

prosperity of the country. The other character of the novel Gora was Lolita who rebels against all sorts of tyranny and oppression of the society. She was the harbinger of women's liberation and feminist movement in the 20th century. Bimala, heroine of *The Home and the World* (Ghare Baire) did not have any formal education but her husband also tried to educate her. Labanya, heroine of *Farewell My Friend* (Sesher Kabita) (written in 1928 was a post graduate and Ela of *Four Chapters* (Char Adhay) written in 1934 was research scholar. Sohini of *Laboratory* was also highly educated. *EyeSore* or *A Grain of Sand* (Chokher Bali), and *The Wife's Letter* (Streer Patra) were the most revolutionary writings in terms of women's position in the society. Both Binodini and Mrinal did not have the formal education but they were educated at home. "Rabindranath Tagore's *The Wife's Letter* (Streer Patra) is a powerful feminist writing. This text tried to give a picture of Rabindranath's perspective of Feminism. The story is a revolutionary one because at a time when the author penned this story, it was impossible to imagine in Indian society that a woman was leaving her husband's home denouncing her marital existence in search of her own identity. Rabindranath was far ahead of his time reinterpreting a woman's position in *The Wife's Letter* (Streer Patra) which has relevance for modern reader, though written over a century ago." (Feminism and Rabindranath – A brief discussion through *The Wife's Letter*. 2014:62). Tagore's *EyeSore* or *A Grain of Sand* (Chokher Bali) was another blow to the existing social customs. This novel had been severely criticized as highly immoral at that time because through Binodini, a child widow, Tagore bold enough to brought forward first time in Bengali literature the sexual desire of a young woman, her desire, and longing for love, affection and care from a male. But being a widow she was forced to live a life of austerity and inhuman sufferings which was a common phenomenon in the Hindu society. Though time changed, widow remarriage are well accepted now a day in the society but the outlook for a young widow has remained same till date. To some extent even today they are forbidden and expected to lead colour less life if they want to remain single. They are still accused of seducing men and similarly considered easy prey for men till date. *Sand of the Eye* was path breaking and Binodini can well be categorized as emancipated woman because though she was a young widow she wanted to live her own life, denying all her widowhood, releasing herself from social taboos and expressing her sexual desire boldly which was inconceivable during 19th century Bengali society.

Conclusion: From fiction to facts, Tagore throughout his life tried to fight against the ruthless rituals. To deviate from the prevailing customs reflected in his text and also in his own life was really path – breaking. As a true follower of Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Tagore took the initiative to get married his son Rathindranath with Pratima Devi who was a widow. The intellectual, multicultural Tagore's house hold helped Tagore to evolve as a passionate seeker of freedom, a cosmopolitan man as

expressed in his own song *Amaar Mukti Alaye Alaye* (My freedom lies in the light of the sky). He wanted women to celebrate their freedom with education, raising their spirit above all darkness, paving a new way to walk.

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Exoticization of Everyday Life in Travel Writing: A Study of Maria Graham and Susan Ward

- Nurjahan Begum

Abstract: One of the major concerns of Western colonial and neo-colonial discourses is the cultural representation of the non-Western "Other". The 'Other' is always attributed with negative traits and is exoticized to a great extent in most of the nineteenth century literature (both in fiction and non-fiction). Such stereotypical representation expresses the politicized nature of the representation of the Other and its complicity with the colonial ideology. Everyday Life encompasses activities what a person does, thinks and feels every day. Everyday experiences are shared by all humans across the globe. But a close reading proves that everyday life can both hide and highlight a range of social differences. Different people have different sorts of everyday lives, the sorts of everyday routines and activities they engage in depends on their social position. However, a person brought up in Western culture may respond to other's cultural practice in a very different manner; and what is quotidian and routine to one community may appear unusual and dangerous to another. This paper is an attempt to look at the projection of everyday life by Maria Graham and Susan Ward in Colonial India, that is, to study the trajectories of everyday life that both these writers highlights in their travelogues, *Journal of a Residence in India* (1813) and *A Glimpse of Assam* (1884).

Keywords: Other, Stereotype, Exotic, Ideology, Everyday life, Travel writing.

I

Travel writing produces images of other countries, peoples and places in embellishing terms. Information about the other is always very demanding and most sought for in the colonial context. Travel writers in the early nineteenth century have provided important information on the colonized countries, and have depicted the unfamiliar in exotic terms. Such representations invariably have been very influential for the greater project of colonialism. As such, in travel writing, emphasis was given on documenting the observed experiences. Consequently there have been proliferations of women writers who have helped in acceleration of the project further by providing minute details on domestic affairs of the foreign lands that they have visited. The aim of this paper is to examine the exoticization of everyday life in travel writing, that is, to study the representation of facets of life in India as observed by the British women travelers to India in the nineteenth century. The texts chosen for analysis are Maria Graham's *Journal of a Residence in India* (1813) and Susan Ward's *A Glimpse of Assam* (1884). The paper argues that colonial encounters create the condition for realignment of the exotic and the everyday in women's travel writing. The exotic

representation of the 'Other' is also political in nature. Women's travel writing in the colonial era provided important information on the colonized countries as many women travelled to India during that time. From around the early decades of the nineteenth century, western women started to publish their letters, diaries and journals originally written for personal communication. These women's narratives helped to shed light on an imagined India that captured the colonial imagination and found expression in their writing. Maria Graham came to India in 1808 with her father, George Dundas, who was appointed Commissioner for the Navy in Bombay. She married Lieutenant Thomas Graham, in Bombay, in 1809. She recorded her experience in her *Journal of a Residence in India* (1813) and *Letters on India* (1814). Susan Ward married Reverend William Ward, a widower and a junior missionary in Assam, and followed him to Assam around 1860. She assisted Ward (who had come to Assam in 1851) in his work on the missionary periodical, *Orunodoi*. She depicted her experience in Assam in *A Glimpse of Assam* (1884). When the travelers come into contact with indigenous groups and observe their lifestyle, they cannot help seeing it as curious and exotic. In such situations, the everyday is transformed to the exotic and vice-versa. It makes sense therefore to look for sites in these two texts where the authors seem to historicize the everyday. This will bring to the fore the relationship between the everyday and otherness, and also the various strategies of representation.

Historically, everyday activities associated with various communities of India have been exoticized by visitors to the region, whether from within India or outside. So, while people living in India may respond to certain community-specific cultural practices with a certain degree of familiarity and understanding, a person brought up in another part of India may see the event as a spectacle. There is no doubt that persons born and brought up in the West would respond to cultural practices in India differently. It is important to note that a Westerner's response may not match that of an Indian from another part of India. The reality of everyday life differs due to cultural as well as geographical differences. In consequence, what we see is that there is no fixed definition of the everyday, as the everyday is also a construction. In fact, there is a natural tendency to select, to highlight or exaggerate things that catch the writer's eye. What appears as a record of the everyday in a strange place is actually an account meant to draw the reader's curiosity at the "quaint and curious" nature of life elsewhere. In this context, Thompson says as much:

Even when travel writers recount journeys that did genuinely take place...there have been many authors who have fabricated some incidents and encounters, or exaggerated them, so as to capitalize on the reading public's perennial hunger for wonders, exotic curiosities and sensational tidbits (Thompson, 29).

It follows that this is not a new or uncommon practice as far as travel accounts of the East by Westerners are concerned. Everything is open to scrutiny and where not possible, to speculation and surmise. Treating the common as uncommon or exotic, consequent upon their "looking"

differently, is at the core of these narratives.

In fact, various strategies of representation render the 'Other' appear quaint and exotic to the Western eye. As Edward Said has described: "... The techniques of representation make the Orient visible, clear, "there" in discourse about it. And these representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient" (Said, 22). Different institutions and the ideologies of these institutions produce images of the Orient and make them distinct. Colonial literature abounds with representations of natives as quintessentially lazy, ignorant, deceitful, passive, incapable of self-governing, and the native rulers as corrupt and despotic. These stereotypical projections convert the Orient into a timeless presence. It is pertinent to cite what Stuart Hall has said in this context: "Stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature ... stereotyping reduces, essentializes, and fixes 'difference'" (Hall, 257-258). The stereotypical representations of the 'Other' serve as a marker to highlight the differences between the West and the rest. This process of describing unfamiliar phenomena as exotic is addressed by Huggan in *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001). As he says: "Exoticism describes the systematic assimilation of cultural difference, ascribing familiar meanings and associations to unfamiliar things..." (Huggan, 14). There is both an attempt to familiarize and highlight difference in the new places visited. The otherness of things is addressed and at the same time reduced to something else in the writer's culture. Further, Said holds that exoticism functions in a variety of imperial contexts as a mechanism of aesthetic substitution which "replaces the impress of power with the blandishments of curiosity" (cited in Huggan, 14). What is not easily understood is deemed exotic or conversely simplified in the writer's own terms as quaint. Underlying all such acts is the consciousness of difference along with a desire to capture or sublimate the essence of foreign cultures. As such, in colonial travel writing the everyday life of the 'Other' is represented in terms of stereotypes, or of the exotic.

II

Both the English and Indians view one another in ways conditioned by their own culture. When the travel writers view the other's cultural practices or everyday living practices, they seem to be overwhelmed with the differences between the two cultures. That colonial discourse produces images of 'Otherness' is not in doubt. For instance, while describing the dress of the palanquin-bearers, Maria Graham states: "The palankeen-bearers are called *hamauls* (a word signifying carrier); they for the most part wear nothing but a turban, and a cloth wrapped round the loins, a degree of nakedness which does not shock one, owing to the dark colour of the skin, which, as it is unusual to European eyes, has the effect of dress" (Graham, 2). Graham clearly despises the dress, and the dhoti worn by the palanquin-bearers is not even counted as a

dress. Here, the concept of dress is quite different to a European and an Indian. So, here the cultural differences produce images of the 'Other' in exotic terms; people roving naked in the public, and at the same time there is a tendency to generalize the dressing habits of the Indians, due to their dark complexion. She ironically remarks that where in India, this scanty piece of cloth is counted as a dress; to a European it appears to be shocking and amounts to nakedness. Again, on another occasion, Graham remarks: "The tanks are the great luxuries of the natives; one sees people bathing in them from morning till night, all ages and sexes together; but they wear as much clothing in the water as out of it" (Graham, 9). Graham's unease is evident when she notices the scantily dressed people bathing together. But it should be noted that not all people bathe together, and what is quaint to an outsider is part of everyday living practices, particularly in a rural setting in nineteenth century India. Further, one of the frequent topics of discussion in women's travel writing in colonial India is the appropriateness of dress. The women travel writers express their bewilderment at the dressing habits of the Indians. The clothes of the people of India (Assam) appear to be very meager as well as primitive to a foreigner. Ward's description of Assamese dress habits is a key to her understanding, or lack of it, of everyday life and culture:

The people are primitive in their habits and customs; the introduction of English society affects but slightly the costume of the men... women keep strictly to the style of the past centuries, which is simple, economical, and well adapted to their mode of life and the climate. The native costume of men is a strip of white cloth or silk so arranged around the waist, that the folds flow to the knees; a long sleeved tight fitting jacket and about five yards of thin white muslin around the head completes the costume. The women's costume is a skirt like a pillow case, about the same width, open at each end; sometimes they are made of cotton cloth, but usually all classes wear the native silk... When going out, a white sheet of cloth or muslin, three yards long and one and a half wide, called a "Chudda," is placed over the head, one end flowing, the other tossed over the left shoulder (Ward, 37).

Here, wearing the 'chadar' is not a strange habit for the people of Assam, but to a foreigner this very dress looks like a pillow case, something strange. However, it should be noted that this concept of appropriate clothing is created by the British in India. This tendency is discussed by Margaret Case in her study, "Nineteenth Century Memsahibs in India" (1985). As she states: "Appropriate clothing was a central concern in the world the British created for themselves in India. At the periphery of this world were the undifferentiated masses, mostly naked, as suited their savage or childish natures. They formed a picturesque panorama quite separate from the real world" (Case, 134). Thus, the nineteenth century women travel writers have projected an exoticized version of Indian in terms of their meager dresses. The people are transformed into a spectacle, and this in a way, creates the effect of a panorama. However, along with other everyday practices, indigenous healing practices are also looked with suspicion by the British. For instance, Ward, in *A*

Glimpse of Assam, has this to say about indigenous medicine, an everyday practice:

When ill they depend on charms and incantations for recovery; to cure a sick child, a little copper tube is plugged with some root or herb, and tied around the neck or forearm by the family priest, with some "vain repetitions", or a "Bhokat" is called who fans the child with a leaf of *Belongoni*, a species of fern, while repeating a sloke of the shasters. The anxious mothers have far more faith in these means, than she would have in the medicines of an English physician, and only when all their own methods have failed, will they resort to "belatee", or foreign medicines...It is not strange therefore, that there is rarely a family without its buried children; the wonder is that so many survive such mismanagement (Ward, 11-12).

Here, Ward describes the traditional herbal cures offered to a patient in ancient Assam. What is significant here is that, what is so normal to the inhabitants of Assam appears exotic to an outsider. As pointed out by David Arnold, in the years of colonial rule, Indians did not have much faith in Western medicine. But, for Westerners the indigenous cures appeared irrational and exotic. This attack on indigenous medicine can be seen as an example of the complicity between colonial rule and colonial medicine on the one hand, and colonial rule and travel writing on the other. The women travel writers in India have provided minute details of Indian socio-cultural life to the readers back home. In their narratives, women travel writers provide sensational tidbits of life in India and often they denigrate the natives as inferior and uncultured. While depicting India, travel writers most often describe it as a primitive land inhabited by uncultured people, waiting to be civilized. For instance, Graham's views of the lives of the lower castes in India are quite significant in the sense that she even dehumanizes them, referring to them as man-eaters. As she says:

In Fact, the Pariahs are outcasts so despicable, that a Brahmin not only would refuse to instruct them, but would think himself contaminated by praying for them ... It is therefore not to be wondered at, that their minds are degraded in proportion to their personal situation ... They are filthy in all their habits, and do not scruple to use as food any dead animal they find; it is even said that, in some places, they do not reject human bodies (Graham, 15).

The passage dehumanizes the lower casts to the extent that they are depicted as man-eaters. Graham does not even try to understand the real situation and instead projects an exoticized picture of some inhabitants in India. Her description echoes the orientalist views of the 'Other' as barbarous and even primitive. She projects them as inhuman and filthy, who eat corpse, and she associates these to their lack of civility. It should be noted that in colonial India, caste system was very much dominant, which deprived human beings from enjoying their basic human rights; but that does not degrade them to man-eaters. Moreover, the everyday living practices of women in India appear quite dull and exotic to the Western women travel writers. In an instance, Graham talks about the daily chores of women's lives in the following way: "They thread beads,

plait coloured threads, sleep, quarrel, make pastry, and chew betel, in the same daily round; and it is only at a death, a birth, or a marriage, that the monotony of their lives is ever interrupted” (Graham, 18-19). Interestingly, for an outsider, these daily activities of women's lives appear to be monotonous and dull; but for these women these are part and parcel of their existence. Hence, our everyday habits are not queer to us, but when an outsider observes these practices and finds these weird, these living practices are reconsidered/ realigned. However, everyday practices of Indian women like cleaning, cooking, housekeeping etc appear unusual and strange to a person belonging to another culture; and often these practices are perceived as a spectacle. Ward, for instance, describes the cleaning practice in an Assamese home as:

Hindus are religiously neat; the daily bath before eating must be observed by every caste from the highest to the lowest, and their garments washed. Religiously compelled to take their food on mother earth, the ground where they eat must undergo a purifying process, in their estimation, which is performed by some female member of the family or servant. This consists in washing the ground over with cowdung and water, giving it a smooth, clean appearance; to them the odour never seems offensive, as the cow is held sacred by the people. This process of “lipping” is the daily routine in a Hindu family, and as necessary a preparation for the family meal, as laying the table among Europeans (Ward, 31).

This process of cleaning the ground with cow dung is common in traditional Assamese culture and such practices are followed regularly as the basic activities of everyday life, without anybody ever questioning their utility. However, it should be noted that cow dung is used for various purposes in traditional Indian culture; it works as a potent disinfectant and is used mostly for its anti-bacterial properties. But to an outsider, these practices may appear very strange and abominable. This is yet another example of everyday changing into exotic. Furthermore, most of the women travel writers are skeptical of Indian food items. In their narratives, almost all the women travel writers in India have expressed negative attitudes towards Indian food habits. As Ward says:

The Hindu, if he has not fish, depends on various kinds of “Haksak”, pot-herbs, either wild or cultivated; the new curled leaves of an edible fern, young leaves of Arum, and other wild plants answers the purpose (Ward, 164-165).

This remark on food should be analyzed a little closely. She is not only dismissive about the food consumed by the Assamese Hindu family as part of its everyday diet, but also betrays her own anxiety and ignorance about Indian food culture. It should be noted that the so-called 'wild' herbs are not exactly wild. The admission of these herbs into specific food-cultures is a result of hundreds of years of experiment and accommodation. Ward either would not or cannot appreciate the fact that the tender leaves of Arum or the twigs of the fern *dhokia* are effective anti-oxidants and have great anti-alkaline properties. It may be mentioned, however, that unlike the modern consumer of these food