1916. However, India revived its opposition to the Bureau when the later decided to set up a branch in Iraq. The Government of India was aware of, and consequently thoroughly opposed to the Bureau's plan for the post-War Arab World: an independent Arab state as explained in Husain-McMahon correspondence.\(^1\) According to their approach it was irrational to include Iraq in the proposed Arab State mainly because the country was conquered by the Indian troops. India, in fact, wanted to form and run the future government in Iraq as an imperial power.

The Arab Bureau, on its part, was contemptuous of the Government of India approach and branded them as being

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1. The contents of Husain-McMahon correspondence will be discussed in detail in a later chapter.
ignorant of Arab realities. However, India was not to be written off so easily. She was to be cajoled into agreeing with the Bureau’s approach to Mesopotamia and its plan to set up a branch office in Basra. For this purpose Gertrude was asked to move to India.

Gertrude reached Karachi on 6th February 1916 and immediately moved on to Delhi to allay the fears of the Indian Government about the Arab Bureau. She played her role successfully in persuading the Government of India to agree with the setting up of a branch office of the Arab Bureau in Basra. However, the Indian Government had conceded only after securing the right of being represented at the Arab Bureau in Cairo by an officer appointed by them. Moreover, they persuaded Gertrude to be in charge of the Basra branch of Bureau. It appears as the Indian Government was still suspicious about the Bureau’s branch office in Basra, especially if it was to be headed by Lawrence or by some other staff member of the Bureau other than Gertrude. Obviously she was happy over her growing importance. 'It is interesting, deeply interesting, but oh, it’s an anxious job. I wish, I wish, I knew more - and was more. And I am overwhelmed at meeting with so much kindness and confidence,’ she wrote exultantly.

1. Quoted in Winstone, Gertrude Bell, op. cit. p. 17.
Gertrude arrived in Basra on the first day of March 1916. With the mutual consent of the Arab Bureau and Sir Percy Cox, the Chief Political Representative in Iraq she was appointed the Bureau's Correspondent in Basra. She carried out her responsibilities so skillfully and worked so energetically that Cox was prompted to appoint her as his Oriental Secretary in order to deal with local notables. Moreover, she began to make the first of her major contributions to Hogarth's Arab Bulletin, the secret organ of the Arab Bureau, to assemble intelligence information from briefings with the army authorities and interviews with tribal sheikhs, to translate the Arabic correspondence of the office, and as was to become her increasing habit to take on tasks which some of her colleagues considered to be the proper preserve of the Chief of the civil administration, such as writing a letter to Ion Hasnic, an ally of the Turks in central Arabia to win him to the British side. Besides, Gertrude also began to compile a gazetteer in which she tried to put together relevant and reliable information about the Arab tribes. In this regard she received ready and valuable help from Reverend John Van Ness, a missionary who had acquired enormous knowledge about

1. Ibid. P. 179.
the Iraqi tribes by having travelled widely in the desert and marshes. Religion and missionary zeal were thus brought in to action to serve the British Empire.

*Gertrude and the Making of Iraq*  With the fall of Baghdad on March 1917 the war in Iraq was almost over. For the Turks were in retreat on every front leaving behind a vast territory to administer. Cox accepted the challenge and began to organize the British administration slowly but confidently. He gathered around him men of great abilities such as Philby and Arnold Wilson who, fortunately or unfortunately, had divergent ideas and the ability to stick to and pursue their respective policies. It was natural that such men will sooner or later at logger heads with each other. However, for the moment the war on other fronts both in Arabia and Europe prompted them to work as a coherent and united body.

Between the fall of Baghdad in March 1917 and the General Armistice of November 1918 Gertrude continued to perform her usual and routine works, gathering intelligence information helping the British administration in the country writing propaganda articles and treatises on tribal shaikhs and Arabian geography etcetera. Besides she took it upon herself to lecture and couch vituperative and opinionated young officers such as Philby in 'right ideas'. She even
ventured to give advice to the future rulers of the newly occupied Arab countries:

...men who have kept the tradition of a personal independence, which was limited only by their own customs, entirely ignorant of a world which lay outside their swamps and pastures, and as entirely indifferent to its interests as to the opportunities it offers, will not in a day fall into step with European ambitions, nor welcome European methods. (1)

Only on one occasion she herself got out of humour. In November 1917 Mr. Arthur Balfour made his famous announcement (2) regarding the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine. For Gertrude it was an outrageous as well as an unworkable plan. Because Palestine was a 'poor land, incapable of great development.' Moreover, since two-thirds of Palestinian population was Muslim it was difficult, according to Gertrude, to implement the Balfour Declaration which was completely artificial and 'divorced from all relation to facts.' (3)

However, she seems to have compromised on an equally serious matter, the Sykes-Picot Agreement (4) which was signed secretly by the Triple Entente in 1916 to divide the

1. Quoted in Ibid. p. 194.
Arab world between France and Britain according to their imperial interests. As per the Agreement Iraq was to be given to Britain as a war booty in the event of an Allied victory. With the fall of Baghdad in March 1917 it was clear that Britain would rule over the country. However, as time went on, there arose differences among the officers on the spot with regard to the form of future government in Iraq. The main actors in the controversy, as will be discussed later on, were Gertrude Bell and Arnold Wilson who had become Acting Civil Commissioner after Cox was sent to Tehran in 1918.

It has already been discussed that Gertrude was thoroughly opposed to Arab nationalism and believed that the idea of nation-states in the European sense was foreign to the Arabs. It was with this view that she criticised the Anglo-French Declaration of November 5, 1918 (1) which promised the Arabs the right to self-determination. 'The Declaration whatever may have been its political significance elsewhere, was at best a regrettable necessity in Iraq,' (2) she wrote, in a memorandum, 'Self-Determination in Mesopotamia' that she submitted to the British Government in February 1919. In the same memorandum she further claimed, though erroneously,

1. See the text of the Anglo-French Declaration in The Middle East and North Africa 1988, op. cit. p. 64.
2. Quoted in Winstone, Gertrude Bell, op. cit. p. 207.
that the common Iraqis were content with the British rule. But the Declaration gave an opportunity to the politically ambitious and religiously 'fanatical' elements in the country to foment agitation and disrupt public tranquility. These men, according to Gertrude, were Arabs 'who had been in Turkish Civil or Military employment and thrown in their lot with the Turks after the occupation, active members of the Committee of Union and Progress (the party to whom the entrance of Turkey into the War against Great Britain was directly due) and others who had not ventured to remain in Baghdad on account of their well-known Turkish sympathies came back from Mosul early in November' (1) in accordance with the terms of the General Armistice. These so-called 'anti-social elements' were further greatly encouraged to look forward to an ambitious political future when they learnt that Faisal had been invited to Paris to attend the Paris Peace Conference as a representative of an independent Arab state.

Wilson had gone through Gertrude's memorandum before it was sent to the India office in order to be submitted to London. He had no doubt certain reservations but in main his views at this stage were in agreement with those of

1. Ibid. pp. 207-208.
Gertrude. As a result he dispatched her to France to present his as well as her views in the Paris Peace Conference. Later he also joined her to canvass for the retention of direct British rule in Iraq.

However, Gertrude's views that she had expressed in her memorandum of 1919, began to change during the Paris Conference. Infact her discussions with Lawrence and Hogarth caused a volte face in her thinking and approach to the Arab question. She began to think to form in Iraq a national government consisting of the former Turkish officials and Iraqi merchants loyal to Britain. Probably the rationale behind her approach was that such a government would either itself take care of or will be manipulated to serve Britain's imperial interests without inviting people's indignation to them or to the British.

But Wilson was thoroughly opposed to any such idea. He believed that the Arabs of Mesopotamia had no experience of government. Moreover they were not a coherent group rather divided between 'townsfolk who sought no greater freedom than that which allowed them to wrangle and double-deal to their heart-content, and tribesmen who asked nothing more than to be left alone to wage their reeds.'(1) He further argued that

1. Ibid. p. 206.
the Iraqi society consisted of the Sunni Arabs, the Kurds, the Arab-Iranian Shias and none of them was willing to accept any one’s rule or hegemony. Hence, in his view, Britain will be well advised not to commit the folly of entrusting the Iraqi Arabs with self-rule but take the rational step of governing them in her own interest.

Obviously Wilson’s attitude and approach was purely imperialistic. However, being the Acting Civil Commissioner he was better placed than Gertrude or anyone else to implement his ideas. He began to rule the Iraqis with an iron hand and in a ruthless authoritarian manner.

Contrary to the assessment of Gertrude as expressed in her memorandum of 1919 the Iraqis were not content with the British occupation of their country. She herself was later to realize, especially after the Iraqi Revolt of 1920,

1. The Iraqi Rebellion started as spontaneous protests and agitations by the people of Iraq, both Sunnis and Shias, against the gradual consolidation of British rule with nominal Arab representation. These agitations became more frequent and widespread after the announcement of the San Remo Conference decisions. In the beginning the Rebellion was led by the members of the pre-War al-Ahwa, a secret society of the Arab officers of the Turkish army who had supported and participated in the Arab Revolt, but it was later joined by the Shia Ulema or Mujahids who issued a fatwa, a religious edict, calling people to wage a Holy War, Jihad, against the British rule. Towards the end of June 1920 the protests became more serious and in the following month turned out into an open revolt which the British brutally suppressed in September of the same year after spending over £ 40,000,000, killing ten thousand Iraqis and having lost 400 British lives. (See the details in Antonius George, The Arab Awakening, op. cit. pp. 312-316.)
that, in her opinion, was a rising against Wilson's authoritarian rule.

Although the Revolt was crushed by the superior might of Britain the policy makers in London were shaken and subsequently forced to adopt a new policy. The first step was to reinstate Cox.

Cox arrived in Basra in October 1920 and together with Gertrude and Philoy embarked upon establishing a Provisional Government. The main problem before them was to select 'suitable' men for various ministeries, who will be acceptable to the Iraqi people on the one hand and serve the British interest on the other. The 'suitable' men they picked up were those who had remained loyal to Britain in her hour of trial, that is, in the July-September Rebellion of 1920. This meant that the Shias who formed the majority.

1. Gertrude knew well as is evident from her letter of October 3, 1920 that the Shias were in a majority in Iraq and that the election for a truely representative assembly, if fairly held, will result in a Shia-dominated government. The relevant part of the letter is as follows:

'The Shia problem is probably the most formidable in this country... if you are going to have anything like really representative institutions you would have a majority of Shias. For that reason you can never have three completely autonomous provinces. Sunni Musul must be retained as a part of the Mesopotamian State in order to adjust the balance. To my mind it is one of the main arguments for giving Mesopotamia a responsible government. We as outsiders can't differentiate between Sunni and Shia, but leave it to them and they will get over the difficulty by some kind of hanky-panky just as the lurks dio and for the present it is the only way of getting over it. The final authority must be in the hands of the Sunnis, inspite of their numerical inferiority, otherwise you will have a Kujtanic-run State, which is the very devil.' (Burgoyne, E. op. cit. (Vol. I) p. 169).
in Iraq and a good number of Sunnis who had taken part in the Rebellion would not be properly represented in the government.

The Provisional Government consisting of loyal Arab-Britain's favourites and surrogates — was somehow formed on 25th October 1920. But this did not put an end to Britain's problems. The dilemma confronting Britain in the later part of 1920 and the fewer choices that were before her have been well depicted in the following letter that Gertrude wrote on 4th November 1920:

We are badly in need of the Iraqis who served with Faisal in Syria — men who have the solid Arab nationalism in them. If we can't get them as allies I believe we shall founder between a Shia theocracy and a pro-Turkish bureaucracy. The menace of the Turkish nationalists in alliance with Bolshevism is always with us.

1. A Shia minister was also induced in the Provisional Government. However, as a whole the Shia community was discriminated against by the Government. Gertrude's following letter is a testimony: 'The present Government which is predominantly Sunni, is not doing anything to conciliate the Shiites. They are now considering a number of administrative appointments for provinces, almost all the names they put up are Sunnis, even for the wholly Shia province of the Euphrates with the exception of Karbola and Najaf (Najaf) where ever they have't the face to propose Sunnis'. (Well, Loy, op. cit. p. 525).

Over two months later Gertrude wrote another letter (January 10, 1921) in which she mentioned the assessment of Jafar Pasha regarding the wishes of the Iraqi people and their Shaikhs. 'Most of the shaikhs', she wrote, 'didn't care a button what sort of government was set up but on the whole would prefer to have the Turks whom they knew rather than a devil they didn't know. When is our father returning they asked him, meaning the Sultan.' (1)

If public discontent is to be judged by the public slogans and folk songs the general Iraqi attitude towards Britain and the Provisional Government was one of hostility and animosity. In early 1921 the walls of Baghdad were not often decorated with such slogans:

"Woe betide you O Ministers - rotten C prisoners
Does your conscience not trouble you?" (2)

Some of the slogans were even written in Urdu expressing bewilderment on the Indian armymen, both Hindus and Muslims, who had conquered Iraq for Britain and were loyal to her even after having been treated like animals by their arrogant masters.

But the British had not fought the Ottomans to establish a government in accordance with the wishes of the Iraqi

1. Ibid. p. 200.
2. Winstone, Gertrude Bell, op. cit. 232.
people. Their main intention, as indicated earlier, was to serve their imperial interests under the cover of a farcical native government.

The Provisional Government proved short-lived even though it was performing well the role the British had assigned to it. Just within two and a half month it was able to draft an electoral law which was finally passed on 8th January 1921 and sent to the High Commissioner's office for his approval. Soon after his approval the elections were to be held to convene a representative assembly, but this did never happen.

On 10th January 1921 Gertrude was summoned to the High Commissioner's Office where she was informed by Cox about a telegram from Winston Churchill (who had been recently appointed the Colonial Secretary) which contained a new policy that was shortly to be followed in Iraq. The new policy in a nutshell was to instal Faisal King of Iraq.

The decision to establish Faisal as King of Iraq under British mandate was taken by Churchill and Lawrence well before they came to attend the Cairo Conference held in March 1921 details of which will be discussed in a later chapter. The Conference was in fact held to adopt a strategy in order to smooth Faisal's way to power. The strategy they
decided to follow was that Faisal will contest an election for the Iraqi throne. However, such an election was never held mainly because Faisal did not want it for fear of being rejected by the people. Cox, then, persuaded the Council of Ministers of the Provisional Government to proclaim Faisal King of Iraq. This was duly done in July 1921. Later on a farcical referendum was held in which Faisal was declared to have secured 96 percent of the total votes and eventually crowned on August 23, 1921.

Faisal's ascent to power in Iraq opened a new chapter in Gertrude's life. Years ago in March 1917 she had written about Iraq:

"We shall, I trust, make it a centre of Arab civilization and prosperity, that will be my job partly, I hope, and I never lose sight of it."(1)

Now, in 1921 she was personal friend of Faisal the King of Iraq advising him on his domestic problems and looking forward to a great future for his country. 'When we had made Mesopotamia a model Arab State,' she told the King, 'there was not an Arab of Syria and Palestine who wouldn't want to be part of it, and before I died I looked to see Faisal ruling from the Persian frontier to the

1. Bell, Lady, op. cit. p. 400.
If Gertrude was really serious to build up a modern Arab Empire under Faisal she was doomed to disappointment from the beginning. In fact Faisal was not picked up by Churchill and Lawrence because he was a great leader able to command the following of his fellow Arabs and create a big country but because he was incompetent and had the ability to play the role of the puppet ruler perfectly in order to serve the British interests. Gertrude soon discovered it, in less than a year time after Faisal's coronation, that he was a weak administrator. 'Mr. Cornwallis and I', she wrote on 4th June 1922, 'had a long talk (with Faisal). I told him I was very unhappy over the King's indecisive attitude, his refusal to contradict the statements of the extremist papers and the backing he was giving to the most ignoble extremists.'

There was much more to come in later days. She discovered that Faisal was vain, feeble, timid, hardly dependable and above all a master double dealer who sometimes even did not hesitate to conspire against his own ministers. Dismayed by the King's mischievous activities she was forced to tell him:

'I had formed a beautiful and gracious snow image to which I had given allegiance

and I saw it melting before my eyes.
Before every noble line had been obliterated, I referred to go, in spite of my love for the Arab nation and my sense of responsibility for its future. I did not think I could bear to see the evaporation of the dream which had guided me day by day.\(^{(1)}\)

To escape from the frightening disappointment Gertrude sought refuge in Baghdad Museum that she had begun to build in her last years in order to preserve Iraq's archaeological heritage. Her relations with Faisal remained cordial despite her disillusionment with him, but there is reason to believe that in her last days she had come to realize that King-making was as difficult, even impossible, as building a castle in the air.

However, her commitment to Faisal was one thing and her dedication to her country another. She never swerved in her loyalty to Great Britain as Winstone, her biographer has proved it quoting from the records of Britain's Foreign Office. That she never failed in sending 'her weekly intelligence report,' to the White hall, 'articles for the Colonial Office's home propaganda machine and the annual reports which summarized events with unfailing regularity and authority.'\(^{(2)}\)

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1. Ibid. pp. 271-272.
What her intelligence reports and propaganda articles were meant for except that she wanted to serve her country? She was, in sum, a traveller-scholar who used her intellectual abilities to promote the cause of the British Empire in the Arab World.

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