Colonisation and *Hijab*

A Case Study of Egypt and India

AHMAD, Nasreen

Thesis submitted for the Degree of M.Phil. (Research)
Centre for the Study of Literature, Theology and the Arts.
University of Glasgow
June 2001

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of the contemporary perception of the Muslim woman's dress known as the *hijab* in order to determine the extent of the influence of European culture on this perception through the process of colonisation.

In light of the resurgence of the *hijab* amongst young Muslim women during the last decade, the study is an attempt to analyse some of the factors that may have contributed to its decline in popularity amongst certain sectors of the Muslim population during the early part of the twentieth century. The study will investigate why the *hijab* as a religious tradition was abandoned by some women and analyse to see if there may have been a link between the so-called 'unveiling' and the subsequent occupation of Muslim lands by the secular Europeans in order to demonstrate that their influence may have been intrinsic to the subsequent change of perception.

Prior to the phenomenon that came to be known as colonisation, Muslim women everywhere accepted the *hijab* as a traditional part of their dress with its origin in religion. The emergence of feminist idealism and its development into a movement proved decisive for the key players thus marking this period as a landmark in the feminist phase. The exploration into imperialism revealed as much about the diversity of cultures as it did about the ethnocentric climate within which the empire was established.

Critical to understanding the ideology of empire was the essence of understanding the philosophy of the men who documented the structure of the empire with all the stereotypical images that helped to perpetuate the myth of the East. Within this category were travellers such as Burton,

Doughty, Edward Lane and T. E. Lawrence, and government officials such as John Stuart Mill and Lords Cromer and Balfour. These men along with many others helped to establish the myth of the corrupt and uncivilised east with its savage and backward culture. Their views contributed towards the understanding that the Islamic *hijab* was a contributory factor to the backwardness of the people and underlying this assumption was the belief that the *hijab* as a practice was subjugating the women and only through its removal could the people be liberated. The colonial process of attempting to convert the Muslim east was no myth. It entailed a systematic mechanism of subtle and aggressive proselytising by government social engineers and missionaries alike. The failure to convert the Muslims through direct preaching forced the colonial scheme to abandon its strategy and resort to the indirect method of assaulting the religion of Islam by associating its practice and customs with backwardness. It therefore used the *hijab* as its visible marker and the women as their target.

The climate within which the Muslim women's perception of the hijab developed cannot be encapsulated within a specific moment in time. It was the outcome of a process that developed over a period of time reaching its climax during the Victorian era. The prejudices and misconceptions of the culture and character of the east were a deliberate attempt by the dominant cultures of the West to establish an image of the east that would allow them to empower and dominate with justification.

This thesis contains references to the Holy Qur'an and Traditions from the life of Prophet Muhammad (*sallallahu ^alayhi wa sallam).* The formula uttered by Muslims when they hear the name of the Prophet is a salutation for blessings upon him. Muslim readers of this thesis are requested to utter the formula wherever the name of the Prophet is mentioned.

Table of Contents

Abstract

Chapter ONE

Introduction

1.1	General	1
1.2	Objectives of the Study	3
1.3	Research Methodology	3
1.4	Background	4
1.5	Limitations of the Study	6

Chapter TWO

Hijab in Islamic Literature

2.1	Introduction	7
2.2	General Background	8
2.3	Importance of Correct Interpretation	12
2.3.1	Rules of the Religion	14
2.4	Linguistics of *Hijab*	15
2.5	The Requisites of *Hijab*	18
2.5.1	The *Awrah* Analysed	19
2.5.2	Evidence of the *Awrah* the female from *Hadith*	21
2.6	*Hijab* in the Qur'an	25
2.7	Conclusion	29

Chapter THREE

European Perspective

3.0	Introduction	32
3.1	Victorian Image of the World	34
3.1.1	Female Perspective in Victorian Society	40
3.2	The Architects of Colonial Hypothesis	47
3.2.1	William Beckford (1760-1844)	48
3.2.2	Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)	50
3.2.3	Edward William Lane (1801-1876)	56
3.2.4	Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890)	62
3.2.5	T. E. Lawrence (1888-1935) on Charles Doughty (1843-1926)	69
3.3	Conclusion	74

Chapter FOUR

Egypt

4.0	Introduction	78
4.1	Cromer on Cultural and Racial Superiority	79
4.2	Cromer on Islam	84
4.3	Cromer on Education	90
4.4	Cromer on Egyptian Autonomy	95
4.5	The Impact of the Occupation	99
4.5.1	Wilfred Scawen Blunt (1840-1922)	99
4.5.2	Qasim Amin (1865-1908)	103
4.5.3	'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Jabarti (1753-1825)	108
4.6	Conclusion	113

Chapter FIVE

India

5.0	Introduction	116
5.1	Colonial Perspective of India	118
5.2	The English Influence on Sir Syed	122
5.2.1	Sir Syed on Education	129
5.2.2	Syed on Women's Education	135
5.3	Conclusion	138

Chapter SIX

Conclusions 142

Bibliography

Acknowledgement

First of all, I thank Allah, the Exalted and Most Merciful without whose help I could not have completed this study.

I would also like to express my thanks to a number of people (friends, colleagues and acquaintances) who encouraged me to complete the project. I am grateful to Samia Loucif who encouraged me to complete the thesis through her incessant emails. I would also like to acknowledge the friendship of Hadia Badrah and her family during their stay in Glasgow. The warmth of their friendship made it easier to continue.

My special thanks are due to my family, my husband, Tanvir and sons, Omar and Mustafa, who were a constant source of help and encouragement to me throughout my period of study. I thank them for putting up with the highs and lows and I know that I could not have completed it without their loving support. May Allah reward them for their patience.

As a Muslim, I am aware of the importance of correctness especially with regard to matters relating to *fiqh* issues in Islam. I have endeavoured to ensure that any references I have used or any inferences made in the context of the *hijab* are correct. I seek forgiveness of Allah the Most Merciful for any errors I may have made and for which none of the above are responsible.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 General

This study is an analysis of the contextual relationship between the colonial occupation of Islamic lands through imperial hegemony and the influence this may have had on the Muslim woman's dress known as the *hijab*. Primarily it was to study why a custom practised by Muslim women, known as the *hijab*, should have become such a focus of interest for non-Muslims.

Muslim women have worn the *hijab* and observed its practice for centuries and for them it is as natural as wearing shoes or carrying an umbrella. For the Muslims, its origin comes from the religion and that is why they comply with the requirement to follow it. It therefore comes as something of a surprise to discover that the general public outside the Muslim community should take such an avid interest in its existence. Curiosity about a custom or foreign practice is not harmful; however, derogatory criticism that belittles and labels it as backward and uncivilised, makes it necessary to question why the hijab should invite such vehement protest. In this context it became necessary to question the reason for the hostility in order to ascertain the reasons for the objections.

The contemporary understanding of the *hijab* is denoted through use of the scarf as a head cover which has come to be accepted as the generic term representing the Islamic dress. In reality the term *hijab* represents a complex vocabulary that encompasses not only the physical but also

encapsulates the conceptualisation of modesty, behaviour and social interaction. Hence, whilst terms such as *khimar, jilbab, abaya, niqab* and *milhafa* describe the physical dress, the categories of *tabarrüj,* and *awrah* are used within the context of behavioural confines. They all, however, form part of the vocabulary that is used in the contextual analysis of *hijab.* This study is concerned with the conceptual understanding of the *hijab* by the Europeans and their association of it, with backwardness.

It was interesting to discover that the curiosity surrounding the *hijab* goes back to the days of the colonial empire and the assumptions surrounding the hijab, the women and culture of Islam were all established by the men who travelled and served the empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is the understanding of the author that the inexperience of the Western travellers coupled with their ignorance of the new cultures formed the basis for a colonial discourse that was euphemistically charged with racial innuendoes. Visitors to the colonies were conditioned by the writings on what they were expected to find in the orient. They were also conditioned to act with disgust towards anything that disagreed with their own culture and tradition. Under these conditions, Muslim women covered by the veil represented the worst case scenario. The clothing used by the women to cover themselves also came to signify backwardness to the Western eye.

This study, like any previous scholarship was borne out of a personal interest in the subject. As a Muslim woman wearing the *hijab* and living in the West, I was unable to view the situation from the periphery. I had become one of those *hijab*-wearing women that were written about in the media and discussed about critically during intellectual discursive exercises. The study was educational in more ways than I had anticipated. Through it, I was able to understand certain factors and key issues that clarified previously unknown matters. Colonial discourse on

Muslim women and the *hijab* were inextricably linked with the Western pre-conceived perception of Islam and their fear of its unknown precepts. It was almost as if by disparaging the customs of the religion, they could reduce it to the level of insignificance and hence render it harmless.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are four:

1.2.1 To determine the source of colonial prejudice and establish its reasons

1.2.2 To establish that the European powers did use ethnocentric evaluation to justify their imperial ideology.

1.2.3 To verify that the colonial experience may have impacted upon the contemporary perception of *hijab* as an obstacle for development.

1.2.4 To establish that the *hijab* is indeed an Islamic practice as evidenced from the Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah.*

1.3 Research Methodology

The research study was primarily conceptualised as an exploratory study of the Islamic practice of *hijab,* its interaction with colonialist powers in two developing countries; one predominantly Muslim and the other with a large Muslim population. The study comprised of two distinct areas; the religious and the historical. The former was researched using primary sources of the Holy *Qur'an* and *Hadith* interpretations in as much as was available and confirmed as being reliable primary sources.

The latter was also research used primary data from the copious material provided by the early narratives. Writers such as Burton, Lane, Beckford and Carlyle to name a few that were used, all provided an insight into how

conceptualisation of other races helped to develop the misogynist view of women, especially eastern women, that came subsequently to be accepted as the norm. Personal narratives by Evelyn Baring, and Syed Ahmed proved very useful in accessing their own views and beliefs that conditioned them into recording their own personal prejudices.

Observations derived from the above primary texts were examined to determine whether there was any commonality of view that would provide conclusive evidence of ethnocentricity amongst the recorded data. Concepts and assumptions thus gleaned from the above data were analysed to prove the central argument of the thesis.

1.4 Background

The last few decades of the twentieth century witnessed the resurgence of the *hijab* amongst young women around the world. This phenomenon was unique in its composition as it was a global occurrence and was not confined to areas specific to Muslims. Also relevant to this revival was the fact that the new generation of Muslims who had taken the decision to wear the *hijab* did so without compulsion from members of their family as had been implied by some earlier feminists. This return to the *hijab* by the young Muslims was due to global socio-political events that brought Muslims and Islam under new scrutiny.

The watershed that marked the change may be attributed to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, which was followed by further racial conflict in the region. The experience of the Arabs during the conflict raised an awareness of their identity as Muslims and their need for cohesiveness in the face of increasing alienation. The influence upon the young was especially significant as they saw this as an opportunity to unite in their belief and thereby strengthen themselves against the common enemy, United States

imperialism, and the State of Israel. These were now seen as the new faces of imperialism.

The emerging conflict in the Middle East became synonymous with the revival of the *hijab*, which witnessed its rebirth on the college campuses of Egypt, Turkey and Algeria. The new generation of Muslims discovered in the hijab an identity that they had previously lacked. With the *hijab* they were now able to declare their identity as Muslims in a subtle yet unobtrusive manner. The *hijab* therefore became symbolic of the Muslim identity representing their association with Islam. Through the *hijab*, women were able to transmit tacitly their message of association.

The young Muslims had consequently reversed the trend set in motion by the Egyptian feminist Huda Sha'rawi in 1923 when she removed her face veil. This unveiling was considered the symbolic liberation that the feminists had been campaigning to acquire. The feminists had gained a victory by acquiring public acceptance for their action and the incident set a precedent for the future. The early Egyptian feminists had set the trend, but soon the movement to remove the veil became popular and it gained momentum amongst the upper classes. Over the next decade or so Egyptian women increasingly followed the move to Europeanise themselves by following the dictates of Cromer and other liberal Egyptians who had influenced their conversion.

The modernising influence of the West also affected the leaders of many Muslim states who transformed their traditional countries into models of the West. The most notable among these was the examples of Turkey and Iran. Both traditional Muslim states were transformed through their leadership into the archetypal Western model. Turkey, which had hitherto played the role of the spiritual leader for the Muslims, became under the authoritative control of Kemal Ataturk, a secular state. During his

leadership (1923-1938), many traditional practices including the veil were forcefully abolished. He had turned Turkey into a modern new republic where European education and ideas were allowed to flourish. For almost the next fifty years the Muslim women's movement through its now frequent interaction with the West, continued to be influenced by its powerful media driven modernising process.

The conflict between the Muslim East and the secular West became the central focus for hostility between the two cultures. And just as the colonial leaders used the *hijab* as a mechanism to dislodge tradition, it was subsequently used by feminists to promote their ideology.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

One of the pertinent limiting factors of this study has been the restriction of access to primary Arabic sources due to time constraints providing access to the work of the early Muslim scholars and their prolific research in the area of Qur'an and *Hadith* interpretations.

A final comment about the content of this study. As a believing Muslim practising the *hijab* I would like clarify that I believe implicitly in the revelations of the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet and all that is contained within them. As a Muslim I also believe in the requirements of the *hijab* to cover the awrah of the woman and as such have tried to qualify this in my study. The investigations of this research, especially with regard to chapter two, are therefore a substantiation of this belief.

CHAPTER TWO

Hijab in Islamic Literature

2.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is twofold. First of all to investigate the origin of the Islamic dress known by its generic name of the *hijab* in order to understand its importance for the Muslim woman. Secondly, to clarify the issue of the face veil and ascertain whether this is part of the mandatory *hijab*.

Verification of the use of the *hijab* is taken from evidence in the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet as these form the basis of the custom for all those who follow the practice. Muslims have followed the practice of the *hijab* in various forms since it's revelation as a recommendation for women and because it was the practice of the Prophet's wives. For the Muslims to accept and follow a *Sunnah* of the Prophet was an easy matter since they only required proof that any matter they followed was authentic.

The *hijab* as a concept encompasses not only the physical covering of the head as observed by contemporary women, it also covers many other aspects of dress and demeanour, which are encapsulated within the context of the term 'the Islamic dress', (*al-libas al-Islami*). The context of the dress here refers to the covering of the *awrah* with the *libas* and hence it is relevant to both men and women, although the requirements for each are different. As well as the dress, the Muslim is expected to conform to socially acceptable behaviour within the parameters of society, all of which are contained within the context of their social circle.

2.2 General Background

The Muslims have two sources of reference for their guidance. The Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of the Holy Prophet. The Holy Qur'an is the primary source of reference and it is to this that Muslims would turn to seek guidance for their every day life. For issues which are not clearly understood from the Qur'an, an explanation is sought through the Traditions of the Holy Prophet. The importance of *Hadith* in providing guidance to many complex issues is important.

> "The life of the Prophet, his discourses and utterances, his actions, his silent approval and even his passive conduct, constituted next to the Qur'an the second most important source of law for the young Muslim empire".[1]

The methods employed by the early generation of *Hadith* scholars were exacting in its demands for scrupulousness and accuracy. Interpretation of Qur'anic Text was also a difficult issue requiring special effort to avoid misinterpretation of the meaning.

For the Muslims, the Qur'an contains the complete code of conduct and behaviour for all eventualities and circumstances. It is accepted by Muslims that understanding the Qur'an can be complex and difficult for many people without the aid of recognised scholarly explanation. The scholars who were able to draw a legal judgement direct from the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* were known as the *Mujtahid Mutlaq* scholars. These scholars due to their in depth understanding and study of *fiqh* issues were able to provide interpretations and explanations that were considered valid and reliable.

Since an interpretation of the Qur'anic text into any other language, is still only an author's own understanding of the meaning, this raised a serious issue of reliability. Gradually over the last few decades, the number of interpretations in circulation have been steadily increasing thus exacerbating the potential for confusion. This has been coupled with the general consensus among lay people that interpretation of the Qur'an is within their own capability or through understanding any of the available rendition.

The position of the acceptability of *Hadith* literature is also problematic as many Traditions have been interpreted in a way that contradicts the Qur'an. The test of reliability for any scholarly work on *Hadith* has been its consensus with Qur'an and other related *Hadith.*

Although researchers into Islamic scholarship are warned about the dangers of fake and unreliable *Hadith*, the task of eliminating the authentic from the dubious is exacerbated by the availability of numerous written works on the subject. Hence a certain degree of knowledge and discernment on the subject is necessary to be able to differentiate between the authentic and the forgery.

It is with respect to this last point that the relevance of competency in classical Arabic becomes apparent. Since it is through the medium of classical Arabic that the work of the earliest scholars becomes available. For example, in order to reference the original *Hadith* collection of *Sahih* Bukhari, recourse to the Arabic text and an explanation by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani in his book *Fath al-Bari*[2] on an explanation of *Sahih* Bukhari would reveal quite different results to the explanation given by Muhsin

[1] Siddiqi Muhammad Zubayr, *Hadith* Literature: Its origin, development and special features pg 5, ITS, 1993

[2] Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, Fath al Bari published Cairo 1319

Khan[3] who has attempted to interpret *Sahih* Bukhari in contradiction to the rules of the early scholars by transposing literal meanings to *Mutashabihat Hadith.*

To minimise the possibility of confusion, one option may have been to teach the Qur'an in its original language after command of the language had been accomplished. However, with the gradual spread of Islam to various parts of the world, it became apparent that if Islam as a religion was to be understood by different people, the Qur'an had to be translated from the Arabic into the language of the indigenous peoples.

The process of transmitting the message of the Qur'an and teaching the *Sunnah* of the Prophet through *Hadith* narration was undertaken by scholars who dedicated their lives to the study and interpretation of the religious Script spending many decades in search of authentic material. This can be shown by the example of one well-known scholar, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali [d.764/1363] who spent many years in search of knowledge, even though by contemporary standards he was considered very knowledgeable.

> "At the outset of his career he studied under Ahmad al-Radakani at Tus, and then proceeded to Nisabur where he frequented the classes of the Imam al-Haramayn. He laboured most diligently, so that in a brief space of time he graduated (*takharraj*) and became a master, composing his own works in the lifetime of his preceptor with whom he remained until the latter's demise. He then left for the Camp-Court and joined Nizam al-Mulk, who accorded him much honour and respect. With the vizier there was a group of men of virtue, who debated with him He triumphed over them, and his name became celebrated and his fame spread. The vizier conferred upon him the professorship of the *Nizamiya* and there at Baghdad his followers grew in multitude until they outnumbered even the retinues of the emirs and magnates. The people of Iraq were greatly pleased with him. Then in the month of *Dhu'l-Qa'da* in the year 488 (1095) he gave up the entirety of his worldly estate

[3] Khan Dr Muhsin, "The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari", Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1994

and followed the way of renunciation and solitude".[4]

Similarly, the early centuries of Islam witnessed many other scholars who followed the same guiding principles as al-Ghazali in the search for original source. In the context of the present study the interpretations of Qur'an and *Hadith* used for clarifying the issues of *hijab* are particularly pertinent, as the judgement made on the basis of the text used will determine the course of action taken. It is the understanding of the author that the interpretation of religious text by contemporary scholars will inevitably contrast with the interpretation of the scholars of the period of the *Salaf*.[5]

Part of the problem of interpretation and understanding stems from the fact that many of the interpretation of the Qur'an and *Hadith* presently available, do not conform to the parameters and guidelines followed by the early *fuqaha*. In the earlier interpretations of religious text, both Qur'an and *Hadith*, took into consideration that the classical Arabic of the Qur'an could not be interpreted in the same way as an ordinary piece of Arabic literature. The early scholars also took into account the diversity of the language and attempted to interpret the text in accordance with the guiding principle that it was impossible for *Ayats* of the Qur'an to contradict one another. In the same way the *Hadith* of the Prophet could not contradict the message of the Qur'an.

[4] Al-Ghazali, "The remembrance of death and the afterlife", translated by T.J Winter, p xv, published by Islamic Text Society, 1995

[5] The scholars who lived during the first three hundred years after the Prophet.

2.3 Importance of Correct Interpretation

A closer understanding of the Qur'an is therefore only possible through the interpretations of scholars who have explained the Qur'an by adhering to guidelines which regulate that *Surahs* and *Ayats* must not contradict each other. They based their understanding on *Surah* 3:7 of the Qur'an which has the meaning:

> "Allah is the One who has sent down to the Prophet the Book that contains *Muhkamat Ayats*, which are the foundations of the Book. And other *Ayats* which are the *Mutashabihat Ayats*. Those who have deviation and perversity in their hearts they follow the *Mutashabihat Ayats* seeking discord and searching for un-befitting meanings based on their delusions."[6]

This verse clarifies a very important issue in Qur'anic interpretation. It states that the verses in the Qur'an are divided into two types. The *Muhkamat Ayats* are grouped under the category of clear and explicit and leaving no room for ambiguity. The other category lists the verses as *Mutashabihat,* which means that the meanings of these *Ayats* are not explicit or they may have several meanings according to the Arabic language and the rules of the religion.

According to the rules followed by the scholars of the *Salaf,* these *Ayats* had to be interpreted following the rules that verses from the Qur'an cannot contradict each other.

Hence the verse in the Qur'an *Surah* Shura:11 which has the meaning:

"There is nothing like Him".

The scholars have established that since this verse has the meaning, that *Allah* does not resemble His creation, it was therefore impossible for another *Ayat* to be interpreted in a way that resembled *Allah* to creation. This would negate the meaning of *Surah Shura Ayat* 11.

[6] The Holy Qur'an Surah 3:7

Imam Abu Hanifah has said;

"The Creator does not resemble His creation".[7]

The methodology of the *Salaf* consisted of giving general explanations by interpreting the Qur'an and by giving meanings that befitted the perfection of *Allah* and by not assigning interpretations that contradicted this rule. This also applies to the interpretations of *Hadith*, since it is accepted by Muslims that the Prophet could not have contradicted the Qur'an.

Scholars of the *Salaf* have explained *Surah Qalam ayat* 42 as having the meaning: 'a Day of anguish and hardship'.[8]

However, the *mushabbihah* (the resemblers[9]) insist on taking the literal meaning of the word and attribute 'the shin' to Allah by saying *saq* literally means 'shin'. It is clear that if the *Ayats* are interpreted based on the literal meanings, this will lead to numerous contradictions. Therefore, the scholars of Islam have ascribed proper and acceptable meanings to the *mutashabihat ayat* and the *mutashabihat Hadith* in accordance with the religion, the language and by referring them to the clear *muhkamat ayat*.

The interpretations of the Qur'an that have not been done according to the rules mentioned above will result in a literal meaning being assigned to the Qur'anic verses and *Hadith*, which could result in *Ayats* of the Qur'an contradicting each other and *Hadith* that contradict other *Hadith* or the Qur'an.

---

[7] "The ^Aqidah of Ibn ^Asakir", Damascus, 1332

[8] Imam al-Fakhr as-Raziyy in his Explanation of the Qur'an, vol 30 pp 94, Imam al-Bayhaqiyy in his book, Al-'Asma' was-Sifat pp 245 and Fath-al-Bari, vol 13 page 428

[9] Wortabet J, and Porter H, Wortabet's Dictionary, p 318, English-Arabic Librairie du Liban

2.3.1 Rules of the Religion

The rules contained within the text of the Qur'an, and clarified by the living example and Traditions of the Prophet together form the basis of regulations that Muslims would use to guide themselves. The rules of the religion are specified under two categories; (*Fard al-Ayn*) the personal obligatory being the obligations of every individual and the (*Fard-e-Kifayah*) being the obligations of the community, whereby even if a few individuals in a community fulfilled it, the entire community would be absolved of its obligations.

The test of the soundness of *Hadith* is based on the chain of narration and the reliability of the source. A *Hadith* therefore, which is supported by a complete uninterrupted chain of authorities leading back to the Prophet via a Companion, would be known as a *Musnad*, a term which literally means 'supported'.[10] After the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, Muslims can also use guidance given by the scholars for clarification of issues. The *ijma*[11], which is the consensus of opinion of those *Mujtahid Mutlaq* scholars who are able to deduce scholarly consensus and judgement direct from the Qur'an and *Hadith* based upon their knowledge and understanding of the rules of the religion. A *Hadith* that is reliable cannot contradict another *Hadith* that has been accepted as authentic and similarly a *Hadith* cannot contradict the Qur'an. Only interpretations by scholars who have complied with the rules as already mentioned may be assumed to be reliable.

---

[10] Siddiqi, *Hadith* p 11
[11] Siddiqi, *Hadith* p 113-14

2.4 Linguistics of Hijab

The noun *Hijab* comes from the verb *Hajaba*, which means to 'hide from view or to conceal'. The Dictionary of Modern Arabic has an extensive list of meanings among which are:

> "to veil, cover, screen, shelter, seclude; to hide, obscure; to make imperceptible, invisible, conceal; keep in seclusion. Cover, wrap, drape, curtain; woman's veil; screen, partition etc."[12]

The word itself has undergone a transformation over the years and has come to denote all aspects of concealment, such as the donning of a loose clothing to disguise the wearer's physical dimensions, domestic seclusion, as well as a description of the deportment of the wearer. The semantic development of the word to its present usage has been seen as the result of religious affiliations and cultural settings as well as geographic influences.

> "Semantically and legally, that is, regarding both the terms and also the parameters of its application, Islamic interpretation extended the concept of *hijab*...On the one hand, the semantic association of domestic segregation (*hijab*) with garments to be worn in public (*jilbab, khimar*) resulted in the use of the term *hijab* for concealing garments that women wore outside of their houses".[13]

Consequently, the word came to represent domestic seclusion of the woman as well as concealing garments worn outside the home and was used interchangeably to refer to either. The term *hijab* therefore is used by some to refer to the concealment of women within their homes.

In remote villages where segregation is still practised, women's apartments are distinct from the rest of the family dwelling and its access is restricted to the immediate members of the family. These apartments serve as *hijab* or *purdah* for the women. The *hijab* when used in the

---

[12] The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic p 156

[13] Stowasser Freyer Barbara, "Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretations", page 92 OUP, New York 1994

form of a particular dress style fulfils the criteria of concealment while at the same time allowing the women to participate more actively in the public sphere. *Fadwa el Guindi*[14] refers to this as *al-ziyy al-Islami*, (the Islamic dress), and it has been adapted by women across the Islamic community to comply with the code for the Islamic dress.

> "The *ziyy* refers to women's and men's form of dress which conforms to a code. The dress code reflects the community's conceptualisation of modesty, which is meaningful and makes sense according to their beliefs and rules... Therefore, al-*hijab* is essentially what forms a separation between two worlds or two spaces: that of men versus that of women".[15]

In contemporary terms, the *hijab* is understood to reflect a specific form of dress, however, it also signifies a commitment to a discrete code of conduct and the awareness of the concept of *hijab* provides a protection from the occurrence or temptation of behaviour that violates the Islamic code of behaviour.

The semantic shift in the application of the word, where *hijab* has been used to describe the domestic seclusion and the woman's clothing as well as her behaviour in public, has been seen by some as a progression of social conditions. Stowasser, describes this as the inevitable consequence of socio-economic conditions;

> ".. the Islamic call for women's *hijab* has changed its tenor. On the one hand, the religious message is now addressed to the Muslim woman herself rather than to her man (formerly her guardian in all things); this is so because the Muslim woman now listens to the radio, watches television and, most of all, is now able to read. On the other hand, the Islamic call is now also directed at a new constituency, the women of the urban middle and lower

[14] Fadwa el Guindi, "Veiling *Infitah* with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement", 'Social Problems', vol 28, no 4, April 1981
[15] El-Guindi Veiling *Infitah*

> middle class, in a quasi-'democratised' fashion. Inasmuch as its target audience are Muslim women often compelled to work, the Islamic call for the *hijab* has also shifted in semantic content. By socio-economic necessity, the obligation to observe the *hijab* now often applies more to female 'garments' (worn outside the house) than it does to the ancient paradigmatic feature of women's domestic 'seclusion'".[16]

A systematic breakdown of the word reveals that it encompasses many different aspects of the requirements that come under the banner of *hijab*. Edward Lane, in his lexicon[17] elaborates on the semantics of hijab:

> *Hijab* [A thing that prevents hinders, debars, or precludes:] a thing that veils, conceals, hides, covers, or protects; because it prevents seeing or beholding: a thing or body that intervenes between two things, or between two bodies; which is said to be the primary signification]

Hence *hijab* can describe both the cause and object of concealment. The word *hijab* therefore encompasses both the physical and the metaphorical or phrased another way, both the concrete and conceptual. Articles of clothing that come under the banner of *hijab*, may be explained by using descriptive words such as *jilbab,*[18] (dress, gown; woman's dress) *khimar* [19](veil covering head and face of a woman), or *niqab*[20] (to veil the face)[21]. To understand the significance of hijab without religious or cultural context is to reduce its importance for the Muslim. El-Guindi in her study explains the importance of keeping the objective in perspective.

> "When the veil is considered out of its context, stripped of cultural meaning and social dynamics, it tends to be treated as an exotic, backward custom. However, it should be pointed out that what is

[16]Stowasser , Women, p 129
[17] Lane Edward William, Arabic-English Lexicon, Williams and Norgate, London and Edinburgh, 1863
[18] Wehr Dictionary p129
[19] Wehr Dictionary p261
[20] Wehr Dictionary p 989
[21] Lane Arabic p 440 and 516

called 'the veil' in English does not even correspond to any single term in Arabic. There are many Arabic words that could be translated as veil in English. Aside from semantics, this is because the institution of veiling is complexly differentiated. For example, there are several different kinds of head and face covers for women (and for men) in the Islamic East, some of which are extensions of general body cover".[22]

2.5 The Requisites of *Hijab*

As we have seen, the word *hijab* has a diverse application and is used interchangeably to represent among other things, clothing, behaviour, and segregation. The contemporary usage of the word appears to represent predominantly the headscarf as a potent signifier of the constituent of an Islamic dress.

However, as anyone travelling to the Muslim regions of the world will have witnessed, there is no such formula for a specific dress that qualifies for the description of *hijab*. Without a prescriptive formula for an Islamic dress, where do the women in the different countries around the world obtain their understanding of exactly what constitutes as fulfilling the hijab? The specific articles used to cover the head and body are dictated by cultural nuances. The factors that make it pertinent however, are classified as the area to be covered. *Hadith* literature provides evidence of the parts of a woman's body that are required to be covered in the presence of *ghair mahram* (male strangers).

[22] Fadwa el Guindi, Veiling *Infitah*, p 474

2.5.1 The *Awrah* Analysed

The *awrah* of a man or woman are those parts of the human body, which a Muslim is required to cover in the presence of non-*mahram.*[23]

> "*awrah*: the private parts, the parts of the person which it is indecent to expose in public. For a man it is what is between the navel and the knee and for a free woman, all except the face and hands".[24]

The issue of *awrah* is pertinent since it dictates the parameters of the *hijab*, and this is central to our study. The ambiguity of the exact requirements of the *hijab* is one of the primary causes of confusion and debate on the issue. Since the matter of the *awrah* is relevant for both male and female and since it will help our understanding of the ruling, we will briefly examine the *awrah* of the male according to some of the schools of *fiqh*. According to Imam Abu Hanifa, the *awrah* of the male is between the navel and the knee, including the two. According to Imam Ash-Shafii, it is between the navel and the knee. According to Imam Malik, the *awrah* of the male is the sexual organ and the area around it.

A *Hadith* relates an incident when the Prophet was sitting in a place with his thigh uncovered and Umar and Abu Bakr entered, but the Prophet did not cover his thigh. However, when Uthman entered, the Prophet did cover his thigh. When Aisha asked why he had done this, he said, in meaning: "should I not be shy in from of whom, even the angels are shy".[25]

---

[23] Mahrem denotes a relationship either by marriage or by close blood ties of such a degree that marriage is permanently prohibited. To a woman, a mahrem is either her husband or any male relative with whom marriage is forbidden.

[24] Bewley Aisha, A Glossary of Islamic Terms, p 5 Ta-Ha Publishers, London 1998

[25] Sahih Muslim: Chapter on virtues of the companions, under the sub-title of the Virtues of Uthman. Also related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih in the chapter on prayer under the sub-heading on what is mentioned about the thigh. Also related by Ahmad in his Musnad volume 3, pp 102. From the route of the companioun Anas Ibn Malik, who said that the Prophet on the day of the battle of Khaybar unveiled from his thigh the garment that covered his lower body, Anas said 'until indeed I was looking at the whiteness of the thigh of the Prophet of Allah'.

To those people who state that the uncovering of the thigh was a license given to the Prophet, the scholars have said that such specifications may only be confirmed by proof and since none of the scholars said it was specific, then it has been recommended to abide by the *Hadith.*

When the work of Maududi is analysed it reveals conflicting results in relation to the matter of *awrah.* He has remarked extensively on the status of women and the *purdah* in his book[26] where he appears to present his personal view as justification to support the validity of the face veil (*niqab*).

> "A person who considers carefully the words of the Quranic verse, their well known and generally accepted meaning and the practice during the time of the Holy Prophet, cannot dare deny the fact that the Islamic *Shariah* enjoins upon the woman to hide her face from the other people, and this has been the practice of the Muslim women ever since the time of the Holy Prophet himself. Though the veil has not been specified in the Qur'an, it is Quranic in spirit. The Muslim women living at the time of the Holy Prophet to whom the Qur'an was revealed had made it a regular part of their dress outside the house, and even at that time it was called *Niqab*, the veil."[27]

Maududi appears specifically to say that the face should be covered by the veil implying that it comes under the category of obligation. The wives of the Prophet used the face veil, however, it was not an obligation upon all women. The act has been classified as a *Sunnah* and it is rewardable if followed but a woman does not commit a sin if it is not observed. One of the criticisms directed against the *ulema* and those seeking to teach the religious knowledge, is their unwillingness to differentiate between the obligatory and the supererogatory thus causing confusion in matters of religion. It is important for the women to know the parameters of *awrah* since they are responsible for being aware of the requirements of *hijab.*

[26] Mawdudi Sayyid Abul A'la, *Purdah and the status of woman in Islam* p 248-257
[27] Maududi, *Purdah*, p 252

The evidence for the *awrah* is present in the Traditions and that is explored in the next section.

2.5.2 Evidence of the *Awrah* for the female from *Hadith*

Evidence for the parameters of the awrah is obtained from *Hadith* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. The Scholars determined from *Hadith* narration's that the *awrah* of the female in front of non-*mahram* males is the whole body, except the face and hands. This was further confirmed by consensus that it was permissible for the woman to leave the house thus covered. This is verified by Al-Haytamiyy in his book[28]

> "the conclusion of our *madhhab* is that the *Imam* of *Haramayn* has transferred the consensus that it is permissible for the women to go out exposing the face and it is upon the man to lower his gaze".[29]
> In his second book[30] he said:
>
> "Verily, it is permissible for her to expose her face with consensus and it is upon the man to lower the gaze".[31]

This is subject to the proviso that the above consensus rests on the assumption that it is not obligatory upon her to cover the face if she does not perceive the threat of *fitnah* (temptation, trial infatuation). If she perceives the possibility of *fitnah*, then she may choose to cover the face. Al-Haytamiyy also said quoting An-Nawawiyy:

> "If she fears that someone looking at her will lead to *fitnah*, then she should cover her face. Nevertheless, we already said that it is not obligatory upon her to cover her face, as has been confirmed".[32]

---

[28] Al-Haytamiyy, "Al-Fatawiyy al-Kubra" Vol I, Beirut (year of publication not known)
[29] Al-Haytamiyy, Al-Fatawiyy, Vol I page 199
[30] Al-Haytamiyy "Hashiyah Sharh al-Idah ^ala al-Manasik of An-Nawawawiyy", Lebanon (year of publication not known)
[31] Al-Haytamiyy Hashiyah page 276

The scholars therefore confirmed that it was not obligatory upon the woman to cover the face, but it is *Sunnah* to do so since it was the practice of the Prophet's wives. It is up to the man to lower his gaze. The evidence from the *Hadith* clarifies the issue of whether the face and hands are *awrah* and it is made clear by further proofs from another incident, which took place during the Farewell *Hajj* of the Prophet.

> "Yahya related to me from Malik from Ibn Shihab from Sulayman ibn Yasar that Abdullah ibn Abbas said, "Al-Fadl ibn Abbas was riding behind the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, when a woman from the Khathama tribe came to him to ask him for a *fatwa*. Al-Fadl began to look at her, and she at him, and the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, turned Fadl's face away to the other side. The woman said, 'Messenger of Allah, Allah's making the *hajj* obligatory finds my father a very old man, unable to stay firm on his riding-beast. Can I do *hajj* for him?', and he said, 'Yes.' This was during the farewell *hajj*."[i]

This is also related on the same *Hadith* by at-Tirmidhi that:

> "She kept looking at him, liking his beauty. Al-Abbas (the father of the two brothers) said: Oh Messenger of Allah! Why did you turn your cousin's neck? He said, with the meaning: I saw a young man and a young woman and I did not feel safe that the devil would leave you alone. Ibn Abbas said this was after the revelation of the verse of *Hijab*".[33]

An exposition of this *Hadith* is necessary in order to explain the legal requirements of *hijab*. One of the primary reasons for the confusion surrounding the parameters of *hijab*, is the air of mystery encompassing the subject matter. Ibn Hajar said in his explanation on the above *Hadith*:

> "Ibn Battal said in the *Hadith*, the commandment to lower the gaze is if he is afraid of *fitnah*. Consequently, if there is no danger of *fitnah*, the man will not need to lower the gaze. Ibn Battal said, supported by the saying of the Prophet, that he did not move the face of Al-Fadl until he settled his eyes on her, liking her beauty.

---

[32] Al-Haytamiyy, Al-Fatawiyy, p 178

[33] Ja mi ^at-Tirmidhi, Chapter on *Hajj*, section on Arafat is a place for stopping.

> The Prophet feared for *fitnah*. Ibn Battal said: In that there is fighting against the *nafs* of the son of Adam and the weakness regarding looking at women and liking the sight".
>
> "There is proof in that saying that it is not obligatory upon the common *Mu'min* woman to follow the same rules as the wives of the Prophet. If it were obligatory upon all women to cover their faces, the Prophet would necessarily have commanded this Khathamiyyaz woman to cover her face when he turned Al-Fadhl's face away. *Ibn Battal* said in this is also a proof that the covering of the woman's face is not obligatory since the *Ijma* is that the woman in prayer may open her face even if the non-*mahram* sees her".[34]

It is further related by Abu Daud[35] and Ibn Abi Shayba[36] that:

> If the silence of the Prophet regarding the Khathamiyyaz woman covering her face were because of *Ihram* (in the state of pilgrimage), he would have commanded her to use *Mujafah* to avoid contacting the face. However he did not do this. Hence, when he did not command the woman to cover her face in that large gathering of people, of which Ibn Jabir said of this *Hajj* after the Prophet left Medina that the people extended as far as the eye could see in front, behind, left and right. We know from this that it is not obligatory; if it were, he would have commanded her.

The Scholars have used the above *Hadith* to validate the ruling that a woman's face and hands are not part of her *awrah* and hence it is not obligatory upon her to cover the face and hands, it is however, *sunnah* and if she were to do so, it would be deserving of reward. This directly contradicts the verdict passed by Maududi[37] regulating that women are obliged to cover their faces when going out. It would appear from the above disclosure that the reason the face veil was used in Egypt and continues to be used in many parts of the Muslim world is due to the

[34] Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, Fath al_Bari, Vol 11 page 10
[35] Sunan Abi-Daud, chapter of al-Manasik in section on status of female pilgrims on covering their faces.
[36] Musannaf of Ibn Abi Shayba Vol 3, chapter on Hajj p 284 in section on status of female pilgrims on covering their faces.
[37] Maududi, *Purdah* p 248-252

understanding that the face is part of *awrah.*

Another *Hadith* is related by Ibn Hibban[38] who referred to Ibn Abbas related a narration with the meaning:

"And a beautiful woman among the best of the people in beauty was praying behind the Prophet. Some of the people went in front to the first row in order not to see her. Others delayed in order to join a later row, so if they bowed, they could look at the woman from under their armpit. Allah then revealed the verse *Surah Hijr Ayat* 24, regarding her".[39]

The scholars have explained that the essence of this implies that the Prophet did not say to the woman, 'go and sit in your house', or 'cover your face'. If he did not say that, we know that to be fearful of *fitnah* is no reason to change the rules of Allah. The consensus therefore, of the scholars is that it is permissible for a woman to show her face and upon the man to lower the gaze, will not be invalidated because of the opinions of some later people.

This *ijma* has been transferred by Ibn Hajar Al-Haytami[40].

It is also related in the *Sunan* of Abi Daud[41], that Aishah related the following narration with the meaning: that her sister Asma once came to visit the Prophet clad in thin clothes which revealed her body. The Prophet averted his gaze and said the following which has the meaning:

> '*Asma* when a woman begins to menstruate, nothing should be seen of her except this and this' and he pointed to his face and hands.

It appears therefore that there is enough evidence from reliable authentic *Hadith* to substantiate the parameters of awrah for the woman.

---

[38] Ibn Hibban, Al-Ihsan Bi^tartib *sahih* Ibn Hibban

[39] Ibn Hibban, Al-Ihsan vol I page 309

[40] Al-Haytamiyy *Hashiyah Sharh al-Idah* and by Al-Qadi^Iyad, a Maliki Scholar

[41] *Sunan* of Abu Daud, Chapter of *al-libas*, in the section on what the woman may display of her beauty.

2.6 *Hijab* in the Qur'an

Regulation for the *hijab* has its foundation in the Qur'an and it is from both the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet that scholars have been able to ascertain the requirements. The injunctions on *hijab*, both for clothing worn outside and how to behave in public and interact with members of the opposite sex, were found in the verses of the Qur'an. There were some injunctions on the classification of *hijab* which were addressed specifically to the wives of the Prophet in their special capacity as Mothers of the Believers. These commands therefore had specific relevance, which was applicable for them, but nevertheless as models for emulation contained recommendations which were also appropriate for all Muslim women. The Qur'anic verse that has been established as the one that introduced *hijab* for the wives is *Surah* Ahzab verse 53 has the meaning:

> "O you who believe do not enter the houses of the Prophet unless permission is given to you for a meal, not waiting for its cooking being finished-but when you are invited, enter and when you have taken the food, then disperse-not seeking to listen to talk; surely this give the Prophet trouble."[42]

One contemporary interpretation of this verse is given in the following explanation:

> "The term *hijab* denotes anything that intervenes between two things, or conceals, or shelters or protects the one from the other; it may be rendered according to the context as barrier, obstacle, partition, screen, curtain, veil etc., in both the concrete and abstract connotations of these words. The prohibition to approach the Prophet's wives otherwise than from behind a screen or curtain may be taken literally - as indeed it was taken by most of the Companions of the Prophet - or metaphorically, indicating the exceptional reverence due to these 'mothers of the faithful'".[43]

Close members of the family with whom the women were permitted to appear without *hijab* were excluded from the above directive. The list of

[42] M.H. Shakir interpretation Holy Qur;an,
[43] Asad interpretation Holy Qur'an

this category was subsequently revealed in a later verse with the meaning:

> "There is no blame on them in respect of their fathers, nor their brothers, nor their brothers' sons, nor their sisters' sons, nor their own women, nor of what their right hands possess; and be careful of Allah; surely Allah is a witness of all things".[44]

In terms of applicability of context, we have already mentioned that *hijab* represents more than the dress. It prescribes to an acceptable form of behaviour and restrains from committing the undesirable, the latter also termed as *tabarruj,* is especially condemned as an unbecoming behaviour and un-Islamic. *Tabarruj* is described as the behaviour of women as displayed during pre-Islamic days and it was strictly condemned as undesirable. Lane's describes *tabarruj* as:

> "She (a woman) showed or displayed her finery, or ornaments, and beauties of person or form or countenance, to men, or to strangers, or to men distantly related to her; to do which is culpable; but to do so to the husband is not: or she showed her face: or she showed the beauties of her neck and face; or she did so exhibiting a pretty look: or she showed or displayed her finery, or ornaments, and what excites a man's lust".[45]

Stowasser explains the meaning of the word *tabarruj* as having relevance in contemporary times.

> "In general terms, *tabarruj* meant a woman's public display of her physical self, including her unrestricted gait and the wearing of revealing garments that aided to display physical features, ornaments, makeup, and the like. Today, the meaning of *tabarruj* includes everything from uncovered hair to the elaborate salon-type coiffure, the hairpiece, and the wig; facial foundation, powder, and blushers; lid colour and mascara for the eyes; manicure and enamel for the nails; revealing dress of any sort, but also including all Western clothing in generic terms, especially if it is of the couture kind or has intentions of being fashionable in the Western sense. [46]

---

[44] Shakir interpretation of Holy Qur'an, 33:55
[45] Lane, Arabic p 180
[46] Stowasser Women pp 98
from Ni'mat Sidqi, *al-Tabarruj* (Cairo: Dar al-I'tisam, 1975), pp 1-62

> "While the exact definition of what constitutes *tabarruj* has varied over the ages, its condemnation by the custodians of communal morality has always included the Qur'anic reference that it is un-Islamic, a matter of *jahilliya* (33:33) and thus a threat to Islamic society. Applied to all women, *tabarruj* thus came to signify the very antithesis of *hijab* in the latter's extended meaning of a concealing garment worn outside the house".[47]

Hence it can be seen from this that the expression of *tabarruj* can have quite a wide general application. The warning advising caution in how women address men outside the family as well as the admonishment against *tabarruj* form part of the overall 'code' that regulates behaviour thereby ensuring that that the possibility of forbidden acts such as *zina* are prevented. Asad's explains his understanding of the clause:

> "to restrain their gaze and to guard their private parts; the latter expression may be understood both in the literal sense of covering one's private parts - i.e. modesty in dress - as well as in the metonymical sense of restraining one's sexual urges, i.e. restricting them to what is lawful, namely marital intercourse.. the lowering of one's gaze, too relates both to physical and to emotional modesty".[48]

In reference to the phrase *illą mą zahara minha*, (Qur'an 24:31) (except what may be apparent or may be allowed to be shown). As already explained above, the Prophet stated clear the regulations for awrah;

> '*Asma* when a woman begins to menstruate, nothing should be seen of her except this and this' and he pointed to his face and hands.

As regards the garment of clothing that is used for covering or concealing, Asad describes the *khimąr* (plural *khumar*) as:

---

[47] Stowasser Women, p 98

[48] Asad Holy Qur'an, explanation of 24:30 p 538

> "The noun *khimar* denotes the head-covering customarily used by Arabian women before and after the advent of Islam. According to most of the classical commentators, it was worn in pre-Islamic times more or less as an ornament and was let down loosely over the wearer's back; and since, in accordance with fashion prevalent at the time, the upper part of a woman's tunic had a wide opening in the front, her breasts were left bare. Hence, the injunction to cover the bosom by means of a *khimar* (a term so familiar to the contemporaries of the Prophet) does not necessarily relate to the use of a *khimar* as such but is rather meant to make it clear that a woman's breasts are not included in the concept of 'what may decently be apparent' of her body and should not therefore, be displayed".[49]

In modern Arabic, one of the meanings given to *juyub* is breast or bosom.[50] However, one interpretation of the word (*juyubbihinah*, plural *juyub*) also means neck.[51] As explained earlier, the possibility of confusion in Arabic translation is considerable, especially, if some contemporary attempts at interpretation have applied literal meanings to their understanding. An interpretation of the Qur'an has to conform to the rule on *Muhkamat* and *Muhtashabihat Ayats*. Women used to let their coverings fall in a way that exposed their necks. He also uses the word 'draw' for (*yad_rib_na*) this is taken from the noun (*daraba*)[52] and it means to strike. This is referring to the way the women let their *khimar* fall down so that the neck was exposed, they were told to 'strike' the left part of the garment over the right shoulder and vice versa, to cover the neck.

[49] Asad Holy Qur'an, explanation of 24:31 p 538
[50] Wehr p 150
[51] Ali Alkhili Muhammad, Dictionary of Islamic Terms, 1st edition, 1989
[52] Wehr p 538

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the issue of the *hijab* as interpreted by the early scholars. It is the conclusion of the present researcher that confusion on the exact requirements of the *hijab*, may have been due to mistaken assumptions about the customs that have been allowed to flourish.

The early Muslim scholars who lived in the first three centuries of the Islamic period had a better understanding of issues related to Islamic *fiqh* than subsequent generations of scholars. The acute understanding of *fiqh* issues by scholars of the *Salaf* was believed to be due to their natural disposition for the Arabic language as well as their accessibility to original source material providing a clearer perception of classical text. They used strict guidelines for the purpose of interpretation of Qur'an and *Hadith*. Subsequent interpretations during the last two centuries have introduced significant changes that have resulted in interpretations that contradict the early sources. A primary example is given by Maududi where he uses the maxim, 'Though the veil has not been specified in the Qur'an, it is Qur'anic in spirit'.[53] It would appear that he has used speculation and emotion to formulate his opinion and has used this as his basis for deduction. Conflicting opinions such as these have resulted in the confusion that currently prevails making it impossible to ascertain the reliable from the hearsay. It was to prevent this confusion that scholars warned against the consequences of taking judgement and knowledge without verification of authenticity.

With the spread of Islam to non-Arab lands the risk of misinterpretation became greater and the possibility of deviation increased. Cultural traits

[53] Maududi, *Purdah*, pp 252

and changes were also allowed to infiltrate into religious rulings thus making the possibility of further confusion inevitable. These changes subsequently came to be accepted as part of Islamic culture, tradition and more worryingly, as part of the religion itself. This situation was allowed to continue for centuries despite the fact, that throughout the period original source text containing authentic explanations of Islamic jurisprudence has always been available.

The situation was further exacerbated due to patriarchal influences exerted by the *ulema* who maintained a strong influence over the religious communities they served. The cultural setting of the patriarchal structure was dominated by an ideology that supported the misogynist beliefs that approved the subordination of women. The function of this ideology was served through the maintenance of a social structure that separated the genders from interaction. Most importantly, it made it difficult for the women to question the validity of injunctions imposed on them by the *ulema*.

It has emerged through this research that the 'innovations' that have been introduced into the religion have been due to an ignorance of the obligations upon individuals. This presented an opportunity for those mentioned in the Qur'anic verse:

> Those who have deviation and perversity in their hearts they follow the *Mutashabihat Ayats* seeking discord and searching for un-befitting meanings based on their delusions.[54]

Without the religious knowledge of personal obligation, it was impossible for individuals to determine for themselves, their duties and rights thus making it inevitable for them to be misguided.

[54] The Holy Qur'an Surah 3:7

The *hijab* was introduced as an Islamic practice during the Prophet's lifetime. The women observed *hijab* and yet participated in public life. It is well documented in the Traditions that they attended gatherings and lectures in the mosques, frequently asking questions to clarify issues, which were of relevance for them, and the community.

From the early days of Islam women have shared in the field of preservation of *Hadith* literature. Prominent amongst the transmitters of *Hadith* were the women of the Prophet's household.

> "After the Prophet's death, many women Companions, particularly his wives, were looked upon as vital custodians of knowledge, and were approached for instruction by the other Companions, to whom they readily dispensed the rich store which they had gathered in the Prophet's company. The names of Hafsa, Umm Habiba, Maymuna, Umm Salama, and A'isha, are familiar to every student of *Hadith* as being among its earliest and most distinguished transmitters. In particular, A'isha is one of the most important figures in the whole history of *Hadith* literature-not only as one of the earliest reporters of the largest number of *Hadith*, but also as one of their most careful interpreters."[55]

It is also well recorded that the women's role in the transmission of *Hadith* was not confined to discreet teaching and learning of a few individuals, they were known for their attendance in large gatherings.

> "Throughout the history of feminine scholarship in Islam it is clear that the women involved did not confine their study to a personal interest in traditions, or to the private coaching of a few individuals, but took their seats as students as well as teachers in public educational institutions, side by side with their brothers in faith. The colophons of many manuscripts show them both as students attending large general classes, and also as teachers, delivering regular courses of lectures."[56]

---

[55] Siddiqi, Hadith, p 117-8
[56] Siddiqi, *Hadith*, p 123

CHAPTER THREE

European Perspective

3.0 Introduction:

In this first of two chapters on the impact of British colonialism, I will be investigating the results of the occupation on the societies that were colonised. This chapter will concentrate on the period between 1882 to 1947 when Egypt was a British colony. In order to understand the development of events during this period, and due to the fact that this essay is a study of the influence of one group of people upon another, it will be necessary to look into circumstances that shaped the thinking of the men who controlled the colonies. By this I will demonstrate that the nineteenth century colonial discourse was influenced by the writings of prominent men who articulated the distinction between Western, civilised societies and non-western primitive ones. This distinction was written about in respect of the inhabitants of the colonies as well as about their culture and religion and used against them to justify the changes that were implemented.

This essay is concerned with a particular colonial treatise, to investigate the underlying assumptions that were enforced by the nineteenth century protagonists in their attempt to establish the dominance of the English people by attributing the colonised people with a secondary status. These assumptions about the characteristics of those 'others' who came under the banner of non-white natives, helped convince the colonial rulers that the inhabitants of the colonies were barbaric, ignorant and uncivilised and that

their role was to instruct them in the art of social development and bring them up to the standard of Western 'civilisation'. The emphasis therefore came to rest on standards of normality that were acceptable to the governing society and by which all others came to be judged. The ensuing hypothesis compounded the beliefs that were part of the baggage that was exported to the colonies by its administrators.

The main remit of this study into imperialism is to explore how colonial rule impacted on the Muslim women of Egypt, it was also to understand why the British concentrated on the Egyptian women's traditional dress of the veil as a focus for change. Investigations into the English preoccupation with the Islamic hijab also revealed a deeper colonial rhetoric in which the language of feminism was implicated with issues of culture and oppression, specifically, the culture of other people. All of this was amalgamated in the colonial narrative, which projected the Muslim woman as oppressed and the Islamic society as barbaric. To the English, therefore, the hijab symbolised both the oppression of women and the stagnation of Islam.

A prime mover in the development of Egyptian affairs and a vocal objector of the hijab, was the colonial administrator of the period, Evelyn Baring, the Lord Cromer. To the people of Egypt, Cromer represented the government of Britain as well as the symbol of western imperialism. Cromer's understanding of Egypt, the country and her people was the culmination of a colonial philosophy that had its foundation in a culture that believed profoundly in the supremacy of its race and heritage. The system that established this belief was, in the final analysis, the cause of the misconceptions that were written, about the colonial population. In order therefore to examine Cromer's personal role in the development of

events, it will aid our task if we first look into and understand the ideology that permeated nineteenth century society. This will be followed by a closer analysis into the writings of some of the authors who may have influenced Cromer.

3.1 Victorian Image of the World

The eighteenth and nineteenth century was a period of immense transformation for the British Empire. It was a period characterised by great progress in the scientific and industrial fields, all of which helped Britain to its ascendancy in the Industrial Revolution. To the English, this was an epoch of immense development and growth, which appeared to have no limits especially in view of the potentialities of empire. This was also a period of change for English society in which the old established order was discarded in favour of new ideology where the new economically powerful middle-class challenged the ruling aristocratic powers for the right to political representation. Amidst the changes to the social fabric of society that was taking place in Victorian Britain was added the additional dimension of developments in the colonies. Victorian culture and philosophy therefore influenced the way in which the empire was managed. The image of the empire and its perception by the English was determined by the tales and narratives which formed part of the political and social, colonial discourse.

These narratives formed the foundation upon which nineteenth century writers evaluated the cultural and ethnic diversity of other 'races' and used the results to classify the status of 'other' societies. Anecdotal accounts by travellers returning home were embellished and expanded to make them compatible with the images that the English expected of colonial natives. Catherine Hall in her study of imperial masculinity describes how

the colonised people were presented to the English.

> "..empire was part of the everyday life of the English, part of their imaginative landscape, part of their sense of themselves, part of their mapping of the globe. To be English was to be white, Anglo-Saxon, and a master race, masters indeed of a quarter of the world's population. Englishmen could dream of ruling 'natives' in India, making fortunes in the goldfields of Australia or the diamond mines of South Africa, converting 'heathen' in the Caribbean. The Empire offered the English adventures beyond 'the old country', forms of authority which they might not be able to achieve at home, visions of 'native' sexuality. Empire it can be argued, was indeed constitutive of English masculinity in the mid nineteenth century".[57]

Victorian literature on the colonies was infused with elaborate descriptions that frequently mis-represented the reality from the fiction because it conformed to the stereotypical images that were established. This self-perpetuating propaganda helped to sustain the almost insatiable appetites of the home readers by furnishing them with the requisite anecdotes of eastern decadence. Edward Said describes as central to the understanding of imperialism and what he has called the study of the Orient, 'Orientalism'.

> "so far as the West was concerned during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an assumption had been made that the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West".[58]

What Said has suggested, exemplifies the premise behind the colonial rhetoric that was used by the Western powers in the strategy that was employed by them for colonial domination. This strategy was the

---

[57] Hall Catherine, Going a-Trolloping: imperial man travels the Empire, published in Gender and Imperialism, p 180, edited by Claire Midgley, Manchester University Press, 1998

[58] Said Edward, Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient, p 40-41, Penguin Books, 1995

culmination of political propaganda that was used effectively by the ruling authorities to justify their rules and legislature for government. Rana Kabbani in her study[59], has explained how fictional text was used for the purpose of misleading the Western readers.

> "If it could be suggested that eastern peoples were slothful, preoccupied with sex, violent, and incapable of self-government, then the imperialist would feel himself justified in stepping in and ruling. Political domination and economic exploitation needed the cosmetic cant of *mission civilisatrice* to seem fully commendatory. For the ideology of empire was hardly ever a brute jingoism; rather, it made subtle use of reason, and recruited science and history to serve its ends. The image of the European coloniser had to remain an honourable one: he did not come as exploiter, but as enlightener. He was not seeking mere profit, but was fulfilling his duty to his Maker and his sovereign, whilst aiding those less fortunate to rise toward his lofty level. This was the white man's burden, that reputable colonial *malaise*, that sanctioned the subjugating of entire continents".[60]

The burden of social and moral responsibility, which was assumed by the Western colonial empire, justified its actions in the colonies, whatever form it happened to take and eased the conscious of the colonisers. This was only possible if the image of the native inhabitants was projected as defective and in need of corrective interference. It is my belief, that continued occupation and domination of the empire was only sustained due to the continuous polemics on the mysteries of the Orient by authoritative accounts documented by persuasive writers. Many of these authors left an indelible impression upon their readers which, permeated and influenced their notions of the mysterious east and in fact, it would appear, that without these writers the efficacy of the colonial rhetoric would have been considerably lessened.

[59] Kabbani Rana, Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient, 1986, 1994, Pandora-Harper Collins

Established beliefs were also challenged by the nineteenth century naturalist, Charles Darwin,[61] whose 'theory of evolution', was used by Social Darwinists to divide humanity into racial hierarchy. They regarded racial conflict as a necessary part of the evolution process in mankind's struggle to survive. Victorian social engineers used Darwinian principles to promote the ideology of the racial superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race and applied it to justify the domination of minority races, such as the Indians, Asians and Africans. The implication of this revolutionary concept was that it reaffirmed the justification for maintaining colonial presence in the occupied territories. This theory was time and again reinforced by the documentation written by the travellers during this period. During his travels, Henry Stanley[62] wrote a descriptive understanding of how he found the natives of Zanzibar.

> "Being I hope, free from prejudices of caste, colour, race or nationality, and endeavouring to pass what I believe to be a just judgement upon the Negroes of Zanzibar, I find that they are a people just emerged in the Iron Epoch, and not thrust forcibly under the notice of nations who have left them behind by the improvements of over 4000 years. They possess beyond doubt all the vices of a people still fixed deeply in barbarism, but they understand to the full what and how low such a state is; it is, therefore a duty imposed upon us by the religion we profess, and by the sacred command of God, to help them out of the deplorable state they are now in. At any rate, before we begin to hope for the improvement of races so long benighted, let us leave off this impotent bewailing of their vices, and endeavour to discover some of the virtues they possess as men, for it must be with aid of their virtues, and not by their vices, that the missionary of civilisation can ever hope to assist them".[63]

---

[60] Kabbani Imperial p 6
[61] Darwin Charles, On the Origin of Species by means of natural selection: or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life. 4th edition, London, 1866
[62] Stanley M. Henry, Through the Dark Continent, in two volumes, published by Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1878
[63] Stanley Dark p 48-49

The mission of civilisation, to which Stanley is referring, was based on the premise that his ancestry entitled him to carry out this task.

> "After nearly seven years' acquaintance with the Wangwana, I have come to perceive that they represent in their character much of the disposition of a large portion of the Negro tribes of the continent.... I know too that they can be made good, obedient servants, that many are clever, honest, industrious, docile, enterprising, brave and moral; that they are, in short, equal to any other race or colour on the face of the globe, in all the attributes of manhood. But to be able to perceive their worth, the traveller must bring an unprejudiced judgement, a clear, fresh, and patient observation, and must forget that lofty standard of excellence upon which he and his race pride themselves, before he can fairly appreciate the capabilities of the Zanzibar Negro."[64]

> "The Mgwana or native of Zanzibar, who dwells at Ngambu, is a happy, jovial soul. He is fond of company, therefore sociable. His vanity causes him to be ambitious of possessing several white shirts and bright red caps, and since he has observed that his superiors use walking-sticks, he is almost certain, if he is rich enough to own a white shirt and a red cap, to be seen sporting a light cane."[65]

Stanley's ethnocentric opinion, which enabled him to evaluate and form judgement on the indigenous population of Zanzibar, fulfilled his expectations of ethnic physiology. This was also the case for Arthur Leared[66] when he documented his travelogue on Morocco and its people.

> "The Moors, a mixed race between Arab and Spaniard, are essentially townsmen; they are the degenerate descendants of that section of the Arab race which, in the eight century, after establishing the powerful kingdom of Fez, overran a large portion of Spain... Although capable of enduring great fatigue when induced by a sufficient object, the Moors are essentially inert and lazy. Not one of them would take a walk for walking's sake."[67]

---

[64] Stanley Dark p47-48
[65] Stanley Dark p 49
[66] Leared Arthur, Marocco and the Moors Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, London, 1891
[67] Leared Marocco p 211-5

> "The Moorish nature is cruel, and insensible to suffering not personally experienced."[68]

> "We were often struck with the extraordinary vivacity and inexhaustible spirits of many of the lower classes of Moors with whom a visitor to Marocco comes in contact. They are the Irishmen of Africa. As in the case of the Irish Celt, ages of oppression, misrule, and poverty, from which as yet the Moor has not emerged, have been insufficient to crush out a keen sense of humour and a tendency to see things from their comic side."[69]

Arthur Leared's comment in the introduction to his book on the accuracy of his narratives is indicative of the need for these travel writers to implant into the mind of their readers, the authenticity of source.

> "It contains, however, much valuable information, and, even after allowing for the difficulty of arriving at truth in that country, some strange inaccuracies." [70]

The possibility of inaccuracy in the text is confined to a single sentence at the end of the author's preface, and is not mentioned anywhere else in the book. This slight matter of factual inaccuracy in the travellers tale is a recurring problem as will be demonstrated during the course of this essay. The tendency of the writers of oriental travels to document selectively those aspects of their experiences that would be of 'interest' to their readers was a license that was taken by many of the Western writers.

Due to the complexity of changes taking place in eighteenth century political dynamics, the role of women acquired new emphasis. The awareness during this period on the lack of female representation in the public sphere coupled with the acceptability of the social role of woman in

[68] Leared Marocco p 220
[69] Leared Marocco p221
[70] Leared Marocco preface p iv

Victorian society encouraged English writers to step in and contribute towards a better understanding of women's role. These writers raised awareness on the plight of the Victorian woman and on the need for reform. Before we investigate the contribution of individual Western writers and their influence on eastern society, it is necessary to comprehend the state of Victorian society in Britain and the expected role of women within it. It is my understanding that the Victorian ideology on race, class and gender determined unequivocally, the way the empire and her colonies was projected for the British people and contributed to their perception of racial characteristics.

3.1.1 Female Perspective in Victorian Society

The status of woman in Victorian Britain during the seventeen and eighteen-century was peculiarly at odds with the image that the white man publicised to the oriental people as the standard for emulation.

Women of all classes struggled to gain acceptance for their gender against established resistance from men in areas of work and politics. Masculine values and interests which dominated Victorian society relegated the woman to the category of second class citizen in the home and at work. Early feminist discourse during this period was struggling to raise awareness in women to rise from the role of subordination in which she was placed. Hence, while colonial policy makers championed for the rights of colonised women against oppression by their own men, conditions for the British woman were hardly utopian. The writings of Mary Wollstonecraft focused on the rights of women, which had to be developed if they were to improve their condition.

Wollstonecraft argued against the exploitation of women and the assumption of society that women were the responsibility of the men of her household, the father or husband.

> "Let not men then in the pride of power, use the same arguments that tyrannic kings and venal ministers have used, and fallaciously assert that woman ought to be subjected because she has always been so".[71]

While advocating for the rights of woman, Wollstonecraft stresses that woman's status was lowly because she contributed to the self-perpetuating paradox by her own folly.

> "I lament that women are systematically degraded by receiving the trivial attentions which men think to pay to the sex, when in fact, they are insultingly supporting their own superiority. It is not condescension to bow to an inferior. So ludicrous, in fact do these ceremonies appear to me that I scarcely am able to govern my muscles when I see a man start with eager and serious solicitude to lift a handkerchief or shut a door, when the lady could have done it herself, had she only moved a pace or two".[72]

The Victorian philosophy that relegated the woman to the home due to her weakness of nature and her inability to compete with men in their field of expertise is criticised by Wollstonecraft as being responsible for holding her back by refusing her the education she needed to progress.

> "To render mankind more virtuous, and happier of course, both sexes must act from the same principle; but how can that be expected when only one is allowed to see the reasonableness of it? To render also the social compact truly equitable, and in order to spread those enlightening principles, which alone can ameliorate the fate of man, women must be allowed to found their virtue on knowledge, which is scarcely possible unless they be educated by the same pursuits as men. For they are now made so inferior by ignorance and low desires, as not to deserve to be ranked with them; or, by the serpentine wrigglings of cunning, they mount the tree of knowledge and only acquire sufficient to lead men astray."[73]

---

[71] Wollstonecraft Mary, The Rights of Woman, p 50, J.M. Dent London, 1929
[72] Wollstonecraft Rights p 63
[73] Wollstonecraft Rights p 192

It was manifestly clear that conditions and expectations of equality, was not the same across all classes. Middle class women enjoyed far better conditions in their lifestyle than the working class and while the working class had greater priorities to think about than women's suffrage, economic and social conditions for both the classes were affected as a result of the suffrage agitation. Working women was a phenomenon that did not find fervent protagonists in the middle classes. Women were encouraged to remain at home to maintain the well being of the family, where it was believed that the children suffered as a direct result of the employment of the woman. Pro-emancipation lobbyists argued that this was nothing but a projection of the anxiety the men had about losing their own jobs. The entrenched ideology that demarcated the workforce into two, relegating the woman to the private sphere, the home, and the man to the public sphere, the workplace, has been identified as the self-perpetuating myth that served the requirements of the working man. Catherine Hall explains this:

> "To understand the position of women in the home it is necessary to see the way in which women provide an industrial reserve army of labour which can be drawn upon in different ways at different times. The ideology of domesticity which ties women into the home and stresses their role as wife and mother has, since the early nineteenth century, been a key to the sexual division of labour as we know it."[74]

The established beliefs on the woman's place derived its formulation from prominent writers who proved their case through use of academic theory that this was a natural law. Charles Darwin's justification for the differentiation of the species was used by other Victorian writers to promulgate their views, most of them argued fiercely for the continued

[74] Hall Catherine, White Male and Middle Class, p 68 Polity Press, 1995

rights of men to be protected from the encroaching emancipation of women. One writer, who believed in the equality of the sexes, was John Stuart Mill. Mill argued that women should be given the same opportunities as men to develop their skills and that the weakness of the traits that women possessed, were due more to their lack of education, than any intrinsic characteristics.

> "The opinion in favour of the present system, which entirely subordinates the weaker sex to the stronger, rests upon theory only; for there never has been trial made of any other: so that experience, in the sense in which it is vulgarly opposed to theory, cannot pretend to have pronounced any verdict. And in the second place, the adoption of this system of inequality never was the result of deliberation, or forethought, or any social ideas, or any notion whatever of what conduced to the benefit of humanity or the good order of society. It arose simply from the fact that from the very earliest twilight of human society, every woman (owing to the value attached to her by men, combined with her inferiority in muscular strength) was found in a state of bondage to some man."[75]

Mill has stressed that the continued subjection of women is due to the entrenched beliefs that they were inferior and that they had to be kept away from the public place that was the domain of men. He believed that unless this ideology was changed, there would be no hope of changing existing conditions.

> "All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections. And by their affections are meant the only ones they are allowed to have--those to the men with whom they are connected, or to the children who constitute an additional and indefeasible tie between them and a man. When we put together three things-first, the natural

[75] Mill John Stuart, Subjection of Women , J. M. Dent, London 1929

> attraction between opposite sexes; secondly, the wife's entire dependence on the husband, every privilege or pleasure she has being either his gift or depending entirely on his will; and lastly, that the principal object of human pursuit, consideration, and all objects of social ambition, can in general be sought or obtained by her only through him, it would be a miracle if the object of being attractive to men had not become the polar star of feminine education and formation of character."[76]

Mill's does not totally reject the traditional beliefs on women; rather he questions the validity of the assumptions that are formed on the theory that women are incapable of accepting public responsibility. He further questions the understanding that an 'accident of birth' should limit a human to suffer in its prevailing circumstances, and here he includes other social categories such as race and class.

> "if the principle is true, we ought to act as if we believed it, and not to ordain that to be born a girl instead of a boy, any more than to be born black instead of white, or a commoner instead of a nobleman, shall decide the person's position through all life--shall interdict people from all the more elevated social positions, and from all, except a few, respectable occupations." "The disabilities, therefore to which women are subject from the mere fact of their birth, are the solitary examples of the kind in modern legislation. In no instance except this, which comprehends half the human race, are the higher social functions closed against anyone by a fatality of birth which no exertions, and no change of circumstances, can overcome; for even religious disabilities (besides that in England and in Europe they have practically almost ceased to exist) do not close any career to the disqualified person in case of conversion."[77]

Catherine Hall explains that Mill's assumption on equality for all human kind is relative, subject to criteria that Mills presumes.

> "The assumption that peoples should be subject to the laws in the same way, and to be able to develop their potential to the highest possible point, did not mean that Mill and his supporters believed

[76] Mill Subjection p 232-3
[77] Mill Subjection, p 237

> the races were entirely equal. They emphasised the potential for equality rather than equality, which was yet fully realised. Women, blacks and browns, having been denied opportunities, must now have access to them but it would be necessary for them to learn civilisation, just as the working-class men would have to learn that civilisation."[78]

Women's inferior status and their subordination to men on social and political levels were part of the overall debasement of their sexuality that was an intrinsic part of Victorian belief. The role of the church in the influence of this doctrine was paramount to the ideology that prevailed throughout most of the nineteenth century. The sanction by the church of the inferior status of woman and the affirmation by the church that women represented evil and temptation to man, provided Victorian society with the authority that they needed to disparage women. The church, through its directives, controlled the sexuality of both men and women by expressing its opinion on marriage and chastity. In the Bible[79], St Paul is quoted as saying the following on marriage:

> "I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife[80].... those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this. What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none.[81] I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs-how he can please the Lord.[82] But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world-how he can please his wife[83]-and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned abut the affairs of this world-how she can please her husband.[84] I am saying this for

[78] Hall White p 280
[79] Holy Bible: new international version, 1997
[80] Bible: 1 Corinthians 7:27-28
[81] Bible 7:29-30
[82] Bible 7:33
[83] Bible 7:34
[84] Bible 7:35

> your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord."

Through pronouncements such as these, Paul suggested that to remain unmarried was more beneficial for both men and women. Thus the promotion of celibacy by the church contaminated the concept of sexuality making it appear immoral even within the parameters of marriage. The association of sexuality with lasciviousness turned it into something that 'good, decent', people ignored. Hence, the denunciation of sex to the furthest recesses of the mind resulted in its re-appearance in the form of extreme illusions and fantasy that were projected onto other societies and cultures, where it was presented as acceptable. This fantasy as we will examine was played out through the excessive imaginations of the writers who glorified and expanded on their travels of the empire, for the gratification of their home readers. Victorian prudery prevented the development of any ideas that conflicted with the teachings of the church.

> "Having confined sex beneath the bedclothes by what is after all the acme of euphemism, that is by refusing to recognise its existence, another essential line of attack was to remove all other traces of it from the household. To ban it from conversation was easy enough: stern remonstrance and corporal punishment would keep the young in line. To ban it from the immediate sight was facilitated by the change in fashion, which made women bell-shaped with skirts that concealed everything except the toe. Who could so much as imagine two female legs within that dome of drab material? Powerful aids as well as the pulpit were enlisted to keep the enemy in check. Anxiety making doctors promised disease and disintegration to those who transgressed the ascetic rules against sex."[85]

The motive for the banishment of sex was the fear of what it represented and the reality of female sexuality was prominently projected as threatening to the respectable male and his family.

[85] Crow Duncan, The Victorian Woman, p 25-6, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971

> "the important factor of man's perennial ambivalence to woman, his apprehensions about the dangerous nature of female sexuality and his hostility towards her, no less than his pleasure in the cowed and doll-like 'looking-glass' that reflected him at twice his natural size. Sex of course had not been banished from the land. Forbidden in the houses of respectables it lost none of its strength elsewhere. If woman had been turned into the virgin in the drawing-room she had to compensate for this by being the prostitute elsewhere; and because of the extreme cosseting she received in the respectable home so the swing of ambivalence demanded that she be degraded and subject to physical brutality in her role as the hired instrument of man's pleasure outside the home."[86]

The 'split concept of virgin and prostitute'[87], was used by the nineteenth century writers in their projection of the debauched women of the east. This contrasted sharply with the image of the chaste English and European woman. This east-west dichotomy of female sexuality and the literary license taken by European travellers both combined to produce an anthology of 'literature' that contributed to the perception of the east, eastern culture and eastern women all of which assisted in establishing a definitive understanding of the colonies and its people.

3.2 The Architects of Colonial Hypothesis

The success of the narrators of colonial travels was due to two factors. Nineteenth century travel was not the past time of the masses. Those who indulged in it, did so either because they were able to afford it, or they were sent on ministerial missions for the state. Consequently, the ignorance of the general public on cultural matters pertaining to areas outside Europe, especially the east, was evident. This lack of knowledge was advantageous to the writers who documented their experiences, since they were able to take literary license to exaggerate their tales. With no

[86] Crow Victorian p 29-30
[87] Hoffman R. Hays, The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil, p 233, Methuen, 1966

one to challenge the verification of the facts, these two factors sustained each other in helping to maintain the European myth surrounding the 'mysterious' east through tales of sexual intrigue and the moral depravity of eastern women.

Writers to the east during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries started their travels with preconceived notions of what they expected to see. This enabled them to formulate their judgements based on the European criteria of standards of 'civilisation' and the role of women within the culture and societies they were visiting. A documentation of some of the writers who contributed significantly to the European perception, alongwith their idiosyncratic beliefs will assist in providing an explanation of their motives. It is also my understanding that the nineteen-century authors, who were to be 'members' of the literary circle, were influenced by the opinions and judgements of their contemporaries, thus reinforcing each other's views.

3.2.1 William Beckford (1760-1844)

William Beckford came from a powerful, wealthy background that provided him with the opportunity to travel and study different cultures.

He is best known for his gothic novel *Vathek*[88] (1786) which was strongly influenced by Antoine Galland's rendition of 'A thousand and one nights'.[89] The story is based on the character of an eastern ruler, the caliph *Vathek*, a morally corrupt character who is represented in stereotypical overtones. To give credibility to his yarn, Beckford intersperses his narrative with real life characters. He embellished his

---

[88] Beckford William, Vathek, translated fromt The Original French, publishers W. Clarke, London, MDCCCXXIII

[89] Galland Antoine, Les Mille et une nuits, 12 volumes, 1704-17, Paris

yarns with exaggeration when he says:

> "Being much addicted to women and the pleasures of the table, he sought by his affability, to procure agreeable companions; and he succeeded the better as his generosity was unbounded and his indulgences unrestrained. "The fifth palace, dominated the Retreat of Mirth, or the Dangerous, was frequented by troops of young females beautiful as the Houris, and not less seducing; who never failed to receive with caresses, all whom the caliph allowed to approach them, and enjoy a few hours of their company".[90]

Beckford's prolific use of the orient as the background to give worth to his story provides the reader with a vivid picture of the east as a place of intrigue, violence and decadence. Beckford thus presented textually, the oriental civilisation to the Europeans in a manner that conformed to their perception. His stereotypical images depicted a dark, threatening and uncompromising orient with a doomed yet seductive and exciting prospect of adventure. The success of *Vathek* was due to the strong demand for oriental folklore and the requirement for a continued supply containing increasingly imaginative material. The armchair traveller therefore enlightened himself by reading about a country or culture and the people, aspects of which he would have been denied. The books and journals were able to fulfil the void to study other cultures, without any actual travel. Edward Said explains the purpose of textual recourse.

> "Two situations favour a textual attitude. One is where a human being confronts at close quarters something relatively unknown and threatening and previously distant. In such a case one has recourse not only to what in one's previous experience the novelty resembles but also to what one has read about it. Travel books or guidebooks are about as 'natural' a kind of text, as logical in their composition and in their use, as any book one can think of, precisely because of this human tendency to fall back on a text when the uncertainties of travel in strange parts seem to threaten one's equanimity. Many travellers find themselves saying of an experience in a new country that it wasn't what they expected,

[90] Beckford Vathek, p 5

> meaning that it wasn't what a book said it would be. And of course many writers of travel books or guidebooks compose them in order to say that a country is like this, or better, that it is colourful, expensive, interesting, and so forth. The idea in either case is that people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority and use, even than the actuality it describes."[91]

Beckford's imaginative use of oriental background to enhance his tale is made all the more realistic by connecting fictional characters with real life people who may have lived during an earlier period, and whose names lend a touch of authenticity to the drama. Beckford's association of eastern people with provocative drama became inevitable and unavoidable due to the expectations, that the east and its culture were different from the west. The notion of differentness became enmeshed within the rationalisation of Europeans, who came to regard their own identities as dominant and superior to all others. Consequently, any attempt to assimilate the dominant, superior culture with another would equate the two cultures thus rendering the assumption of dominance, as obsolete. The us-them dichotomy therefore played an important role in east-west relationship and it was used effectively by politicians to promote nineteenth century dominance in the colonies.

3.2.2 Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)

Unlike Beckford, Thomas Carlyle did not come from an aristocratic background. He was born the son of a stonemason and received a strict Calvinist upbringing. Through education he managed to rise to become one of the middle-class intellectuals who was to dominate the nineteenth century political scene. Through his writings Carlyle became involved in the colonial issue on slavery. Carlyle's views on the native inhabitants of the West Indian colonies provoked a great deal of debate on issues of race

[91] Said Orientalism, pg 93,

and culture as well as on the status of women in general.

A catalogue of events that took place during the nineteenth century on the West Indian Islands motivated Carlyle to enter into dialogue on colonial race issues. The political debate focused on the issue of slavery and on whether to abolish servitude of the black people at the expense of the plantation owners who depended on cheap slave labour. The British government was caught up in the middle of the controversy and was pressured by the growing evangelical movements at this time, to cease the slave trade altogether.

Carlyle's attitude towards the slave issue was one of intolerance. He regarded the plight of the Negro as insignificant and not worthy of attention by the British people or government. He considered the efforts of the political machinery to abolish slavery as one that would exacerbate the problem of demand for labour in the colonies while at the same time he argued, the Negro wouldn't know what to do with his new found freedom. To Carlyle, the black man was born to be a slave. To support his theory of the racial inequality of the Negro, Carlyle dubbed the Negro a comic representation of a human, whom he called a '*Quashee*'. His stereotypical images emphasise the qualities of the Negro as akin to that of a horse or dog that are in need of a master.

> "I decidedly like poor *Quashee*, and find him a pretty kind of man. With a pennyworth of oil, you can make a handsome glossy thing of *Quashee*, when the soul is not killed in him.
>
> Am I gratified in my mind by the ill usage of any two or four-legged thing; of any horse or any dog? Not so, I assure you".[92]
>
> "I say, if the Black gentleman is born to be a servant, and, in fact, is useful in God's creation only as a servant, then let him hire not

---

[92] Carlyle Thomas, The Nigger Question: Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question. 1849 p 12, reprinted by the Meredith Corp NY in 1971

> by the month but by a very much longer term. That he be 'hired for life', - really here is the essence of the position he now holds!"[93]

In Carlyle's imperial analysis, hard work was essential in a civilised society in the same way that Victorian middle-class ideology regarded the family and the woman's role in it as paramount for the maintenance of social order. The thought of an idle man wasting his time, whether black or white, was insufferable to him.

> "Any poor idle Black man, any idle White man, rich or poor, is a mere eye-sorrow to the State; a perpetual blister in the skin of the State".[94]

To Carlyle, the essence of maintaining English identity was to project the special feature of the Englishman. Virtues such as strength, virility, masculinity, hard work and control of his surroundings whether it was as a colonial administrator, a plantation owner in charge of Black slaves or as a husband in his own home. The Englishman was thus always to appear consistently invincible. The natives therefore of the colonies never witnessed the ageing Englishman since it was government policy to retire their administrators at a pre-determined age.

> "In public the Englishman had to be perpetually on his dignity, wearing what was half a naturally supercilious expression, half a mask. In private he had to be able to relax... He had therefore to keep Indians, except servants at a distance... Then, at an age (it came to be fixed at fifty-five) long before senility, his service ended and he returned abruptly to England. India never saw the giant old and feeble".[95]

The stereotypical image of the black man was employed by Carlyle to perpetuate the myth of his inferiority and futile existence in any role except as a slave. The racial implication of his belief, that the white man

---

[93] Carlyle Nigger p 22
[94] Carlyle Nigger p32
[95] Kiernan V.G, The Lords of Human Kind: European attitudes towards the outside world in the imperial age.p 55, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London

was created superior to and indeed was born to rule the black race, was made explicit in his treatise, "The Nigger Question", published in 1849.

> "Our beautiful Black darlings are at last happy; with little labour except to the teeth, which surely, in those excellent horse-jaws of theirs, will not fall. The Twenty Millions (a reference to the money paid out due to the Slavery Abolition Act 1833 to slave owners as compensation for their freed slaves) a mere trifle dispatched with a single dash of the pen, are paid; and far over the sea, we have a few black persons rendered extremely 'free' indeed. Sitting yonder with their beautiful muzzles up to the ears in pumpkins, imbibing sweet pulps and juices; the grinder and incisor teeth ready for ever new work, and the pumpkins cheap as grass in those rich climates: while the sugar-crops rot round them uncut, because labour cannot be hired, so cheap are the pumpkins; - and at home we are but required to rasp from the breakfast loaves of our own English labourers some slight differential sugar duties, and lend a poor half million or a few millions to keep that beautiful state of matters going on.... And beautiful Blacks sitting up there, up to the ears in pumpkins, and doleful Whites sitting here without potatoes to eat: never till now, I think, did the sun look down on such a jumble of human nonsenses".[96]

Carlyle imbibed the view that the mastery of the slave-owner should be evidenced by their ability to enforce the desired labour by his slaves. He argued that if the required effort was not forthcoming, then the master was entitled to coerce the slave by means of the whip.

> "Induce him if you can: yes, sure enough, by all means try what inducement will do; and indeed every coachman and car-man knows that secret without our preaching, and applies it to his very horses as the true method: but if your Nigger will not be induced? In that case, it is full certain, he must be compelled; should and must; and the tacit prayer he makes (unconsciously he, poor blockhead), to you and to me, and to all the world who are wiser than himself, is, "Compel me!" For indeed he must, or else do and suffer worse, he as well as we."[97]

Carlyle therefore, regarded the right of the white man to subordinate his inferiors as part of the natural process. Since he did not consider the

---

[96] Carlyle Nigger p 4-6
[97] Carlyle Nigger p 10

Negro capable of government, he advocated that the duty of European was to fulfil their responsibility.

> "And now observe my friends, it was not black *Quashee*, or those he represents, that made those West India Islands what they are, or can by any hypothesis, be considered to have the right of growing pumpkins there. For countless ages, since they first mounted oozy, on the back of earthquakes, from their dark bed in the Ocean deeps, and reeking saluted the tropical sun, and ever onwards till the European white man first saw them, they were as if not yet created, their noble elements of cinnamon, sugar, coffee, pepper black and grey, lying all asleep, waiting the white enchanter who should say to them, Awake! Till the end of human history and the sounding of the Trump of Doom, they might have lain so, had *Quashee* and the like of him been the only artists in the game. Swamps, fever-jungles, man-eating Caribs, rattlesnakes, and reeking waste and putrefaction, this had been the produce of them under the incompetent Caribal (what we call Cannibal) possessors, till that time; and *Quashee* knows, himself whether ever he could have introduced an improvement."[98]

To Carlyle's a civilised society was one in which race, class and gender knew their place. He disagreed with the liberal philosophy of a free for all in which the lines of demarcation were blurred and nobody knew where they stood. As far as the female species was concerned, it was his belief that women were, if not inferior to men, then at least different to them in capability. Writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft argued against this philosophy when they found that their views on the equality of women were rejected due to the strong Evangelical views that prevailed. The Evangelical beliefs advocated the important duties of women in the home. They rejected the equality of men and women, saying that sexes were naturally different, and they emphasised that the only purpose of educating women was to enhance their capabilities of being wife and mother. Mary Wollstonecraft in her book 'Vindication of the Rights of Women', which was first published in 1792 voices her concern for the plight of the woman:

[98] Carlyle Nigger p 28

> "I shall not go back to the remote annals of antiquity to trace the history of woman; it is sufficient to allow that she has always been either a slave or a despot, and to remark that each of these situations equally retards the progress of reason. The grand source of female folly and vice has ever appeared to me to arise from narrowness of mind; and the very constitution of civil governments has put almost insuperable obstacles in the way to prevent the cultivation of the female understanding; yet virtue can be built on no other foundation." [99]

> "I lament that women are systematically degraded by receiving the trivial attentions which men think it manly to pay to the sex, when in fact, they are insultingly supporting their own superiority. It is not condescension to bow to an inferior. So ludicrous, in fact do these ceremonies appear to me that I scarcely am able to govern my muscles when I see a man start with eager and serious solicitude to lift a handkerchief or shut a door, when the lady could have done it herself, had she only moved a pace or two."[100]

> "Women commonly called ladies, are not allowed to be contradicted in company, are not allowed to exert any manual strength; and from them the negative virtues only are expected, when any virtues are expected--patience, docility, good humour, and flexibility--virtues incompatible with any vigorous exertion of intellect."[101]

Another champion of women's rights was the nineteenth century philosopher and statesman, John Stuart Mill. A strong vocal opponent of Carlyle's view, Mill endorsed the equality of the sexes. He believed that the differences that existed between the sexes were due to educational inequalities and not inherent weaknesses. In his book[102], he argued in favour of women's status:

> "That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes-the legal subordination of one sex to the other-is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle

[99] Wollstonecraft Rights p 60
[100] Wollstonecraft Rights p 63
[101] Wollstonecraft Rights p 64
[102] Mill, The Subjection of Women, J. M. Dent, London, 1929

> of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other."[103]

To Carlyle, the woman as secondary citizen received no more sympathy than the Negro slaves. Both were born to serve a specific role in society and should be guided towards that end. The issue of the woman's place and the superiority of the white man, through prominent discourses, were both symbolically transported to the colonies and became part of the language that was used subjectively towards the indigenous population. This deeply established belief as will be shown, became the language of the colonisers and will help to explain how it was used by the colonial administrators to regulate control of their empire.

3.2.3 Edward William Lane (1801-1876)

One of the many authors who documented parables of eastern life, Edward William Lane having spent some years in Egypt, (1825-28 and 1833-35) wrote extensively on the life and customs of the Egyptian people.[104] In his efforts to record events as reliable, Lane disguised his personality and assumed the identity of a native in order to impart to the reader an aura of authenticity about which he writes:

> "I have associated almost exclusively, with Muslims, of various ranks in society: I have lived as they live, conforming with their general habits; and, in order to make them familiar and unreserved towards me on every subject, have always avowed my agreement with them in opinion whenever my conscience would allow me, and in most other cases refrained from the expression of my dissent, as well as from every action which might give them disgust; abstaining from eating food forbidden by their religion, and drinking wine, etc."[105]

The subterfuge undertaken by Lane in Egypt in order to allow him greater

[103] Mill Subjection pg 219
[104] Lane Edward William, An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians. 5th edition, John Murray, Albemarle Street, London, 1860
[105] Lane, Account pg xiv

access to the inner secrets of Muslim society, which an outsider would not have been privy to, gives some indication of the difficulty that must have been presented to the non-Muslim visitor. It also demonstrates the possibility of exaggeration in the narratives. Lane's book covers all aspects of the Egyptian's characteristic that may be of interest to his English reader. He describes the personal features of the Egyptian male and female, their dress and habits, their domestic life, their absorption with magic, sorcery, astrology and superstition. The details that Lane describes are explicit in highlighting those aspects of eastern peculiarity that would appeal to the cloistered European readers. Lane is aware that his account of the life of the Egyptian people has to conform to the perceptions that already exist in the West. So much does the credibility of his tale depend upon past conceptions that he explains in a footnote, the resemblance of his 'real life' narrative to his earlier translations of the 'Arabian Nights'.

> "There is one work, however, which presents most admirable pictures of the manners and customs of the Arabs, and particularly of those of the Egyptians; it is 'The Thousand and One Nights; or Arabian Nights' Entertainments': If the English reader had possessed a close translation of it with sufficient illustrative notes, I might almost have spared myself the labour of the present undertaking."[106]

This obvious comparison of the fictitious characters of the Arabian Nights, with the alleged real life people of Egypt, is made in order to fictionalise the reality with the imaginary. Of Lane's documentation, Kabbani says:

> "Lane's account was a vital contribution to the tradition of conceptualising the Orient, turning it into assimilable information. The Society that assisted him financially in his endeavour did so precisely because he fulfilled its aspirations: he was, aptly enough for its purposes, a diffuser of 'Useful Knowledge'. He offered his society a capacious picture of Egypt; Egypt, that is, for Western consumption and coloured by Western bias".[107]

---

[106] Lane, Account p xv
[107] Kabbani Imperial p 39

Lane reinforced many of the traditionally held views of the oriental by ascribing to them those aspects of characteristics that the Westerner expected. He says that 'the Arabs are a very superstitious people; and none of them are more so than those of Egypt'.[108] There is much about Lane's documentation that provokes an element of doubt especially when he asks his reader to accept his word in relation to intimate tales of marriage indiscretion.

> "For a person who has become familiar with male Muslim society in Cairo, without marrying, it is not so difficult as might be imagined by a stranger to obtain, directly and indirectly, correct and ample information respecting the condition and habits of the women. Many husbands of the middle classes, and some of the higher orders, freely talk of the affairs of the hareem with one who professes to agree with them in their general moral sentiments, if they have not to converse through the medium of an interpreter."[109]

In the above extract, Lane has implied that a Muslim man will divulge intimate details of his family life, the women of the household and the harem, to a non-Muslim. To the unfamiliar Westerner, this may be plausible, however, Muslims will be able to verify that this would have been highly unlikely. The proof of this is given by Lane himself when he says:

> "To such an absurd pitch do the Muslims carry their feeling of the sacredness of women, that entrance into the tombs of some females is denied to men;"
>
> "The wife, however, I am never permitted to see, though once I was allowed to talk to her, in the presence of her husband, round the corner of a passage at the top of the stairs."[110]

It was through his association of eastern women with iniquitous sexuality,

---

[108] Lane, Account p 222
[109] Lane, Account p 17
[110] Lane, Account p 178

that Lane offered to the Europeans, a picture of depravity that the West had come to expect. To the nineteenth century readers of Western travelogues, the mystery of the east was made especially enticing through the stereotypical images of eastern women in unimaginable promiscuity. The degradation of eastern women through the penmanship of Western writers, became an acceptable practice, since these writers used their imaginations to say everything about the easterner, that they were unable to articulate about their own women.

> "In sensuality, as far as it relates to the indulgence of libidinous passions, the Egyptians, as well as other natives of hot climates, certainly exceed more northern nations; yet this excess is not to be attributed merely to the climate, but more especially to the institution of polygamy, to the facility with which divorcements are accomplished whenever a man may wish to marry a new wife, and to the custom of concubinage.
>
> "The most immodest freedom of conversation is indulged in by persons of both sexes, and of every station of life, in Egypt; even by the most virtuous and respectable women, with the exception of a very few, who often make use of coarse language, but not unchaste. From persons of the best education, expressions are often heard so obscene as only to be fit for a low brothel; and things are named, and subjects talked of, by the most genteel women, without any idea of their being indecorous, in the hearing of men, that many prostitutes in our country would probably abstain from mentioning."[111]
>
> "The women of Egypt have the character of being the most licentious in their feelings of all females who lay any claim to be considered as members of a civilised nation; and this character is freely bestowed upon them by their countrymen, even in conversation with foreigners."[112]

Lane has taken the same liberty as that taken by his contemporaries, in asserting to the Egyptians a promiscuity that he regards as unimaginable in his own countrywomen. It appears that he does not consider any limit to

---

[111] Lane, Account p 295
[112] Lane, Account p 295

their licentiousness.

> "with respect to the majority of the Egyptian women, it must, I fear, be allowed that they are very licentious. What liberty they have, many of them, it is said, abuse; and most of them are not considered safe, unless under lock and key; to which restraint few are subjected.
>
> "Some of the stories of the intrigues of women in 'The Thousand and One Nights', present faithful pictures of occurrences not unfrequent in the metropolis of Egypt.
>
> "The libidinous character of the generality of the women of Egypt, and the licentious conduct of a great number of them, may be attributed to many causes; partly, to the climate, partly to their want of proper instruction, and of innocent pastimes and employments: but it is more to be attributed to the conduct of the husbands themselves; and to conduct far more disgraceful to them than the utmost severity that any of them is known to exercise in the regulations of his hareem. The generality of husbands in Egypt endeavour to increase the libidinous feelings of their wives by every means in their power; though at the same time, they assiduously study to prevent their indulging those feeling unlawfully."[113]

Such sexual rhetoric encompassing as it did the degradation of eastern women, was allowed to develop in the minds of the armchair travellers and became part of the excepted beliefs. Consequently, each traveller who ventured out took with him images of the east as documented by his predecessors, thus reinforcing the articulation. The European expectations of the fantasies of the east also made it easy to exaggerate the findings of the early travellers. There appear to be several reasons why the tales were so grossly exaggerated. Primarily, as already explained, expectations of the orient had been judiciously prepared by politicians seeking support for empire expansion. Secondly, it corroborated the imperial view, of the differentness of the subjects of the colonies. If the characteristics of the subject people resembled the white colonisers, there

[113] Lane, Account p 296-7

would be no justification for occupation of their land and subjugation of their people. And if their women had the same qualities as the 'gentlewomen' of Europe, it would not be possible to elaborate on their sexual promiscuity. This latter was seen as almost essential to allow the constricted Victorian male an outlet for his frustration.

Lane extrapolates the criticism of the women onto the entire population and criticises the Egyptians for their endless faults in character that he is unable to reconcile.

> "An overreaching and deceitful disposition in commercial transactions, which is too common among all nations, is one of the most notorious faults of the Egyptians: in such cases, he seldom scruples to frame a falsehood, which may better his bargain. Among people who groan beneath the yoke of a tyrannical and rapacious government (and such has long been the government of Egypt), a disposition to avarice invariably predominates.... A vice near akin to cupidity, namely envy, I believe to be equally prevalent among the modern Egyptians, in common with the whole Arab race; for many of them are candid enough to confess their own opinion that this hateful disposition is almost wholly concentrated in the minds of their nation."[114]

Lane acknowledges the possibility of embellishment in his narratives when he confesses to this in his introduction.

> "What I have principally aimed at, in this work, is correctness; and I do not scruple to assert that I am not conscious of having endeavoured to render interesting any matter that I have related by the slightest sacrifice of truth".[115]

Lane's subjective view of the people he was privileged to study was weakened due to his self-imposed limitation to appraise his subject impartially. Kabbani comments on his 'sacrifice of truth';

> "Such an overburdened and cautious sentence implied how acutely aware Lane was of the wiles used traditionally by travellers to 'render interesting' the matters they related. He no doubt strove, as a self-appointed expert on the Orient, to avoid the blatant exaggerations of less erudite narrators. Yet Lane could not help

[114] Lane, Account p 303
[115] Lane, Account p xx

> falling victim to the common distortion of selectivity-of choosing to stress mainly what would interest a Western reader."[116]

Lane's judgement of the Fellaheen [the agricultural class] is not very favourable and his low opinion of their characteristics is one that is echoed by Cromer.

> "The Fellaheen of Egypt cannot be justly represented in a very favourable light with regard to their domestic and social condition and manners. In the worst points of view, they resemble their Bedawee ancestors, without possessing many of the virtues of the inhabitants of the desert, unless in an inferior degree; and the customs which they have inherited from their forefathers often have a very baneful effect upon their domestic state."[117]

Lane's documentation on the people of Egypt left an impression of the orient that was not easily dismissed. It impacted upon subsequent visitors to the east for simply this reason, the chronicles of Egypt were used as a reference point by future travellers, not just to identify with Egypt, but with the entire middle east.

3.2.4 Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890)

Richard Burton's styles of writing and his oriental discourse documenting his travels were influenced to a degree by the narratives of Edward Lane and earlier writers of the orient. This is believed to be inevitable in view of the authoritative style in which Lane portrayed his material and also because it would not be conceivable, that Burton undertaking as he did, his oriental sojourn, would have failed to inform himself of the expositions of the Egyptians at the 'hands' of Lane. Burton's character has been defined by many as non-conformist and maverick in disposition and one that was stifled by Victorian regulations. These factors coupled with his interest in languages of the orient, and a desire to travel beyond the confines of the

[116] Kabbani Imperial p 38
[117] Lane, Account p 195

British society, provided Burton with the opportunity for his adventures. During his period as employee of the empire, he discovered that one of the most effective ways of learning the innermost secrets of the people he was living with, was to impersonate a native and live as one. This subterfuge served Burton's objective, by allowing him to dwell as an inhabitant of the country, he was thus able to acquire the native's trust and like Lane, he was able to penetrate parts of the society prohibited to outsiders. To Burton, the duplicity and the risk of discovery, served as a double dividend for his adventures. Kenneth Walker, as editor of Burton's book[118] had this to say about his character:

> "It was the tragedy of his life that the unique qualifications he possessed after a life devoted to the study of foreign ways of life were never fully utilised or publicly recognised. In his lifetime he was known as the 'neglected Englishman', a material reason for his lack of advancement is hard to find; basically it must lie in his own character. Reckless, self-opinionated, obstinate and intolerant of authority in all forms, he was not of a nature likely to succeed within the rigid Victorian social structure, or in his relationships with colleagues".[119]

Whatever deficiencies prevailed in his character, it is difficult to reconcile it with his intense absorption with sexual perversion, which appears so vehemently in his narratives. His contribution to eastern folklore, the translation of The Arabian Nights and the Kama Sutra, both bear testimony to his obsession with sexuality. It is however, his association of sexual deviance with the east, their culture and especially eastern women that is of relevance to this thesis.

Burton considered himself on a mission for the empire. He saw his role as penetrating and acquiring a deeper insight into the people of the colonies and supplying his government with this information to help them to

[118] Burton Richard, Love, War and Fancy: The customs and Manners of the East from writings on the Arabian Nights, William Kimber, London, 1964
[119] Burton Love p 9

understand their subjects. He used his skills for spy missions in both India and Arabia, about his motives Wilfred Blunt has said:

> "At the same time in his talks with me, and also in his books, he showed little true sympathy with the Arabs he had come to know so well. He would at any time, I am sure, have willingly betrayed them to further English or his own professional interests. He published accounts of Arabia and the Arabs are neither sympathetic nor true. His 'Pilgrimage to Meccah' is largely made up with literary padding and as narrative reads to me insincere. It certainly exaggerates the difficulty of the undertaking which in those days was comparatively easy to anyone who would profess Islam, even without possessing any great knowledge of Eastern tongues. At Damascus, when I was there in 1878, he had left a poor reputation having managed to get into hot water with every native class-Turk, Arab, Syrian, Christian and Moslem alike-though this I believe was greatly his wife's fault. She was indeed a very foolish woman, and did him at least as much harm in his career as good. "[120]

Burton's indefatigable attempt to portray the east as sensational drama through his translation of the Arabian Nights was his way of rebelling against the pristine Victorian constraints. He attempted to enlighten the English, through his experience of eastern people in a manner that portrays his arrogant personality.

> "I can hardly imagine The Nights being read to any profit by men of the West without commentary. My annotations avoid only one subject, parallels of European folk-lore and fabliaux which, however interesting, would overswell the bulk of a book whose speciality is anthropology. The accidents of my life, it my be said without undue presumption, my long dealings with Arabs and other Mohammedans, and my familiarity not only with their idiom but with their turn of thought, and with that racial individuality which baffles description, have given me certain advantages over the average student, however deeply he may have studied."[121]

The assumption therefore, that he had the required expertise on the east, and that his contribution would provide his government with the details

---

[120] Blunt Wilfrid Scawen, My Diaries: Being a personal narrative of events 1888-1914 Part II, p 136-7, Martin Secker, London, 1920

[121] Burton Love p 32

they would need to sustain the colonies, was a common belief amongst the nineteenth century travellers. Another fatalist assumption by Burton was his role in documenting details of the female psyche and which forms such an excessive part of his narrative. The Arabian Nights as became evident, influenced the Western perception of Orientals and was used comparatively by the Europeans to develop their model of a civilised society. Through the Arabian Nights, Burton fulfilled the Victorian society's desire to acquire knowledge about cultures outside the familiar European domain.

Especially lacking during this period was adequate knowledge and information on the religion of Islam, the Muslims and its ideology. With the imperial presence in the east getting stronger, a sustained diatribe on oriental politics articulated by the writers provided the government with the momentum they need to sustain their occupation. The information compiled by these writers was stored by the government as a source of useful data and used as deemed necessary.

It is Burton's interpretation and manipulation with the data that he perceives that allows it to be transformed into the final result. He concedes to his superiority of prowess over his contemporaries in his ability to provide the reader with prose that will fascinate as much as it will inform. He has this to say on his version of the Arabian Nights in comparison to Lane's.

> "Nor will the reader think lightly of my work when I repeat to him that with the aid of my annotations supplementing Lane's, the student will readily and pleasantly learn more of the Muslim's manners and customs, laws and religion that is known to the average Orientalist; and, if my labours induce him to attack the text of The Nights he will become master of much more Arabic than the ordinary Arab owns. This book is indeed a legacy, which I bequeath to my fellow-countrymen in their hour of need. Over-

devotion to Hindu, and especially to Sanskrit literature, has led them astray from those (so-called) Semitic studies, which are the more requisite for us as they teach us to deal successfully with a race more powerful than any pagans -- the Muslim."

"Muslims are not to be ruled by raw youths who should be at school and college instead of holding positions of trust and emolument. He who would deal with them successfully must be, firstly, honest and truthful and secondly, familiar with and favourably inclined to their manners and customs in not to their laws and religion. We may perhaps, find it hard to restore to England those pristine virtues, that tone and temper, which made her what she is; but at any rate we (myself and a host of others) can offer her the means of dispelling her ignorance concerning the Eastern races with whom she is continually in contact."[122]

This enlightenment that Burton offers to his countrymen eloquently informs them of the characteristics of the Arab so astutely formulated for their benefit. He grudgingly admires the merits of the Arab when he says that:

"as a man he is high-spirited and energetic, always ready to fight for his Sultan, his country and, especially, his Faith: courteous and affable, rarely failing in temperance of mind and self-respect, self-control and self-command: hospitable to the stranger, attached to his fellow-citizens, submissive to his superiors and kindly to his inferiors."[123]

His admiration is marred by his contempt of the race and one that he finds difficult to reconcile with their qualities.

"Our Arab at his worst is a mere barbarian who has not forgotten the savage. He is a model mixture of childishness and astuteness, of simplicity and cunning, concealing levity of mind under solemnity of aspect. His stolid instinctive conservatism grovels before the tyrant rule of routine, despite that turbulent and licentious independence which ever suggests revolt against the ruler; his mental torpidity, founded upon physical indolence, renders immediate action and all manner of exertion distasteful: his conscious weakness shows itself in overweening arrogance and intolerance. His crass and self-satisfied ignorance makes him

[122] Burton Love p 34
[123] Burton ibid p 35

> glorify the most ignoble superstitions, while acts of revolting savagery are the natural results of a malignant fanaticism and a furious hatred of every creed beyond the pale of Al-Islam."[124]

Burton's ambivalence towards the Arab is present throughout his narratives and is revealing in its prejudice. He is unable to reconcile cultural strength to the Arab race, without at the same time resorting to the pre-conceived stereotyped image of the 'lazy, indolent', individual. Burton has reserved a few special chapters for his exposition on the feminine gender and like Lane, he assumed the eastern woman to have a peculiarly debauched characteristic and one that had no parallel in the west.

> "In these hot-damp climates the venereal requirements and reproductive powers of the female greatly exceed those of the male; and hence the dissoluteness of morals would be phenomenal, were it obviated by seclusion, the sabre and the revolver."[125]

> "Women with white skins are supposed to be heating and unwholesome: hence the Hindu Rajahs slept with dark girls in the hot season."

> "Easterns are right in regarding a sleepy languorous look as one of the charms of women, and an incitement to love because suggestive only of bed. Some men also find the same pleasure in a lachrymose expression of countenance, seeming always to call for consolation: one of the most successful women I know owes her exception good fortune to this charm."[126]

> "Wealthy harems, are hot-beds of Sapphism and Tribadism".

Burton admits that one of the reasons he wrote the explicit documentation on sexuality was because he 'desired to free the Anthropological Society from the fetters of mauvaise honte and the mock modesty which compels travellers and ethnological students to keep silence concerning one side of the human race'.

---

[124] Burton ibid p 37
[125] Burton ibid p 154

He can only justify being explicit about sexuality if he can project it as something that happens in distant societies, those far removed from his own civilised Christian ambience. As Kabbani says: "Burton had broken the Victorian taboo on masking sexuality. Yet he managed to do so only by speaking of sexuality in a removed setting - the East. His was a language of enumeration of perversions, deviations, and excesses. He took the traditional seraglio of the Western imagination and shaded in details that would give it the appearance of *vraisemblance*."[127]

While Burton ardently believed and wrote about the perversions of the east, he acknowledged that Muslim woman and their virtue were carefully guarded, thus contradicting his own testimony and making the possibility of their behaviour promiscuous as a general character trait, impossibility.

> "The girl is not only carefully guarded but she also guards herself knowing that otherwise she will not find a husband. Hence seduction is all but unknown. The wife is equally well guarded and lacks opportunities hence adultery is found difficult except in books."[128]

He however, acknowledges the general ignorance of his countrymen on the cultural habits of the Muslims and the social conduct of their women. The revelation of which throws doubt on some of his expositions.

> "Europeans, knowing that Muslim women are cloistered and appear veiled in public, begin with believing them to be mere articles of luxury; and only after long residence they find out that nowhere has the sex so much real liberty and power as in the Muslim East. They can possess property and will it away with the husband's leave; they can absent themselves from the house for a month without his having a right to complain; and they assist in all his counsels for the best of reasons: a man can rely on his wives and children, being surrounded by rivals who hope to rise by his ruin."[129]

---

[126] Burton ibid p 160-61
[127] Kabbani Imperial p 54
[128] Burton Love p 142
[129] Burton Love p 136

Burton's restructuring of the Orient to accommodate the European imagery and perception was indicative of the imperialist expectations and gives an idea of the constraints that bound the nineteenth century writers. Although the experience that Burton would have accumulated enabled him to assume a certain edge over some of his contemporaries, it is inconceivable to imagine that he may not have been influenced by the earlier writers in his assumptions. All of which points to the inevitability of a self-perpetuating myth that was engineered for the benefit of the colonies and the objectivity of the empire. This is made all the more apparent when Blunt records his recollection of his meeting with Burton:

> "My talks with Burton were of most intimate kind-religion, philosophy, travel, politics. I had hardly as yet visited the East, but Eastern travel had interested me from the day I had read Palgrave's 'Journeys in Arabia', and Burton was fond of reciting his Arabian adventures. In his talk he affected an extreme brutality, and if one could have believed the whole of what he said, he had indulged in every vice and committed every crime. I soon found, however, that most of these recitals were indulged in *pour epater le bourgeois* and that his inhumanity was more pretended than real."[130]

3.2.5 T. E. Lawrence (1888-1935) on Charles Doughty (1843-1926)

Unlike some of his contemporaries, Charles Doughty travelled to the east under the semblance of a Christian mission whereby he sought to enlighten the Arabs on the merits of Christianity. His documentation on his travels to Arabia[131] is revealing in its intolerance towards the religion of the Arabs, and to his mind, the superiority of his own race and religion.

Doughty's own judgement of the inferiority of the Arab is echoed by Lawrence, who writes the introduction to the third edition of his book in

[130] Blunt, Diaries, 2:135
[131] Doughty Charles, Travels in Arabia Deserta, third edition, two volumes, 1921

which he appears to concur with Doughty on his appreciation of the Arabs, it is only on closer examination, that the essence of the complement is revealed.

> "Nothing is more powerful and real than this record of all his daily accidents and obstacles, and the feelings that came to him on the way. His picture of the Semites, sitting to the eyes in a cloaca, but with their brows touching Heaven, sums up in full measure their strength and weakness, and the strange contradictions of their thought which quicken our curiosity at our first meeting with them."[132]

Concealed in this epitaph are Doughty's true feelings of how he perceived the Arab. Like Lane, he considered the Arabs a superstitious people 'who lived in filth while cloaked in holiness'.[133]

Lawrence, who admired Doughty greatly, complemented the book as a classic that would be useful to anyone who had reason to find himself a traveller in the Deserts of Arabia. In spite of the book having recurrent criticism of the religious faith of the Arabs, Lawrence concludes that Doughty was very tolerant of their religion.

> "They say that he seemed proud only of being Christian, and yet never crossed their faith. He was book-learned, but simple in the arts of living, ignorant of camels, trustful of every man, very silent. He was the first Englishman they had met. He predisposed them to give a chance to other men of his race, because they found him honourable and good. So he broke a road for his religion.[134]

> "Doughty went among these people dispassionately, looked at their life, wrote it down word for word. By being always Arab in manner and European in mind he maintained a perfect judgement, while bearing towards them a full sympathy which persuaded them to show him their inmost ideas."[135]

Lawrence's impassioned plea for Doughty's gallantry is recounted repeatedly to stress the validity. One thing is made clear, almost from the

---

[132] T. E Lawrence, Introduction to Arabia Deserta, pg xxxi
[133] Kabbani Imperial p 108
[134] Lawrence, Introduction p xxix
[135] Lawrence, Introduction, pg xxxiii

start, Lawrence's unmitigated admiration for Doughty is apparent through the letters he wrote to him during the years 1909-1922.[136] The gushing complements given by Lawrence would appear to vindicate any deficiency that Doughty's narrative might have left out in his attempt to portray the Arab.

> "The realism of the book is complete. Doughty tries to tell the full and exact truth of all that he saw. If there is a bias it will be against the Arabs, for he like them so much; he was so impressed by the strange attraction, isolation and independence of this people that he took pleasure in bringing out their virtues by a careful expression of their faults."[137]

The validity of this comment is nullified by Doughty's own writings when he speaks of their character and their religion. He is able to convey in almost the same sentence, both complement and contempt and reconcile it as impartial. Doughty is unable to conceal his contempt from recurring in his writing when he writes:

> "To speak of the Arabs at the worst, in one word, the mouth of the Arabs is full of cursing and lies and prayers; their heart is a deceitful labyrinth. We have seen their urbanity; gall and venom is in their least ill-humour; disdainful, cruel, outrageous is their malediction.[138]

> "Are not Mohammed's saws today the mother belief of a tenth part of mankind? ...Even a thin-witted religion that can array an human multitude, is a main power in the history of the unjust world. Perilous every bond which can unite many of the human millions, for living and dying! Islam and the commonwealth of Jews are as great secret conspiracies, friends only of themselves and to all without of crude iniquitous heart, unfaithful, implacable. But the pre-Islamic idolatrous religion of the *Kaaba* was cause that the soon ripe Mawmetry rotted not soon again.

> "The heart of their dispersed religion is always Mecca, from when the Moslems of so many lands every year return fanaticised. From how far countries do they assemble to the sacred festival; the pleasant contagion of the Arab's religion has spread nearly as far

[136] The letters of T. E. Lawrence, edited by David Garnett, London, 1938
[137] Lawrence, Introduction p xxxi
[138] Doughty Charles, Travels in Arabia Deserta, p 260

> as the pestilence: -- a battle gained and it had overflowed into Europe. The nations of Islam, of a barbarous fox-like understanding, and persuaded in their religion, that 'knowledge is only of the koran', cannot now come upon any way that is good."[139]

It would appear inevitable that Lawrence would agree with Doughty since he himself had similar perception of their characteristics. Both Lawrence and Doughty are unable to attribute any commendation to the Arab without following it with a criticism.

> "They are a limited narrow-minded people whose inert intellects lie incuriously fallow. Their imaginations are keen but not creative. There is so little Arab art today in Asia that they can nearly said to have no art, though their rulers have been liberal patrons and have encouraged their neighbours' talents in architecture, ceramics and handicraft. They show no longing for great industry, no organisation of mind or body anywhere."[140]

Both Lawrence and Doughty spent some time in the desert with the Bedouin and they wrote of the 'Bedu' with equal disdain:

> "The Bedu were odd people. For an Englishman, sojourning with them was unsatisfactory unless he had patience wide and deep as the sea. They were absolutely slaves of their appetite, with no stamina of mind, drunkards for coffee, milk or water, gluttons for stewed meat, shameless beggars of tobacco. They dreamed for weeks before and after their rare sexual exercises, and spent the intervening days titillating themselves and their hearers with bawdy tales. Had the circumstances of their lives given them opportunity they would have been sheer sensualists."[141]

Sharing similar beliefs on the culture and people, Doughty and Lawrence both express pride and relief that although they lived amongst the Arabs, they did not become like them, they managed to retain their identities.

> "We export two chief kinds of Englishmen, who in foreign parts divide themselves into two opposed classes. Some feel deeply the influence of the native people, and try to adjust themselves to its

[139] Doughty Travels p 101
[140] Lawrence, Introduction p xxxii
[141] T. E. Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom: a triumph, p 219, London, 1935

> atmosphere and spirit. To fit themselves modestly into the picture they suppress all in them that would be discordant with local habits and colours. They imitate the native as far as possible, and so avoid friction in their daily life. However, they cannot avoid the consequences of imitation, a hollow, worthless thing. They are like the people but not of the people, and their half-perceptible differences give them a sham influence often greater than their merit. They urge the people among whom they live into strange, unnatural courses by imitating them so well that they are imitated back again. The other class of Englishman is the larger class. In the same circumstances of exile they reinforce their character by memories of the life they have left. In reaction against their foreign surroundings they take refuge in the England that was theirs. They assert their aloofness, their immunity the more vividly for their loneliness and weakness. The impress the peoples among whom they live by reaction, by giving them an ensample of the complete Englishman, the foreigner intact.
>
> "Doughty is a great member of the second, the cleaner class. He says that he was never oriental, though the sun made him an Arab; and much of his value lies in the distinction. His seeing is altogether English: yet at the same time his externals, his manners, his dress, and his speech was Arabic, and nomad Arab, of the desert."[142]

Lawrence felt deeply the kinship with Doughty in enduring against all odds, to retain the powerful image of the Englishman abroad, living with the natives, but distinctly separate from them, owing to his superior nature and indefatigable strength to sustain the image for the sake of the empire.

[142] Lawrence, Introduction p xxx

3.3 Conclusions

The connection between the travellers and their writings and the image of the east is emphatic, as I have tried to show in this chapter. The implied beliefs and assumptions that were formulated about the east, its inhabitants and its dominant religion were developed during the imperial era through information supplied by the early travellers. We know now that much of the information that was passed on for public consumption was of a biased nature. The coercive framework, within which the stereotypical images were set, revealed the judgmental value of the narratives. Much of the hostility to the orient was due to an apprehension about the unknown east which, was exacerbated through tales of exaggeration relayed via such notables as returning missionaries and other servants of the empire. It appeared that no amount of exaggeration was too much for the portrayal of an exotic, even an erotic east, as in the case of Burton, whose representation of the east through tales such as 'The Arabian Nights', left an indelible mark on Victorian society.

A considerable amount of study into the reasons for portraying of the east thus has highlighted several factors that are poignantly relevant. Many of the authors, writing as they were for Christian consumption selectively misrepresented the facts relating to Islamic history and beliefs. On the subject of a deliberate effort to present material that was damaging to the image of Islam, Norman Daniel has said:

> "strands were brought together when the West began to form its own canon of what Islam is and what Muhammad had been. The most important sources of information reached Latin Europe by way of Spain. One of the most influential was the Arabic *Risalah*,

or Apology, attributed to 'Abd al-Masih ibn Ishaq al-Kindi, a work of which the authorship and dating are still in dispute, but which is certainly earlier than the eleventh century.

"It is natural to ask how authors whom we can neither patronise as foolish nor condemn as unscrupulous could consistently have misrepresented facts, regularly crediting ridiculous fantasies. This applies particularly to their treatment of the events of Muhammad's life, but to some extent also to the whole of their attitude to Islam.

"There are many indications of the deliberate editing of source material in various ways. The greatest editorial achievement of the twelfth century was unquestionably the Cluniac collection."[143]

Daniel's study has revealed that the earliest documentation on Islam by the Christian polemicists depended on the interpretation of those undertaking the study. Eighteenth century writer and traveller Lady Mary Wortley Montagu believed that much of the misapprehension about Islam amongst her countrymen arose due to faulty translations.

"all our translations are from Copys got from the Greek Preists, who would not fail to falsify it with the extremity of Malice. No body of men ever were more ignorant and more corrupt."[144]

It is obvious from documentation that the problem of stultifying the image of Islam started well before the period under study in this thesis. For the polemicists, the dilemma was not so much whether to relay the truth or falsify it, rather, it was whether, it would be accepted by the public for whom it was intended. Clearly, from the Christian point of view, it was better to distort the image of Islam than present is in a light unfavourable to Christianity.

[143] Daniel Norman, Islam and the West: The making of an Image, p 229, Edinburgh University Press, 1960
[144] The Complete letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1:318 2 vols, edited by Robert Halsband, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1965

Tales of eastern decadence imagined through narratives such as the Arabian Nights and Beckford's Vathek provided ample fuel for the Victorian imagination. Such tales served to enforce the determination of the government and established their resolve to eradicate Islam from the colonies and establish Christianity as the only civilised religion. The narratives of the imperial travellers served to indoctrinate the representatives of the government and as we shall see in the next chapter, the pre-conceived ideas about oriental people and their 'peculiarities' were used by officials such as Cromer to justify the white man's superiority.

The criteria for establishing the stereotypical uncivilised eastern native were to provide justification for the white European to assume the role of his mission to civilise. The ideology of the white man's supremacy was maintained not only by the empire but also for the empire. The prize of the economic treasures provided by the colonies was too precious to relinquish and this demanded a continuous tirade of imperial justifications such as the argument presented by Carlyle for the maintenance of the slave population in the West Indies:

> "I say if the black gentleman is born to be a servant, and in fact, is useful in God's creation only as a servant, then let him hire not by the month, but by a much by a very much longer term. That he be hired for life, really here is the essence of the position he now holds."[145]

Such colonial rhetoric was part of the language that permeated English society, reinforcing through stereotypes the image of the native's incapacity to manage his affairs and the need for the European settler to step in and organise him. Negative imaging was a carefully constructed deployment that was used with a great deal of success. The colonial machinery to establish the supremacy of their race and culture had been developed over a long period by way of gradual indoctrination. It was

---

[145] Carlyle, Nigger, p 22

only through the systematic supply of exaggerated eastern folklore that an enforcement of outrageous beliefs could be inculcated. Travellers to the east in the eighteenth century were pioneers in the sense that they were able to carry back tales of their experiences without anyone to contradict their records. Subsequent travellers therefore used these recordings to gauge their own experience and in fact were told by the travelogues on what to expect on their journeys thus setting the precedent for future colonial discourse.

The discussion and the contention of this chapter are also supported by the findings of one of the most prolific writers on the subject, Leila Ahmed[146]. She believes that the seclusion of women and the practice of the *hijab* was taken by the Western colonialists as a sign of Muslim backwardness and subsequently as a barrier to their development. The concept was eagerly grasped by the missionaries to further their own cause of propagating 'Christian' principles supporting the 'freedom' and development of native womenfolk. Unfortunately, the westernised local intellectuals also gave credence to the concept in the furtherance of feminist ideals.

---

[146] Ahmed Leila, Women and Gender in Islam Yale University Press, 1992

CHAPTER FOUR

Egypt

4.0 Introduction

As outlined in the last chapter, preconceived notions of race and culture by the colonial powers were the result of indoctrination established over many centuries. The central theme of this chapter will be to demonstrate that the colonisation of Egypt by the British and the role of the Consul General Lord Cromer, contributed intrinsically to the 'modernising' influence on the country. This modernising process affected almost every aspect of Egyptian society; however, for the purpose of this study we will concentrate on the issues that directly impacted upon the women and their wearing of the Islamic *hijab*. The practice of segregation, which was observed by some families and the custom of the *hijab* came under direct attack by Cromer who regarded it as degrading to women.

Legislation directed at the indigenous population was designed to conform to the colonial ideological system that sought to establish within Egyptian society, parallels with the home culture. Hence the quintessential Victorian perception of gender and the role of men and women in society was used as a measure on the Egyptians to determine their level of civilisation. The Egyptian characteristics were compared to their English counterpart and their 'differentness' was criticised as an inherent weakness and hence inferior. An important aspect of this comparison was the connection that was made through religion whereby Islam was projected as being responsible for the subjection of women and relegating them a low status in society.

Cromer who was Counsel General of Egypt during the period 1883-1907 dominated Egyptian politics through his intense autocratic style of government. The legislation introduced by Cromer to provide equity in all areas of education proved implicitly damaging for the women. A closer examination of Cromer's views will reveal that his preoccupation with social reform was an attempt at disguising the colonial ideological apparatus that he had been sent to Egypt to establish. To Cromer this was accomplished by vindication of the Englishman's mission in Egypt:

> "one of the first qualifications necessary in order to play the part of a saviour of society is that the saviour should believe in himself and in his mission. This the Englishman did. He was convinced that his mission was to save Egyptian society, and, moreover, that he was able to save it".[147]

4.1 Cromer on Cultural and Racial Superiority

Cromer's objective as a servant of the Empire was to serve his government in any way that would accrue advantages for his country even if it had repercussions for the colonies. His task was made easier by his beliefs that he was dealing with an inferior people thus justifying his treatment of the 'subjects'. Cromer qualified this difference of the natives by allocating them to a secondary status by virtue of their qualities being vastly subordinate to the English, a factor he perceived to be beyond their control.

[147] Baring Evelyn, Lord Cromer, Modern Egypt, Two volumes, London, 1908

> "Sir Alfred Lyall once said to me: 'Accuracy is abhorrent to the Oriental mind. Every Anglo-Indian official should always remember that maxim'. Want of accuracy, which easily degenerates into untruthfulness is in fact, the main characteristic of the Oriental mind. The European is a close reasoner; his statements of fact are devoid of ambiguity; he is a natural logician, albeit he may not have studied logic; he loves symmetry in all things; he is by nature sceptical and requires proof before he can accept the truth of any proposition; his trained intelligence works like a piece of mechanism. The mind of an Oriental on the other hand, like his picturesque streets, is eminently wanting in symmetry. His reasoning is of the most slipshod description. Although the ancient Arabs acquired in a somewhat high degree the science of dialectics, their descendants are singularly deficient in the logical faculty. They are often incapable of drawing the most obvious conclusions from any simple premises of which they may admit the truth. Endeavour to elicit a plain statement of facts from an ordinary Egyptian. His explanation will generally be lengthy, and wanting in lucidity. He will probably contradict himself half-a-dozen times before he has finished the story. He will often break down under the mildest process of cross-examination. The Egyptian is also eminently unsceptical. He readily becomes the dupe of the magician and the astrologer."[148]

It would appear that to Cromer, the Egyptian had no redeeming quality whatsoever and that nothing was too trivial for Cromer to comment on.

> "Perhaps there is no point as to which the difference between Eastern and Western habits of thought comes out into stronger relief than in the views which are respectively entertained by the Oriental and the European as regards provision for the future in this world. The European, especially if he be a Frenchman, is usually economical, and his economy will not unfrequently degenerate into meanness. He will pause before he gives pledges which, whilst providing for his immediate wants, may embarrass him or even reduce him to penury at no distant date. He will usually make provision for his old age, for the wife, who may, and for the children who probably will survive him. The Egyptian generally cares for none of these things. He takes little heed for the morrow which will dawn on himself, an none for the days which are in store for those whom he will leave behind him".[149]

---

[148] Cromer, Modern, 2:146-147
[149] Cromer, Modern, 2:149

The principals of economics, such as savings and investment, and which constitute such an important cornerstone of Western society, to Cromer's understanding have little value on the Egyptian peasant, and to Cromer this is unfathomable. He finds the Egyptian's inability to be concerned about the future and his disregard for providing for his family in the eventuality of his demise, perplexing. To his European way of thinking, the custom of saving to prepare for the unexpected is natural this contradicts with the Egyptian belief that preparing for the unforeseen will not necessarily prevent a calamity from happening. Other aspects of cultural differences that Cromer reflects on reveal how difficult it is for him to concede to any concession to the Egyptian character.

> "Passing on to the consideration of another difference between the Oriental and the European, which will prove a perpetual stumbling block to the Englishman in Egypt, is to be observed that the ways of the Oriental are tortuous; his love of intrigue is inveterate; centuries of despotic government during which his race has been exposed to the unbridled violence of capricious and headstrong governors, have let him to fall back on the natural defence of the weak against the strong. He reposes unlimited faith on his own cunning, and to some extent his chosen weapon will stand him to good stead. But its employment will widen the breach between him and his protectors, for fate has willed that the Egyptians should be more especially associated with those members of the European family who, perhaps more than any others, loathe and despise intrigue; who, in their dealings with their fellow-men are frank and blunt, even at times to brutality; and who, though not difficult to beguile are apt unexpectedly to turn round and smite those who have beguiled them so hardly as to crush them to the dust. From this point of view, one of the more subtle Latin races, had it occupied the predominant position held by the English in Egypt, would probably have had more sympathy with the weaknesses of Egyptian character than the Anglo-Saxon."[150]

Revealing in the above diatribe, is not only Cromer's low opinion of the oriental, but also his view that the high standard of his race, the Anglo-

---

[150] Cromer, Modern, 2:150-51

Saxon, is superior to even some of the European 'Latin' races because of their impeccability of character. In his narratives, Cromer uses many of the traditional stereotypical classifications about the Egyptian that were used by Lane in his account of the Modern Egyptian. He thus reinforces the established consensus on the Oriental's distinguishing features that have been voiced by his predecessors many times before. Pre-conceived notions of the innate weaknesses of the oriental nature make it possible for Cromer to regard everything the Egyptian does as flawed.

> "A European would think that, where a road and paved side-walk existed, it required no great effort of the reasoning faculty to perceive that human beings were intended to pass along the side-walk, and animals along the road. The point is not always so clear to the Egyptian. He will not infrequently walk in the middle of the road, and will send his donkey along the side path."
>
> "Tell an Egyptian cook that he puts too much salt into the soup. He will abstain altogether from the use of salt. Or, on the other hand, tell him that he does not use salt enough; he will throw in a bucketful. He cannot hit the happy mean; moderation in the use of salt or in anything else, is foreign to his nature; he cannot grasp the idea of quantity."[151]
>
> "The ethnologist, the comparative philologist, and the sociologist would possibly be able to give explanations as regards many of the differences which exist between the East and the West. As I am only a diplomatist and an administrator, whose proper study is also man, but from the point of view of governing him rather than from that of scientific research into how he comes to be what he is, I content myself with noting that fact that somehow or other the Oriental generally acts, speaks, and thinks in a manner exactly opposite to the European."[152]

Cromer's narrative reinforces his subjective viewpoint and is in keeping with his role of representing the Egyptian as worthless. Through his anecdotes he was articulating the colonial fabrication of an entire ethnic group and subsequently justifying their subordination. To Cromer the

[151] Cromer Modern, 2: 153
[152] Cromer, Modern, 2:152-64

domination of the oriental by the superior English was a natural phenomenon and he found the whole process uncomplicated. Cromer found that the proof of the Egyptian's inferiority was evident in his lack of capability.

> "Side by side with the European's appreciation of arithmetic, consider that in all matters connected with number or quantity, the ordinary Egyptian goes hopelessly astray. Few uneducated Egyptians know their own age. The usual reply of an Egyptian if asked the age of some old man, is that he is a hundred years old. What importance, he thinks, can be attached to precision about a matter of this sort, or indeed, to any scientific or quasi-scientific subject."[153]

> "one of the first qualifications necessary in order to play the part of the saviour of society is that the saviour should believe in himself and in his mission. This the Englishman did. He was convinced that his mission was to save Egyptian society, and moreover, that he was able to save it. How was he to accomplish his mission? Was he, in his energetic, brisk northern fashion to show the Egyptian what they had to do, and then to leave them to carry on the work by themselves? This is what he thought to do, but alas! He was soon to find that to fulminate against abuses, which were the growth of centuries, was like firing a cannonball into a mountain of mud. By the adoption of any such method, he could only produce a temporary ebullition. If he were to do any good, he must not only show what must be done, but he must stay where he was and do it himself."[154]

Not only is the mission to civilise evident in the above discourse, but it was also a rejection of any future thought to Egyptian nationalism. Cromer's ethnocentric evaluation of the Egyptians was possibly based on established views suggestive of religious convictions. This was almost inevitable since nineteenth century England had a strong Evangelical revival movement that influenced middle-class men and women and provided them with the religious conviction that theirs was the right to reform above all others. This legitimised the cultural racism that was

[153] Cromer, Modern, 2:152
[154] Cromer, Modern, 2:124

endemic in the colonial rhetoric.

4.2 Cromer on Islam

Cromer had very definite views on Islam and its impact on society but most especially, its impact on women. He believed that Islam as a religion prevented the development of its society and he saw the proof of this in the underdeveloped structure of Egyptian society. He was able to find abundant excuses for its weaknesses.

> "I have said that religious prejudice constituted one of the barriers which were interposed between the Englishman and the Egyptian; for on the on hand besides being one of the European family in respect to civilisation, the Englishman, amidst many deviations from the path will strive perhaps to a greater extent than any other member of that family, to attain to a high degree of eminently Christian civilisation; that is to say, although he will in his official capacity discard any attempt to proselytise, he will endeavour to inculcate a distinctly Christian code of morality as the basis for the relations between man and man. He is indeed, guided in this direction by the lights, which have been handed down to him by his forefathers, and by the Puritan blood which still circulates in his veins.
>
> "The Egyptian on the other hand, holds fast to the faith of Islam, that noble monotheism, belief in which takes to a great extent the place of patriotism in Eastern countries, and which serves as a common bond of union to all Moslems from Delhi to Fez, from Stamboul to Zanzibar, as they turn to pray towards the cradle of their creed."[155]

To Cromer, the difference between Islam and Christianity is what made it unacceptable to the European. Sweeping generalisations that represented Islam as spiritually beyond the borders of Europe made it easier to criticise and deride. To the European therefore, Islam had to be contained within the parameters set by Christian ideology, and if it did not conform to the

---

[155] Cromer, Modern, p 132-33

same ideology, this made it a religion of the unknown. It was also the close proximity of Islam to Christianity, especially in terms of biblical references, that made the Christian polemicists uneasy. This uneasiness was especially prevalent in their perception to the role of the women in Islam. Having received through the generous contributions of writers traversing the orient, European colonialists had an abundance of material informing them of the plight of the woman in the east and how Islam as a religion served to reinforce their pre-conceived stereotypical image. The opposite end of the spectrum represents the stereotypical Englishwoman about whom Cromer says:

> "Look now to the consequences which result from the degradation of women in Mohammedan countries. In respect of two points, both of which are of vital importance, there is a radical difference between the position of the Moslem women and that of their European sisters. In the first place, the face of the Moslem is veiled when she appears in public. She lives a life of seclusion. The face of the European woman is exposed to view in public. The only restraints placed on her movements are those dictated by her own sense of propriety. In the second place, the East is polygamous, the West is monogamous. It cannot be doubted that the seclusion of women exercises a baneful effect on Eastern society. The arguments on this subject are indeed so commonplace that it is unnecessary to dwell on them. It will be sufficient to say that seclusion, by confining the sphere of woman's interest to a very limited horizon, cramps the intellect and withers the mental development of one-half of the population in Moslem countries."[156]

The subject of veiling that Cromer emphasises in the above discourse served as the central theme to his disparagement of the Islamic practice. It was veiling as he saw it, which was the cause of the Muslim's degradation of women and prevented their society from competing on an equal footing with the societies of Europe. As outlined in the previous chapter, to the European mind, the veil was associated with Western tales of harem culture and what was imagined to be taking place within the enclosure.

---

[156] Cromer, Modern, 2:155-56

The Western notion of seclusion was consequently linked to degradation since it was imagined that if the women were confined to their homes, they were theoretically imprisoned. Lady Mary Montague Wortley documented on her travels the reality of oriental culture was very different to the reports they received at home.

> "As to their morality or good conduct, I can say like Arlequin, 'tis just as 'tis with you, and the Turkish ladys don't commit one sin the less for not being Christians. Now I am a little acquainted with their ways, I cannot forbear admiring either the exemplary discretion or extreme stupidity of all the writers that have given accounts of them. 'Tis very easy to see that they have more liberty than we have, on woman of what rank so ever being permitted to go in the streets without 2 muslins, one that covers her face all but her eyes and another that hides the whole dress of her head and hangs halfe way down her back; and their shapes are wholly conceal'd by a thing they call a Ferigee, which no woman of any sort appears without."
>
> "You may guess how effectually this disguises them that there is no distinguishing the great lady from her slave, and 'tis impossible for the most jealous husband to know his wife when he meets her, and no man dare either touch or follow a woman in the street.
>
> "Upon the whole I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the Empire. The very Divan pays a respect to 'em, and the Grand Signor himself, when a Bassa is executed, never violates the privileges of the haram which remains unsearch'd entire to the widow.... 'Tis true their law permits them four wives, but there is no instance of a man of quality that makes use of this liberty, or of a woman of rank that would suffer it.
>
> "Thus you see, dear sister, the manners of mankind does not differ so widely as our voyage writers would make us believe. Perhaps it would be more entertaining to add a few surprising customs of my own invention, but nothing seems to me so agreeable as truth, and I believe nothing so acceptable to you."[157]
>
> "When an Egyptian woman interferes in politics her interference is almost always mischievous. The information she obtains is necessarily communicated to her through a variety of distorted media. The fact of her seclusion renders it well nigh impossible

[157] Wortley Montagu, 1:328-330

for her to hear both sides of a question."[158]

It would appear therefore that Montagu's narrative validates that the implied assertions about seclusion were more speculative than factual thus making it plausible that Cromer's assumptions about life in the women's private apartments were based on conjecture or at the very least would have been influenced by the prevailing ethnocentricity. Cromer's absorption with women's issues and his understanding that their reform was fundamental to progress needs further investigation to establish his motive. Since women's emancipation was not one of Cromer's favourite pastimes, his intense interest in the Egyptian woman's plight appears questionable.

In Britain, two of the most vehement opponents to the cause of women's suffrage, were the Earl Curzon of Kedleston and The Earl of Cromer who together formed the famous 'Curzon-Cromer combine'.[159] Their active participation in the movement to prevent the women from gaining political victory was revealing in its convictions. The question then arises as to how the founding member and one time president of the 'Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage'[160], in his own country, could so ardently stand as advocate for the cause of the unveiling of the Egyptian woman. Since much of Cromer's rhetoric echoed Edward Lane's previously cited remarks on the qualities of the native Egyptians, it is difficult to imagine that Cromer would not have been influenced in his beliefs on the oriental people, by the writings of Lane and his contemporaries. This is verified by Cromer himself in his reference to Stanley Lane-Poole[161], who says of eastern women:

---

[158] Cromer, Modern, 2:156

[159] Rover Constance, Women's Suffrage & Party Politics in Britain 1866-1914, Routledge & Kegan, 1967

[160] Anti-Suffrage Review, July 1910, published by the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League.

[161] Stanley Lane Poole was Edward William Lane's nephew, see title page of Edward William Lane, An account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptian.

> "The degradation of women in the East is a canker that begins its destructive work early in childhood, and has eaten into the whole system of Islam."[162]

When Stanley Lane Poole says that 'Islam as a system is a complete failure', Cromer offers to explain why this is so.

> "The reasons why Islam as a social system has been a complete failure are manifold. First and foremost, Islam keeps women in a position of marked inferiority. In the second place, Islam, speaking not so much through the Koran as through the traditions which cluster round the Koran, crystallises religion and law into one inseparable and immutable whole, with the result that all elasticity is taken away from the social system. If to this day an Egyptian goes to law over a question of testamentary succession, his case is decided according to the antique principles which were laid down as applicable to the primitive society of the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century."[163]

Cromer's vision of Egypt it appeared was not different to that perceived by Lane and his nephew, Poole. They each reinforced each other's polemics on gender and the role of imperialism in defining it, whilst maintaining an air of Christian benevolence towards the unfortunate Egyptians. Cromer's conviction that Islam degraded women gave him the sanction he needed to criticise the native culture of the Egyptians.

> "I need not dwell on the causes which, in Egypt, as in other Oriental countries have led to the seclusion of women, nor on the extent to which this practice is due to the prevalence of the Mohammedan religion. From the point of view of the politician and administrator, the consideration of these questions, interesting though they be, is of little more than academic interest. I am not endeavouring in this work to discuss the effects of Islamism upon progress and civilisation in general. My task is of a more humble nature. I am merely attempting to describe the state of things which the English found in existence when they took in hand the rehabilitation of Egypt. Amongst other social difficulties it has

[162] Stanley Lane-Poole. Islam, a prelection delivered before the University of Dublin, (Quoted in Cromer, Modern, page 134)
[163] Cromer, Modern, p 134-5

> therefore to be noted that Moslem women in Egypt are secluded and that their influence partly by reason of their seclusion, is in all political and administrative matters, generally bad."[164]

Cromer's views on veiling were further compounded by his views on the custom of polygamy, which came to be regarded by the Christian missionaries as the ultimate degradation. Cromer voiced a deep concern about the effects of polygamy on society.

> "The effects of polygamy are more baneful and far-reaching than those of seclusion. The whole fabric of European society rests upon the preservation of family life. Monogamy fosters family life polygamy destroys it. The monogamous Christian respects women; the teaching of his religion and the incidents of his religious worship tend to elevate them. He sees in the Virgin Mary an ideal of womanhood, which would be incomprehensible in a Moslem country. The Moslem, on the other hand, despises women.... Save in exceptional cases, the Christian fulfils the vow which he has made at the alter to cleave to his wedded wife for life. The Moslem, when his passion is sated, can if he likes throw off his wife like an old glove."

> "In the second place, polygamy is expensive. Lane said, so long ago as 1835, 'I believe that not more than one husband among twenty has two wives', and since Lane's time, the practice of polygamy has certainly diminished. Nevertheless, the movement in favour of monogamy cannot be as yet called general. The first thing an Egyptian of the lower classes will do when he gets a little money is to marry a second wife. A groom in my stables was divorced and re-married eleven times in the course of a year or two."[165]

The tendency to superimpose Christian constructions on Islamic practices was used to reinforce moral justification and was part of the missionary project. The missionaries actively targeted the custom of veiling and polygamy by projecting these practices as barbaric and sensual, thus reiterating the travel writer's view that eastern societies were immoral. To Cromer's English middle class viewpoint, the practice of polygamy was

[164] Cromer, Modern, p 2:156-7

an effrontery to his paternalistic masculine identity making it easier for him to direct his assault of the inferiority of women onto the culture of other people even though, in his own country he vocally resisted the suffragette movement of his own countrywomen. He uses the works of established British Orientalists to stress the unfavourable affects on society of the prevailing eastern customs.

> "Amongst other consequences resulting from polygamy and the customs which cluster round polygamy, it may be noted that, whereas in the West the elevation of women has tended towards the refinement both of literature and of conversation, in the East their degradation has encouraged literary and conversational coarseness. This coarseness has attracted the attention of all who have written on Egyptian manners and customs."[166]

The solution to the backwardness of Egypt was considered by Cromer to be uncomplicated. He, along with the other reforming agents, considered it essential that the primary factor in the development of the society, was to target the veil as the object of reform. To them the veil symbolised all that was essentially backward about Egyptian society and only by its physical removal could the society expect to move forward and acquire some of the benefits that Western civilisation was already enjoying.

4.3 Cromer on Education

At least during the start of the British occupation, education in Egypt suffered a series of setbacks. Most of the elementary education was provided by the *kuttabs*, these were the schools attached to the local mosques, the more advanced form of education was provided by al-Azhar. Cromer express a distinct negative opinion of the educational system, especially the ones linked to the local mosques.

---

[165] Cromer, Modern p 2:156-9

[166] Cromer Modern p 159; he quotes: Lane's Modern Egyptians, vol I p 260 and 273

> "It was clear to the British reformer that the education imparted at the famous University of al-Azhar could not be utilised to raise the general standard of education in Egypt. He therefore left the institution alone. The Al-Azhar University stands at the summit of the purely Moslem educational system of Egypt. The village schools (*Kuttabs*), which are attached to most mosques in the country, stand at the base of that system...It would be an exaggeration to say that these Mosque schools are absolutely useless. Through their instrumentality, a certain number of children are taught to read and write. Organised as they were at the time of the British occupation commenced, they were, however as nearly useless as any educational establishment could be."[167]

Cromer's primary criticism to the educational system was due to the concentration of the curriculum in the study of Arabic and of the teaching of the Holy Qur'an. He considered that the only way to improve on the system was through the introduction of a European style of education that imparted learning influenced by the teachings of Christianity.

> "It is nothing less than this, that the new generation of Egyptians has to be persuaded or forced into imbibing the true spirit of Western civilisation. Although Europe was Christianised first and civilised afterwards, it may perhaps be argued with some degree of plausibility - more especially with the example of Japan before us - that the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy would be involved if it were held that Christianity is the necessary handmaid of European civilisation, and that it is impossible to assimilate the true spirit of that civilisation without adopting the Christian faith.
>
> "Looking then solely to the possibility of reforming those countries which have adopted the faith of Islam, it may be asked whether any one can conceive the existence of true European civilisation on the assumption that the position which women occupy in Europe is abstracted from the general plan?"[168]
>
> "As well can a man blind from birth be made to conceive the existence of colour. Change the position of women, and one of the main pillars, no only of European civilisation, but al all events of the moral code based on the Christian religion, if not of Christianity itself, falls to the ground. The position of women in

[167] Cromer, Modern, p 2:532
[168] Cromer Modern p 2:538

> Egypt, and in Mohammedan countries generally, is therefore a fatal obstacle to the attainment of that elevation of thought and character which should accompany the introduction of European civilisation, if that civilisation is to produce its full measure of beneficial effect. The obvious remedy would appear to be to educate the women. It of course, remains an open question whether, when the Egyptian women are educated, they will exercise a healthy and elevating influence over the men."[169]

Whilst Cromer imbibed vocally the necessity for the Egyptians to assimilate the spirit of western civilisation, he was actively pursuing policies that were designed to impede any progress that may subsequently accrue to the people. His policies were especially detrimental to the advancement of women. While some allowances were made towards free education, this was ratified by the early part of the twentieth century, when it was no longer considered necessary to attract new students. Advanced education for girls was also limited to areas that were promoted as suitable.

Girls were encouraged to train in areas such as nursing and midwifery and to fill the growing demand for native governesses for the European residents. Women were not encouraged to enter the field of medicine despite the fact that there was an acute shortage of female doctors. Cromer considered this irrelevant in a country where women showed a preference to being treated by a female doctor.

> "I am aware that in exceptional cases women like to be attended by female doctors, but I conceive that throughout the civilised world, attendance by medical men is still the rule."[170]

The restriction on female doctors resulted in women neglecting their health since they were reluctant to be examined by the male doctors. This did have an impact on the health of the female sector of the population and it was through the training of female health visitors that incidences of

---

[169] Cromer, Modern p 2:539

[170] FO633/8, Cromer Papers, Lord Cromer to Mr Davidson, Cairo, 23 January 1900, FO.252

epidemic diseases could be contained. Cromer's main concern in educating the women was he did not consider that they would find education as useful as the men.

> "It of course, remains an open question whether, when the Egyptian women are educated, they will exercise a healthy and elevating influence over the men. The few Moslem women in Egypt who have, up to the present time received a European education are, with some very rare exceptions, strictly secluded. It is difficult, therefore, to form any matured opinion as to the results so far obtained. In Christian Europe, the religious faith of women is generally stronger than that of the men. The woman feels and trusts, the man reasons. The faith of the Moslem women, on the other hand, is probably rather less strong than that of Moslem men. Neither need this be any matter for surprise. It is not merely due to the curious impulse, which appears almost invariably to drive the East and the West in opposite directions. It is a consequence of the fundamental differences, which separate Christianity from Islamism."[171]

It is difficult to ascertain how Cromer was able to arrive at such an emphatic assumption based, as it appears to be, on conjecture. He had already established his deeply misogynist views through his direct involvement with the anti-suffragettes in England, hence, his opinion of the Muslim woman would have been fairly clear. To suggest that he had privilege access to information on the personal beliefs of Muslim women in relation to that of the men would be highly suspect. The Victorian prejudice that he inherited against all women, was carried one step further when he was able to suggest about the Muslim woman, what he could not suggest of the Christian, their religious apathy. This was so because, as previously explained, the eastern woman was presented by Victorian writers as promiscuous, it was therefore impossible for this same woman to appear also as a fervent believer of her faith, opposites personalities could not exist in the same person. Cromer thus followed the example set by Lane by recounting details of Muslim beliefs in the guise of an eastern

[171] Cromer, Modern p 2:540-41

expert, while it may be fairly safely assumed that they did not anticipate any objection to their prognostication.

> "A Europeanised Egyptian man usually becomes an Agnostic, and often assimilates many of the least worthy portions of European civilisation. Is there any reason why European education should not produce the same effect on the Europeanised Egyptian woman? I know of none. Indeed, in so far as the Agnosticism is concerned, the woman, on the assumption that her faith is relatively lukewarm, would probably find less difficulty than the man in shaking herself free from the ideas and associations which have surrounded her from her cradle."[172]

Cromer acknowledges that the Europeanised Egyptian would not benefit from the influence of Western culture, the most damaging aspect of this would be his estrangement from his religion. While Cromer had reservation on the religiosity and moral characteristics of the Egyptian woman, Lane had already cast aspersions on their morality. The subjection of Muslim women to immorality made it possible to stereotype them in the roles those English readers would find acceptable.

> "The libidinous character of the generality of the women of Egypt, and the licentious conduct of a great number of them, may be attributed to many causes; partly, to the climate, and partly to their want of proper instruction, and of innocent pastimes and employment."[173]

The motive for improving the educational level of the Egyptians was accepted by many to be the subsequent autonomy of the Egyptians from foreign rule. It is however interesting to note that autonomy is a subjective issue and could have different meanings to different people. Cromer's understanding of autonomy was therefore different to the natives.

---

[172] Cromer, Modern, p 2:541-42
[173] Lane, Manners, p 296

4.3 Cromer on Egyptian Autonomy

The rise of Egyptian nationalism brought a reaction from Cromer as well as the British government. Cromer made no secret of the fact that he did not consider it prudent to evacuate Egypt leaving the country in its current state. The case for Britain was presented by Arthur James Balfour, who in the summer of 1910 presented his argument to remain in Egypt in the House of Commons, he said:

> "We know the civilisation of Egypt better than we know the civilisation of any other country.... We are in Egypt not merely for the sake of the Egyptians, though we are there for their sake; we are there also for the sake of Europe at large."[174]

Cromer was emphatically against the withdrawal of British troops from Egypt and did all he could to halt or delay the process. Although he wrote in his chronicles that he was in favour of a withdrawal, if it was in Britain's interest to do so, he nevertheless contrived to prevent this from happening. He declared his concerns regarding the evacuation of Egypt;

> "As a mere academic question, I never have been, neither am I now in favour of the British occupation of Egypt.
>
> "But it is essential that subsequent to the evacuation, the government should, broadly speaking act on principles which will be in conformity with the commonplace requirements of Western civilisation.
>
> "It is absurd to suppose that Europe will look on as a passive spectator whilst a retrograde government based on purely Mohammedan principles and obsolete Oriental ideas, is established in Egypt. The material interests at stake are too important, and the degree of civilisation to which Egypt has attained is too advanced, to admit of such a line of conduct being adopted."[175]

---

[174] Parliamentary Debates in the House of Commons 5th Ser; 1910

[175] Cromer, Modern, p 2:565

The contradiction of Cromer's statement came from Wilfred Blunt and his personal dialogue with him:

> "I asked him what he thought would happen if we evacuated. He said everything would go to smash, but we should not evacuate. I said we might be obliged to do so if there was a change of government at home. He said, 'I shall protest against it, and if it is insisted on, I wash my hands of the consequences.'[176]

Blunt also criticised Cromer's zealous interference in the Egyptian legal system and his attempt to pervert the course of justice at the expense of the Egyptian.

> "Lord Cromer was for strengthening the English political position in Egypt by influencing the Courts and by appointing a majority of Englishmen to the judgeships and only such natives as should be amenable to English pressure, whereas Scott maintained that there were plenty of native judges more competent than and quite as worthy of confidence as the Englishmen."[177]

Cromer's administration in Egypt had incurred not only objection in Egypt but due to his mismanagement of the Denshawai incident, it also aroused disapproval in England. A brief explanation of the Denshawai incident is perhaps required here since it is believed to have played a significant role in the subsequent agitation that resulted in raising the profile for nationalism in Egypt and also receiving a favourable hearing in England.

A group of British soldiers became embroiled in a fracas with some Egyptians in which some natives were wounded and a British officer was killed. Due to a Decree proclaimed in 1895, a special tribunal was set up and the men accused of the death of the soldier were brought to a hasty trial and convicted. As a result of the trial;

> "They have condemned four of the Denshawai villagers to death, four to penal servitude for life, three to fifteen years imprisonment, six to seven years, three to one year with fifty lashes, and five to

[176] Blunt, Diaries, p 60
[177] Blunt Wilfred Scawen, Atrocities of Justice Under British Rule in Egypt, p 19 (London 1907)

> fifty lashes. This is a monstrous sentence and ought, I think to do more to break up the legend of Cromer's paternal rule in Egypt thank anything we have seen since its commencement."[178]

Blunts reaction on the incident reveals the severity of the incident and its impact on the Egyptians.

> ".. there was a special telegram in the Daily Chronicle saying that Cromer had decided to have the villagers shot. This, be it remarked, before any trial had taken place, and all treat it as a case of murder with prearrangement, not on the part of the officers, but of the fellahin. It is the usual course these affairs take in Egypt, but a more than usually plain demonstration of the kind of justice dealt out between Englishman and native. English feeling on these matters has become absolutely callous, and I believe if Cromer ordered a dozen of the villagers to be crucified or impaled, no serious objection would be made to it here,."[179]

The severity of Cromer's administration in dealing with this incident and his general disposition towards the plight of the Egyptians is shown by Blunt's documentary of events as they happened. The general consensus on the impact of the British occupation on Egypt was one of disaster for the country. Cromer's inability to understand or sympathise with the native Egyptians and their requirements was constructive in the conflicts that developed. Cromer was aware of the religious beliefs of the people and the strength of their views on matters pertaining to the religion, yet he made no effort to attempt to understand or to accommodate them. Issues relevant to religious beliefs were continuously raised during the British occupation, however, their solutions were not necessarily in the interest of the grieved party as Blunts revelations show regarding the incidence of alcohol consumption:

> "Another matter which I took up that winter with Lord Cromer was on that lay at the root of all sound progress in Egypt, as it does wherever a Mohammedan population finds itself subjected to a Christian government, that of its demoralization by drink. I am no

[178] Blunt, Diaries, p 2:153
[179] Blunt, Diaries, p 2:152

> fanatic on the question of drink in Europe, where the use of wine and strong spirits stands in no direct opposition, except by its abuse, to morals. In Mohammedan lands the case is entirely different. There the abstention from wine is a fundamental principle of the moral code, and those who transgress on this point become reprobate in their own eyes and lose all sense of decency and decorum. This was beginning to show itself markedly in Egypt as a consequence of the establishment of English rule. It had been against the spread of drink as much as anything that the revolution of 1881 had acquired its moral strength in public opinion and with the suppression of the Nationalist after Tel-el-Kebir, and the reinstatement of European control, the evil had returned in double force. It is hardly too much to say that we had intervened in Egypt to reinstate the Greek drink sellers, who combined it with moneylending in the villages of the Delta."[180]

Blunt reveals that it was calculated by the Greek wine sellers that if the fellahin could be enticed inside to partake of the drink, they would relax on moral grounds other restraints such as transactions in money with interest. Blunt co-operated with the villagers and presented their petition to Cromer to enlist his help. He says:

> "The whole question of the drink shops might, if he was willing to be treated as a police matter to be dealt with as a common nuisance, and it would not have been possible for the Greek Consul General to make a serious question of it if Baring should insist."[181]

The question of drink, like the question of the veil, were recurring issues during the British occupation of Egypt and one that Cromer would have had to confront in his administration. His inability to react to these issues sympathetically was a revealing factor about personality.

---

[180] Blunt, Diaries p 2:41-2
[181] Blunt, Diaries p 2:42

4.5 The Impact of the Occupation

The impact of the occupation on the people of Egypt is probably best viewed through the experiences of the people who witnessed the impact first hand or who were able to assess the consequences of the occupation. These people can be listed under two categories, those that witnessed the impact and were able to document its influence, and the other group of people upon whom the impact was visibly affective. Amongst the first group are two people who documented the affect of the colonial process namely Wilfred Blunt and al-Jabarti. The second group comprised some of those who appeared to have been noticeably influenced by the occupation process. Qasim Amin was a middle-class barrister who voiced his concerns regarding the prevalent practice of veiling and actively promoted its removal. In this section we will examine briefly how each of these characters documented the impact of colonialism and its longer-term affect on Egyptian society.

4.5.1 Wilfred Scawen Blunt (1840-1922)

Wilfred Blunt spent a considerable period in Egypt leading up to the British occupation. His record of the European interaction with the eastern people and the hostilities that transpired reveal the contradiction that is manifestly apparent in Cromer's narrative. Blunt is able to show that ignorance of foreign cultures and apathy to other religions provided the recipe for intense misunderstanding. It is to his credit that he was able to detach himself from any nationalist fervour and report events as they happened and without bias towards the English. This is so especially as he says of himself:

> "Belonging to a family of landed gentry of the south of England with strong Conservative traditions and connected with some of the then leaders of the Tory party, I was placed a the age of

> eighteen in the Diplomatic Service, in the first instance as attaché to the British Legation at Athens where King Otho was still on the throne of Greece, and afterwards, during a space of twelve years, as member of other legations and embassies to the various Courts of Europe, in all of which I learned a little of my profession, amused myself, and made friends."[182]

Blunt reveals that he understood the European presence in Egypt to be altruistic and without an ulterior motive.

> "I was as yet, though not perhaps even then enthusiastically so, a believer in the common English creed that England had a providential mission in the East, and that our wars were only waged there for honest and beneficent reasons. Nothing was further from my mind than that we English ever could be guilty, as a nation, of a great betrayal of justice in arms for our mere selfish interests.
>
> "Englishmen in those days were popular everywhere in Mohammedan lands, being looked upon as free from the political designs of the other Frank nations, and individually as honest than these in their commercial dealings. In Egypt especially they stood in amiable contrast with the needy adventures from the Mediterranean sea-board--the Italian, Greek and Maltese money-lenders-who were sucking the life blood of the Moslem peasantry.
>
> "England to the fellahin in their actual condition of beggary, robbed and beaten and perishing of hunger, appeared in the light of a bountiful and friendly providence very rich and quite disinterested, a redresser of wrongs and friend of the oppressed, just such, in fact, as individual English tourists then often were, who went about with open hands and expressions of sympathy. They did not suspect the immense commercial selfishness which had led us, collectively as a nation to so many aggressions on the weak races of the world."[183]

Blunt's ability to view the Egyptian natives in an unbiased light, revealed the contrast between his account and Cromer's representation of the

---

[182] Blunt Wilfred Scawen, Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt, p 1, Martin Secker, London, 1907

[183] Blunt, Secret p 7-10

fellaheen. To Cromer, the fellaheen represented the lowest order of Egyptian humanity and one worthy of disdain by his benefactor.

> "It has been the misfortune of the English in Egypt that the classes who, under the political programme, most benefited by British rule, were those who were least of all able to make their voices heard. The fellaheen are, politically speaking ciphers. They are too apathetic, too ignorant and too little accustomed to take the initiative, to give utterance in any politically audible form to their opinions even when they have any.
>
> "As to whether the fellaheen are grateful or the reverse, it is to be observed that gratitude is not, generally speaking, a national virtue. Moreover, many of those who have mixed in native society in Egypt consider that ingratitude is one of the predominant features of the Egyptian character."[184]

Here, it is worth noting that Cromer refers to the documentation on the Modern Egyptians by Lane[185] thereby reinforcing the pattern of stereotyping that became established as acceptable projection of the east. When this is contrasted with Blunt's portrayal of the fellaheen, the dichotomy becomes unmistakable.

> "The Egyptians, I wrote in my journal of the time, 'are a good, honest people as any in the world-all, that is, who do not sit in the high places. Of these I know nothing. But the peasants, the fellahin, have every virtue, which should make a happy, well-to-do society. They are cheerful, industrious, obedient to law and pre-eminently sober, not only in the matter of drink, but of the other indulgences to which human nature is prone. They are neither gamblers nor brawlers, nor licentious livers; they love their homes, their wives, their children. They are good sons and fathers, kind to dumb animals, old men, beggars, and idiots."[186]

As Blunt explains, much of the hostility felt by the native Egyptians was due to the blatant disregard by European visitors to the sensitivity of

---

[184] Cromer Modern, p 2:193-5
[185] Lane, Modern, p 1:366
[186] Blunt, Secret, p 10

religious issues. This contributed greatly towards the subsequent nationalist movement that developed over the occupation period. Violations against the fundamental principles of Islamic beliefs such as the introduction and availability of alcohol to Muslims, the emergence of the Greek money-lenders who facilitated financial loans with interest and exposure to a culture that encouraged free interaction between men and women caused deep seated resentment between the Egyptians and the Europeans.

> "A campaign was being carried on, especially by the 'Taif' newspaper, edited by a hot-headed young man of genius, Abdallah Nadim, against the brothels and wine-shops and disreputable cafes chantants which under protection of the 'Capitulations' had invaded Cairo to the grief and anger of pious Moslems. There was an echo, too, of the bitterness felt by all Mohammedans just then on account of the French raid in Tunis where it was affirmed that mosques had been profaned and Moslem women outraged."[187]

The indignity endured by the Egyptians that Blunt documented was repeated in other Muslim lands by European nations seeking to enlarge their empires by any means. European hegemony was achieved at the expense of the societies that were appropriated. The occupying powers thus attained cultural progress beneficial to them by introducing into the colonised societies aspects of their own culture. With cultures as diverse as Christianity and Islam, the scope for disagreement was inevitable but it was exacerbated through the language of colonial bias. To Blunt, the inevitability of Egypt's 'modernisation' was nothing short of a tragedy.

> "I am sorry it should come in this way, though it is what I have always foreseen, for Egypt internationalised to the profit of Europe is not a pleasant prospect. It comes of Cromer's wrong-headed administration, where the on object has been to Anglicise, not to establish a National Government. Egypt too, has been scandalously used for the creation of highly paid posts for not very capable Englishmen. I foresaw all this and protested years

[187] Blunt, Secret, p125-6

> ago, but it was of no use. Now we shall evacuate the country not for the benefit of the Egyptians, but for that of the scoundrel European Colonies."[188]

The miscarriage of justice surrounding the Denshawai affair encapsulates for Blunt the complicity of Cromer's administration and the role of the British Government in condoning Cromer's handling of the incident.

> "Nor was the case less prejudiced by the fact that Lord Cromer-who had ordered the trial and who, there is reason to believe, had decided on the death sentence before the trial began-instead of being required to explain his own share in a matter so compromising, appears in the Blue Book in the character of impartial critic and adviser of the Government, approving the abnormal procedure adopted, and giving testimonials of humanity to the English officials - men less blameworthy than himself-who had been acting under his orders. This, I repeat is a scandal so great and an offence against human right so cynical that I am compelled to renew my charges and to insist on further inquiry. I have it in my power, I believe, to make publicly known the true circumstances, not only of this but of other kindred cases, proving that the Denshawai miscarriage of justice is no exceptional error of judgement, but part of a system under which every principle of civilized law has been for years past made subservient to what has been considered political advantage."[189]

4.5.2 Qasim Amin (1865-1908)

The colonial discourse expounded by Cromer in this chapter was reiterated by the Egyptian Qasim Amin. Amin was an upper-middle class judge in the Court of Appeal having obtained his law qualifications in France; he was strongly influenced by the European culture. Amin took up the role of spokesman for the emancipation of his countrywomen from the subservience of the custom of the veil. By attributing the veil as a symbol of subordination and inferiority, Amin was merely reiterating the colonial perspective, in a Muslim voice since he used the same arguments as the

[188] Blunt, Diaries, p 2:263

[189] Blunt, Atrocities p 6

Europeans on how the veil was responsible not only for the inferior status of Muslim women but also for the general decline of the Muslim nations around the globe. It thus became evident that images of eastern women painted by the eighteenth century European writers and used by the servants of the empires that they subsequently served, did in fact leave a lasting impression on the people whose lands they occupied.

Amin published his book[190] on the Emancipation of Woman in 1899 in which he expresses the colonial view that the degradation of Muslim women was due to the cultural beliefs that permitted its women to be veiled and segregated. This was the same view expressed by Cromer in his attack.[191] By echoing the Colonial voice Amin was inviting criticism against his native culture and beliefs through his own admission of the weakness that the European were criticising. Since the veil, notwithstanding, the variations that individual cultures had adapted, had it basis in religion, consequently, the criticism of a Muslim against it would have had a far greater impact than one by a non-Muslim.

Amin's argument against veiling was based on his rather shallow reasoning that argued the drawbacks of veiling. He understands that by veiling the young women, society was preventing them from fulfilling their true potential by denying them the opportunity for meeting and mixing (as the Europeans did) on a social level. He promoted the free mixing of young people for the purpose of securing their future partner. For all of this he found the veil incompatible with the kind of social life that he was advocating.[192] Amin's upper-middle class status would have

[190] Qassim Amin, Tahrir al-Mar'a (The liberation of the woman) Cairo, 1899 and *al-Mar'ah al-Jadidah* (The new woman) Cairo, 1900 (For quotes on Amin's works I have relied mostly on the references used by Leila Ahmed in , Women and Gender in Islam, Yale University Press, 1992

[191] Cromer, Modern, 2:155

[192] Adams Charles, Islam and Modernism in Egypt, pp 231-34 Oxford University Press, 1933

given him access to European social circles where he would have had ample opportunity to scrutinise the style of the European woman and her society. His love affair with European society and to him, its superiority, formed the justification for reforming Muslim women. He could not understand why the Egyptians did not desire the benefits of the advanced civilisation that Europe had to offer.

> "Do Egyptians imagine that the men of Europe, who have attained such completeness of intellect and feeling that they are able to discover the force of steam and electricity...these souls that daily risk their lives in pursuit of knowledge and honour above the pleasures of life,...these intellects and these souls that we so admire, could possibly fail to know the means of safeguarding woman and preserving her purity? Do they think that such a people would have abandoned veiling after it had been in use among them if they had seen any good in it."[193]

Predictably, Amin's view had a powerful affect on upper class nineteenth century Egyptian society. It provoked a strong opposition by many who believed that he had stepped beyond his limits. By supporting the European view on the veil and condoning their belief that it was subjugating, Amin was declaring himself pro-European, and consequently anti-Egyptian, at least as far as cultural preference was concerned. Since the attack on the veil was directed against Islamic practices, the Europeans had declared their views both against the veil and Islam. The opposition to Amin was predictably hostile, as he had declared his affiliation with the Europeans and against the veil.

Amin's attempt at cultural transformation is an interesting phenomenon and one that is worth exploring briefly. By disassociating himself from the ideology that permeated around the *hijab* and the customs followed by the Muslims, he was in effect, distancing himself from the link that would connect him with the native Egyptians. As a Muslim who had hitherto, it

[193] Amin, Tahrir al-Mar'a 2:67, (Quoted in Ahmed, Women and Gender p 160-61)

is assumed, accepted the beliefs pertaining to the *hijab*, he was able to use his legacy to speak with authority on the subject. The dichotomy for Amin was that although he assumed that his rejection of his traditional values entitled him to membership of the European 'club', to the Europeans, he was merely a 'Europeanised Egyptian', about whom Cromer says:

> "Having cut himself loose from his creed, no barrier, save that of cynical self-interest, serves to keep him within the limits of the moral code which is in some degree he is endeavouring to copy... As he leaves the creed of his forefathers, he casts no lingering look behind. He not only leaves it, but he spurns it. He rushes blindfold into the arms of European civilisation, unmindful of the fact that what is visible to the eye constitutes merely the outward signs of that civilisation, while the deep-seated ballast of Christian morality, which regulates the occasionally eccentric movements of the vessel, is hidden beneath the surface, and is difficult of acquisition by the pseudo-European imitator of the European system.
>
> "He calls heaven to witness that he has cast aside all prejudices based on religion, and that he despises the teachings of his forefathers. See, he says to the Europeans, I have my railways, my schools, my newspapers, my law courts, and all go to make up your boasted civilisation; in what, then am I inferior to you."[194]

Amin believes that his privileged access to European education entitles him to criticise and condemn the undeveloped characteristic of his inherited culture. Having experienced the so called progressive society of the West, Amin is unable to disengage himself from its influence and consequently, is only able to criticise the established customs of his ancestors.

Amin's misogynistic views have much in common with Cromer, both of them viewed women as inferior to men. To Cromer, Eastern women were more worthy of contempt not only because they were women, but because they were eastern as well. For Amin, Egyptian women represented the

worst of female characteristics:

> "Our women do nothing of housework, and work at no skill or art, and do not engage themselves in the pursuit of knowledge, and do not read ad do not worship God, so what do they do? I will tell you, and you know as I do that what occupies the wife of the rich man and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, master and servant, is one thing....which takes many forms and that is her relationship with her husband. Sometimes she will imagine he hates her, and then that he loves her. At times she compares him with the husbands of her neighbours...Sometimes she sets herself to finding a way to change his feelings toward his relatives."[195]

If we now compare Amin's view with that of Cromer, it is difficult to discern the difference between the two authorship.

> "The most trumpery gossip will be sufficient to set her suspicions ablaze, and to convince her that some danger, which is often imaginary, hangs over the head of herself or her relatives. Ignorance of any world beyond that of the harem renders it impossible for her to discriminate between truth and falsehood, between what is within the bounds of possibility and what is so manifestly absurd as to be impossible."[196]

Amin's argument thus followed the genesis of western feminism by proposing the so-called emancipation of Egyptian women from the custom of veiling and seclusion. He was acknowledged as the founder of the Feminist Movement in so far as his monograph encouraged the start of the move towards feminist awareness. However, his message carries a double attack on women when he tells them that they must not only free themselves from the constraints of veiling and seclusion, but they must also raise themselves to the level of European woman.

---

[194] Cromer, Modern p 230-33
[195] Amin, Tahir al-mar'a, 2:40 Quoted in Ahmed, Women p 158
[196] Cromer, Modern, p 156

4.5.3 'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Jabarti (1753-1825)

Al-Jabarti was an Egyptian scholar and historian who lived in Egypt during the middle of the eighteenth century. His chronicles document the French invasion and occupation of Egypt (1798-1801) recording the event from an Arab's perspective. Jabarti describes how the French occupation affected the moral and physical state of the country. He records how Napoleon's duplicity revealed his skilful strategy and his intent to colonise Egypt. He also records how the invasion resulted in some unjustifiable destruction of religious buildings and imposition of legal directives, which were contradictory to the temperament of the natives. Some of the wanton damage to the ancient architecture resulted in damage which could not be replaced such as to the mosques and to Al-Azhar.

> "And the French trod in the Mosque of al-Azhar with their shoes, carrying swords and rifles. Then they scattered in its courtyard and its main praying area (*maqsura*) and tied their horses to the *qibla*. They ravaged the students' quarters and ponds (*baharat*), smashing the lamps and chandeliers and breaking up the bookcases of the students, the *mujawirun*, and scribes. They plundered whatever they found in the mosque, such as furnishings, vessels, bowls, deposits, and hidden things from closets and cupboards. They treated the books and Qur'anic volumes as trash, throwing them on the ground, stamping on them with their feet and shoes. Furthermore they soiled the mosque, blowing their spit in it, pissing and defecating in it. They guzzled wine and smashed the bottles in the central court and other parts. And whoever they happened to meet in the mosque they stripped. They chanced upon someone in one of the *ruwaqs* (student's residences) and slaughtered him."[197]

Napoleon's ambition for the colonising of Egypt was apparent from the moment he embarked on the momentous journey from France. Napoleon's adventure with the Egyptians was unlike any other previously

---

[197] Al-Jabarti, Napoleon in Egypt: Al-Jabarti's Chronicle of The French Occupation, 1798, p 93, Translation by Shmuel Moreh, Markus Wiener Publishers, Princeton.

undertaken as documented by his own chroniclers in *Description de l'Egypte* and published between 1809 and 1828. He had planned to enchant the Egyptians through a clever ruse of beguiling the Muslims into believing that the invaders were their friends. Napoleon through foresight had carefully planned his manoeuvres by ensuring that he knew enough about the culture of the people he was planning to rule. Jabarti was suspicious of Napoleon's attempt to convince the *ulema* of his intention towards their religion.

> "the members of the *Diwan* went to the head of the *Diwan* and they were invited to go the *Sari Askar* (Napoleon). Shaykh al-Sharqawi, al-Sawi and those who were present went to him. After sitting for a while, the *Sari Askar* got up from his seat and brought a three-piece *taylasan* (a shawl like garment) of red, white and blue and put it on Shaykh al-Shaqawi's shoulder. The latter removed it with his hand and put it on the floor, asking to be excused from wearing it. The interpreter said 'Oh *Shaykhs*! You have become dear friends of the *Sari Askar* and his intention is to glorify you and to honour you with his attire and token, because if you are thus marked, the soldiers and the people will extol you and you will fill a great place in their hearts'. They answered, 'But our esteem may fall in the eyes of our Muslim brothers'. The *Sari Askar* became angry with Shaykh al-Sharqawi and said 'This man is unsuited for leadership' and some other words in his language which have the same meaning."[198]

Napoleon's pretext of comradeship with the *ulema* was only part of his plan to lull the natives into a sense of well being. Whilst producing an aura of amicability, Napoleon was initiating conditions that would cause discomfort to the beliefs and customs of the natives.

> "On that day they set up a new *Diwan* which they called the Court of Cases (*Mahkamat al-Qadaya*). To this effect they issued a decree (*firman*) in which they included clauses in a style revolting to one's nature and disgusting to one's ear.
>
> "In the form of this *Diwan* the French established a basis for malice, a foundation for godlessness, a bulwark for injustice, and a

[198] Jabarti, Chronicle p 59

source of all manner of evil innovations.

> "Within the text they inserted stipulations and in their contents were others. These were substipulations formulated in their stupid idiom and crude style, and all of them dedicated to one purpose, namely robbing people of their money by devious means and despoiling them of their real estate, inherited property and the like."[199]

The long-term affect of the French occupation although difficult to gauge immediately, was seen in the subtle differences that gradually became apparent. The French culture so obviously diverse from the Egyptian's proved attractive to some people. During their short stay, the French introduced enough of their civilisation to the Egyptians, to induce them to acquire more. Most prominent amongst these was the ruler Muhammad Ali who used French expertise in his effort to modernise his country along European lines. It was through the endeavours of Muhammad Ali that Egypt was directed towards Western civilisation. The French also introduced to the Egyptians aspects of their social characteristics especially with regard to their conduct and interaction with women. Jabarti comments on the damaging influence of this aspect of French civilisation and its negative affect on Egyptian women.

> "Their women do not veil themselves and have no modesty; they do not care whether they uncover their private parts. Whenever a Frenchman has to perform an act of nature he does so wherever he happens to be, even in full view of people, and he goes away as he is, without washing his private parts after defecation. If he is a man of taste and refinement he wipes himself with whatever he finds, even with a paper with writing on it, otherwise he remains as he is. They have intercourse with any woman who pleases them and vice versa."[200]

The civilisation that promoted such behaviour from its members was alien to the culture of the Muslims who viewed it as promiscuous and

[199] Jabarti, Chronicle p 67
[200] Jabarti, Chronicle p 29

contradictory to their characteristics. Equally disturbing to the Egyptians was the corrupting influence of the French liberal lifestyle and its affect on their hitherto secluded women. Jabarti reports that the physical presence of the French army was especially disturbing to the peaceful existence of Egyptian society and the unwelcome attention paid by the soldiers to the local women.

> "During this year (May 1800-May 1801) local morals began to be affected by licentiousness. The French women who came with the army went about town with their faces uncovered and wearing brightly coloured silk dresses and scarves. The rode about on horses and donkeys wearing cashmere shawls around their shoulders; they galloped through the streets laughing and joking with their guides and with the people of the lower classes. This indecent freedom pleased the badly brought up women of Cairo, and as the French were proud of their submission to women and lavished gifts on them, the women began to enter into relations with them. At first they were quite circumspect, but after the Cairo revolt when Boulaq had been taken by assault, French men began to seize the women and girls who pleased them, dress them in the style of their country and make them change their ways.
>
> "From then on licentiousness spread rapidly throughout the town; many women, who were drawn by a love of riches or by the gallantry of the French, followed the example of the women of Boulaq. The French in fact held all the money in the country, and seemed to be entirely submissive to the women, who might sometimes even hit them with a slipper. Many Frenchmen asked for the daughters of Cairo notables, who would agree to the match either through avarice or because they wanted protectors in the army. Although the French were obliged to make the two professions of faith, this cost them nothing for they were people of no religion."[201]

While visitations to Europe would have made it possible for a selection of the population to experience the full genre of French lifestyle, personal contact with the French in their own country allowed the Egyptians for the

---

[201] (Quoted by Charles Vial in Le Personnage de la femme dans le roman et la nouvelle en Egypte de 1914 s 1960, p 4-5) in Mabro Judy, Veiled Half-Truths: Western Travellers perception of Middle Eastern Women, p 23-4, I.B. Tauris

first time to view the ethnic differences between the two cultures and it was this exposure to Western liberalism by the whole population that has been described as the most damaging by those who witnessed the episode. Napoleon's attempt at subterfuge was recorded by Jabarti and also verified by Louis Antoine Fauvelet De Bourrienne who served as private secretary to Bonaparte and accompanied him on his excursion.

> "He neither learned nor repeated any prayer of the Koran, as many people have asserted; neither did he advocate fatalism, or any other doctrine of the Koran... He never set foot in a mosque; and only on one occasion.... Dressed himself in the Mahometan costume.
>
> "Doubtless Bonaparte did, as he was bound to do, show respect for the religion of the country; and he found it necessary to act more like a Mussulman than a Catholic. A wise conqueror supports his triumphs by protecting and even elevating the religion of the conquered people. Bonaparte's principle was, as he himself has often told me, to look upon religions as the work of men, but to respect them everywhere as a powerful engine of government. However, I will not go so far as to say that he would not have changed his religion had the conquest of the East been the price of that change. All that he said about Mahomet, Islamism, and the Koran to the great men of the country he laughed as himself. He enjoyed the gratification of having all his fine sayings on the subject of religion translated into Arabic poetry, and repeated from mouth to mouth. I confess that Bonaparte frequently conversed with the chiefs of the Mussulman religion on the subject of his conversion; but only for the sake of amusement."[202]

From this it is clear that any compassion that has been recorded about Napoleon towards either the people or religion has been for the sake of politics and cannot possibly carry any weight.

[202] Jabarti, Chronicle pp 152-3

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at colonialism in Egypt through the direct involvement of one of its chief architects, Lord Cromer. It is important to note that Lord Cromer's role in the occupation of Egypt cannot be viewed in isolation but must be analysed in conjunction with the previous chapter on European perspective to provide a synergistic viewpoint. It is also relevant to record that Cromer had served in both the colonies of India and Egypt and his extensive experience of Indian affairs (1872-76 and 1880-1883) first as private secretary to his cousin Lord Northbrook and later as Finance Member in the Viceroy's Council, offered him the unique opportunity of using one experience to influence the other. Cromer's maxim was well known, he believed as indeed many of the government officials of the empire did, that conditions prevailing in both the vital colonies possessed a resemblance that permitted inter-changeability in their governance.

> "Egypt is not the only country which has been brought to the verge of ruin by a persistent neglect of economic laws and by a reckless administration of the finances of the State. Neither is it the only country in which undue privileges have been acquired by the influential classes to the detriment of the mass of the population...Although the details may differ, there is a great similarity in the general character of the abuses which spring up under Eastern Governments wheresoever they may be situated. So also, although the remedies to be applied must vary according to local circumstances and according to character, institutions, and habits of thought of the European nation under whose auspices reforms are initiated, the broad lines which those reforms must take are traced out by the commonplace requirements of European civilisation and must of necessity present some identity of character, whether the scene of action be India, Algiers, Egypt, Tunis or Bosnia."[203]

[203] Cromer, Modern; I:4-5

To Cromer, the 'subject races' were basically of one characteristic, to know one, was to know them all.

> "To be more explicit, what is meant when it is said that the commercial spirit should be under some control is this-that in dealing with Indians or Egyptians, or Shilluks or Zulus, the first question is to consider what course is most conducive to Indian, Egyptian, Shilluk or Zulu interest. We need not always inquire too closely what these people, who are all, nationally speaking, more or less in *statu pupillari*, themselves think is best in their own interests, although this is a point which deserves serious consideration. But it is essential that each special issue should be decided mainly with reference to what, by the light of Western knowledge and experience tempered by local considerations, we conscientiously think is best for the subject race, without reference to any real or supposed advantage which may accrue to England as a nation, or as is more frequently the case, to the special interests represented by some one or more influential classes of Englishmen."[204]

As documented by direct observers, the introduction into Egypt of European influence started with Napoleon's invasion in 1798 and continued well after the British had evacuated. As Jabarti has recorded, the shock of the French culture and its implication for the traditional values left its mark on many established customs that were transformed as a result.

The direct assault on Muslim customs such as the veiling of women by the colonialist and their attempt to demean customs that were alien to Western eyes proved the thin end of the wedge that established the 'otherness' of Eastern culture. Colonialism through its mission to civilise 'alien' races left a legacy that became the heritage of later generations. The progressive reforms advocate by the imperialists for the colonies

[204] Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer, Political and Literary Essays, 1908-1913, pp 12-13, Macmillan and co, Ltd, London, 1913

contradicted their own society in which the women of the Victorian era were constrained by the patriarchal boundaries that proved so difficult for European women themselves to remove. Cromer promoted the emancipation of eastern women, yet he resisted it at home. Through his controlling influence he was able to convince Egyptians into believing that the only way forward, was through the transformation of their society through Europeanisation.

CHAPTER FIVE

INDIA

5.0 Introduction

The period of the British occupation of India is more generally recognised as the age of new imperialism that had developed as a result of the process of industrialisation in Britain. India was the jewel in the British Empire and the reason for the occupation of Egypt, which was justified as having to protect India from Napoleon's intention to attack the British colony. The acquisition of India as a colony assumed such monumental importance that a variety of groups and individuals aspired to acquire some benefit from the process. They ranged from individuals who were looking for opportunities to exploit and also associations such as the East India Company that had multi-faceted reasons for retaining India as a colony. For all the attractions that the British contemplated on finding in India, they were unprepared for the diversity they subsequently faced with regard to the people and their culture.

The reforming impetus of the occupation of India was provided by some well known philosophers of the period who used their position and acumen to deliver their ideas on what was considered most favourable for the country and its people. For the purpose of this study I shall be examining the influence of one Indian, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan to determine how he may have influenced indigenous perception of European culture in relation to his own. His view is especially relevant for its potent emphasis on the superiority of English tradition and culture. It cannot be doubted that the opinions of such notable writers and politicians

such as John Stuart Mill and Thomas Carlyle would not have influenced men such as Sir Syed during his direct contact with the British.
The Indian colonial experience cannot be viewed in isolation and irrespective of developments outside. Elements such as the experience of Britain as a developing economical power and the zeal for imperial eminence that motivated her entrepreneurial manpower all served to determine the direction of imperial objective.

Imperialism became a passion for the English who were unarguably the most powerful nation during this period and their spirit for adventure was fuelled through writings of such notables as Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) and H. Rider Haggard (1856-1925) who enforced the belief of the 'white man's burden' to bring civilisation to the heathens. This ethos served as inducement for the reforming process in which the English patriarchy had stereotyped the Indian into neat little packages susceptible to manipulation. The colonial machinery was well organised to allow the implementation of reform programmes designed to follow the European model of perfection. Legislation that encouraged racism such as exclusion of the native Indians from prestigious British circles and associations and the requirement to attain a standard of the English Language in order to secure better jobs, promoted an atmosphere of racial tension between the native and the British official and also served to build racial competitiveness between the Hindus and the Muslims. Therefore, in order to maintain colonial hegemony, the British government introduced laws to regulate the social structure of traditional Indian society.

Two themes dominate the writings by British travellers to India, the inferior status of the Indian people in comparison to the European race and the overriding belief that the salvation of the Indians from their state of spiritual and moral decline, lay in the capable hands of their benefactors

the British. Predominant in extolling this view were the missionaries from Europe and America who were unable to reconcile themselves to the diversity of the people's religious beliefs especially the customs of the Hindus.

The influence of English ideas and reforms on the Indian population especially their leaders determined the course of events during the period when India was occupied. For the purpose of this study, I will be examining the affect on Sir Syed Ahmed and how he as a Muslim reacted to the foreign culture thus showing that the incorporation of external ideas into a traditional society was detrimental to the stability of that society and its traditional culture.

5.1 Colonial Perspective of India

Almost from the very beginning when the British first landed in India, the views of the people towards the country was one of incredulity at the diversity of the culture that it had to offer. Even before arriving in India, the travellers had established in their minds specific images of the India they were conditioned to see and the reaction they were expected to make. The stereotypical images of the Indian was already sketched in the mind of the European through details supplied by the penmanship of the nineteenth century travellers and fortified through emphasis by men representing the government. It was the official sanctioning of the categories assigned to native Indians by government officials that reinforced the images of the concept of the native Indian.

The socio-political climate in Britain during the nineteenth century encouraged a class of thinkers who represented the new-age philosophy that was sweeping through Britain. The nucleus of this philosophy

demanded a radical re-think of the traditional values that had hitherto been acceptable. Within English politics this heralded the beginning of the demise of the old established order of the power of English aristocracy who had controlled power traditionally for generations. Economic conditions thus favoured the rising influence of the new affluent middle classes that had been given political ascendancy through legal change such as the Reform Act of 1832. The social engineers of the new emergent class were also proactive as representatives of the empire and used their significantly powerful political convictions to influence colonial rule of the empire. One such figure, John Stuart Mill ((1806-1873) figured prominently through his contributions towards nineteenth century political thought. Many of the reformers who were sent to India came from the new breed of middle class men and who now formed the backdrop of the British political structure. It was therefore only natural that these men should aspire the same middle-class values for their reform ideas for India as they did for Britain. The view that if it was successful at home, then it should be successful abroad formed the basis of their convictions.

John Mill who spent almost thirty-five years of his political career as an employee of East India House was a protégé of his father, James Mill and was undoubtedly influenced by his views. It is also inconceivable that Mill, who developed within the context of imperialism, would not have been susceptible to his Indian experience. Mill's contribution to the Colonial discourse through his writings was substantial. He argues against the suitability of Orientals to govern themselves in light of their undeveloped civilisation.

> "the English are the fittest people to rule over barbarous or semi-barbarous nations like those of the East, precisely because they are the stiffest, and the most wedded to their own customs, of all civilised people. All former conquerors of the East have been absorbed into it, and have adopted its ways, instead of

> communicating to it their own. So did the Portuguese, so would the French have done. Not so John Bull; if he has one foot in India he will always have another on the English shore."[205]

The apparent and implied assumptions of this statement make implicit the incapability of the Indian character to assume responsibility for their own government. Authoritative opinions such as these would have conveyed to the British public the political expediency for the maintenance of India as a colony. To be fair to Mill, he was not in favour of absolute direct rule instead he advocated for a system that would allow the local government to be trained through the experience of Western expertise thus providing them with political acumen for self-government. Also prevalent in Mill's assertion on India's oriental disposition was the colonial rhetoric on the superiority of the Western religion and its ability to civilise the 'barbaric' religions of the east.

> "To pretend that Christianity was intended to stereotype existing forms of government and society, and to protect them against change, is to reduce it to the level of Islamism or of Brahminism. It is precisely because Christianity has not done this, that it has been the religion of the progressive portion of mankind, and Islamism, Brahminism, etc. have been those of the stationary portions; or rather (for there is no such thing as a really stationary society) of the declining portions. There have been abundance of people, in all ages of Christianity, who have tried to make it something of the same kind; to convert us into a sort of Christian Mussulmans, with the Bible or a Koran, prohibiting all improvement: and great has been their power, and many have had to sacrifice their lives in resisting them."[206]

The narrative on the colonial discourse was reinforced through specific reference to group cultural behaviour and the tendency for subordination of minorities within the community. John Mill inherited the legacy of

---

[205] Mill John Stuart, The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, 33 volumes, John Robson, general editor, Toronto University Press, 1963 {quote from 27:647}

[206] Mill Subjection, p 263

colonial thought from his father James Mill whose book[207] on Indian affairs appeared in 1817 and records the utilitarian views of the author and makes distinct criticism of the Hindu Caste structure.

> "We have already seen, in reviewing the Hindu form of government, that despotism, in one of its simplest and least artificial shapes, was established in *Hindustan*, and confirmed by laws of divine authority. We have seen likewise, that by a division of the people into castes, and the prejudices which the detestable views of the Brahmins raised to separate them, a degrading and pernicious system of subordination was established among the Hindus, and that the vices of such a system were there carried to a more destructive height than among any other people. And we have seen that by a system of priestcraft, built upon the most enormous and tormenting superstition that ever harassed and degraded any portion of mankind, their minds were enchained more intolerably than their bodies; in short that, despotism and priestcraft taken together, the Hindus, in mind and body, were the most enslaved portion of the human race."[208]

There were also similar views expressed by other colonial writers of the period each expressed their consternation at the horrors that were part of Hindu culture. The missionaries who came to India were affected by the structure upon which the Hindu religion was founded. William Wilberforce writing during the early part of the nineteenth century on the Hindu divinities said they were 'absolute monsters of lust, injustice, wickedness and cruelty. In short, their religion system is one grand abomination.'[209]

The underlying structure of the theme that regulated colonial discursiveness was manifest regardless of the location. A colony and its people were marked out as different to the English that had come to refine their society. The social political ideology was imported into the colonies for the benefit of the natives and to make it easier for their masters to

---

[207] Mill James, History of British India, 6 vols; London, 1820

[208] Mill History, vol 2, p 166-7

[209] Speech by William Wilberforce, 22 June 1813: Hansard, 1st series, vol 26, p 164 (quoted by Stokes Eric, The English Utilitarians and India, p 31 Oxford, 1959)

administer their laws. The convictions with which the colonial masters sought to enlighten India were based upon the belief that a modernised India would be of benefit to both the natives and to the rulers. With this view in mind, the reformers set in motion policies to eradicate aspects of Indian custom that they found unsavoury. Specifically, customs such as sati, the caste system and the prohibition against the slaughter of cows by Hindus were seen by the British as primitive and barbaric, and in need of immediate reform.

For the British reform to be successful, an ambitious programme for the development of the people through education, political manoeuvres and missionary zeal, were put into place. The success of this ideology was critical for any colonial impasse, as too was the necessity for its wide scale promotion that had to be encouraged through the direct involvement of educated natives. It was in this capacity that Sir Syed Ahmed became directly involved in the assimilation process of western indoctrination.

5.2 The English Influence on Sir Syed

Sir Syed was strongly influenced by the English culture during the British occupation of India. The cumulative affect of his exposure to English culture both in India and during his visits to England enabled him to compare and evaluate both cultures. His judgmental evaluation increasingly favoured the English tradition and culture and provided him with the justification to criticise his own heritage. Syed's understanding of his culture was coloured by his close affiliation with English political figures and members of the English upper classes. Consequently, his criticism of native Indian ignorance and lack of refinement voiced in the colonialist's jargon is sanctioned as acceptable because he was speaking on behalf of the powerful occupying culture. Syed's position allowed him access to English society that was not available to the rank and file

and once privy to the Western view on Indian idiosyncrasies, it gave him license to judge the natives from the outside, as he now considered himself qualified to pass judgement. His comments during his travels to England in 1869 on various observations reveal his tendency for bias.

> "All the inhabitants, shopkeepers and others were very dirty, the Somalis being just like savages. The English certainly are the cleanest of nations."[210]

> "Owing to the hills being well fortified, Aden is practically impregnable. The sight of it filled my heart with a sense of British power. It is the outlying sentry on the road to India, and the key to the Red Sea. If trouble were to break out in India, any amount of munitions of war could be poured into it in six days."[211]

> "One matter which grieved me was the dirty state of the railway and stations-the lanterns looking as if they had not been cleaned for months, and the beautiful iron pillars for giving water to the engine being inches deep in dirt. The same applies to the canals, the banks of which were perfectly untrimmed-being just as they were when the earth was shovelled up and thrown at them. There is no doubt that the Europeans sucks in a love of cleanliness and beauty in all things with his mother's milk. The people of other lands have it not."[212]

During his travels to Europe, Syed reserved his most ardent admiration for the English who he considered the most refined of the European race.

> "Without flattering the English, I can truly say that the natives of India, high and low, merchants and petty shopkeepers, educated and illiterate, when contrasted with the English in education, manners, and uprightness, are as like them as a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man. The English have reason for believing us in India to be imbecile brutes. Although my countrymen will consider this opinion of mine an extremely harsh one, and will wonder what they are deficient in, and in what the English excel, to cause me to write as I do, I maintain that they have no cause for wonder, as they are ignorant of everything here, which is really beyond imagination and conception. What I have seen and seen daily, is utterly beyond the imagination of a native of India.

---

[210] Syed Ahmed's letters from England quoted in; The life and work of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, by Major-General G.F.I Graham, pp 88-89, OUP, Karachi 1974

[211] Syed ibid, p 89

[212] Syed ibid p 99

> "I am not thinking about those things in which, owing to the specialities of our respective countries, we and the English differ. I only remark on politeness, knowledge, good faith, cleanliness, skilled workmanship, accomplishments and thoroughness, which are the results of education and civilisation. All good things, spiritual and worldly, which should be found in man, have been bestowed by the Almighty on Europe, and especially on England. By spiritual good things I mean that the English carry out the details of the religion which they believe to be the true one, with a beauty and excellence which no other nation can compare with. This is entirely due to the education of the men and women, and to their being united in aspiring after this beauty and excellence."[213]

Syed's exuberance in his praise for the merit's of the English race has to be viewed with the understanding that such sentiments would not have appeared out of character for a loyal subject of the Empire. However, the fact that a Muslim native voiced them, would have some bearing on its impact on local feelings. It may be relevant to say here that had Syed's experience of European culture been the same as the majority of the native Muslims, his opinion of the English race would also have been tempered with reservation.

Syed's remedy for the ailments that besieged his country were the same as those proposed by the politicians who were anxious to retain the country as the profitable colony that it was. His proposals reinforced the colonial perspective for development of the country and educating of its people. While reading Syed's account of Indian decline, one would be excused for mistaking it for a Westerner's rendition of Indian condition. There is little difference between Syed's rendition of India and Burton or Lane's accounts of Egypt. Syed's view of the natives depreciates considerably after his visit to England when he has had the opportunity to experience

[213] Syed ibid p 125-27

personally the English civilisation. He views with distaste the subtle difference between the working class English and members of the upper class in India.

> "It is a fact that if this woman, who is poor, and compelled to work as a maid-servant in attendance night and day upon me, were to go to India and mix with ladies of the higher classes, she would look upon them as mere animals and regard them with contempt. This is simply the effect of education. Look at this young girl Elizabeth Matthews, who, in spite of her poverty, invariably buys a halfpenny paper called the 'Echo', and reads it when at leisure.
>
> "Cabmen and coachmen keep a paper or a book under their seats and after finding a job, they take them out and commence reading... Until the education of the masses is pushed on as it is here, it is impossible for a native to become civilised and honoured."[214]

Syed's contact with the Europeans leaves a lasting influence on him, it also makes it impossible for Syed to appreciate or expect any benefit from his native homeland. It is fairly safe to assume that Syed's rejection of native India is a direct result of his prolonged exposure to European culture. Syed's devotion to the English and his firm conviction that the benefits that accrued to India are due to the British presence is symptomatic of his loyal allegiance. Syed's belief in the benefits of the British occupation is also echoed by his son Syed Mahmud who having been a beneficiary of the British government's programme for educating Indians abroad, repays the complement to the government representatives in his address on behalf of the Committee of the College of Aligargh.

[214] Syed ibid p 131-32

"The British rule in India is the most wonderful phenomenon the world has ever seen. That a race living in a distant region, differing from us in language, in manners, in religion-in short, in all that distinguishes the inhabitants of one country from those of another-should triumph over the barriers which nature has placed in its way, and unite under one sceptre the various peoples of this vast continent, is in itself a wonderful enough. But that they should rule its inhabitants, not with those feelings and motives which inspired the conquerors of the ancient world, but should make the first principle of their government to advance the happiness of the millions of a subject race, by establishing peace, by administering justice, by spreading education, by introducing the comforts of life which modern civilisation has bestowed upon mankind, is to us manifestation of the hand of providence, and an assurance of long life to the union of India with England.

"To make these facts clear to the minds of our countrymen; to educate them so that they may be able to appreciate these blessings; to dispel those illusory traditions of the past which have hindered our progress; to remove those prejudices which have hitherto exercised a baneful influence on our race; to reconcile oriental learning with Western literature and science; to inspire in the dreamy minds of the people of the East the practical energy which belongs to those of the West; to make the Mussulmans of India worthy and useful subjects of the British Crown; to inspire in them that loyalty which springs not from servile submission to a foreign rule, but from genuine appreciation of the blessings of good government, these are the objects which the founders of the college have prominently in view".[215]

The implied and explicit message of the above text is reassuring to the governing body that there is at least a segment of the native population that is loyal to the imperial government. It is disconcerting to that portion of the native population that is unable to express itself personally and is therefore reliant upon its minority representatives. As spokesman of the people of India, Syed Ahmed was presented with the opportunity of voicing the concern of the people, however, he often represented the facts of the situation in a format that testified him as representing the British

[215] Syed ibid p 178-79

government.

> "Perhaps many people will not like what I am going to say; but I will tell them openly a thing which took place. After the Mutiny the honourable Mr Wilson was Financial Minister, he brought forward a law for imposing a tax, and said in his speech that this tax would remain for five years.... I said, that it was wrong to restrict it to five years. The condition of India was such that it ought to be imposed forever.
>
> "When it has been settled that the English government is necessary, then it is useful for India that its rule should be established on the firmest possible basis. And it is desirable for government that for is stability it should maintain an army of such a size as it may thing expedient, with a proper equipment of officers; and that it should in every district appoint officials in whom it can place complete confidence, in order that if a conspiracy arise in any place they may apply the remedy.
>
> "I ask you, is it the duty of government or not to appoint European officers in its empire to stop conspiracies and rebellions? Be just and examine your hearts, and tell me if it is not a natural law that people should confide more in men of their own nations.
>
> "In the imperial council thousands of matters of foreign policy and state secrets are discussed. Can you with justice say that we Indians have a right to claim those things? To make an agitation for such things can only bring misfortune on us and on the country.
>
> "Therefore, reflect on the doings of your ancestors and be not unjust to the British government to whom God has given the rule of India; and look honestly and see what is necessary for it to do to maintain its empire and its hold on the country.
>
> "Oh! My brother Musslamans! I again remind you that you have ruled nations and have for centuries held different countries in your grasp. For seven hundred years in India you have had Imperial sway. You know what it is to rule. Be not unjust to that nation, which is ruling over you, and think also on this; how upright is her rule. Of such benevolence as the English Government shows to the foreign nations under her, there is no example in the history of the world. See what freedom she has given in her laws, and how

> careful she is to protect the rights of her subjects. She has not been backward in promoting the progress of the natives of India and in throwing open to them high opportunities."[216]

Syed urges his fellow Indians to resist the impulse to reject imperial rule and to appreciate the benefits that could accrue to the Indian nation through the benevolence of the English presence. He is able to present this image as he has experienced the so-called benefits personally and his position in Indian politics enables him to exist on the periphery of the very civilisation that he is urging his fellow natives to shun. His experience of Western civilisation through his visits to Europe and while in India, through contacts with the English government representatives, all serve to reinforce his convictions that the native Indians can only benefit from the English experience. His privileged position enables him to live among the natives of India as a pseudo native, as he represents only the affluent minority, and as a pseudo European, because he can never really be accepted as one of them. This was made evident by many incidences during the course of English rule, the following is one such example related by a personal friend of Syed Ahmed, Major General Graham.

> "How men like himself must regard some of the English in India is evident from a story which he told me. He happened to visit the Madras Club with the Chief Justice, Sir Charles Turner, who is a great friend of his. They had only been a few minutes inside when one of the members came up to Sir Charles and told him, before Syed Mahmud, that no native was allowed in the club. They left it. People at home will scarcely believe this; but it is a fact, and the sooner we alter this behaviour of ours the better for the stability of our rule in India."[217]

Aware that he is addressing Muslims, Syed attempts to convince his listeners of the validity of being faithful subjects of the crown by using

---

[216] Ahmed Syed on The Present State of Indian Politics; consisting of speeches and letters reprinted from the 'Pioneer'. Printed at the Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1888

[217] Graham life, p 261-62

religious arguments. He says:

> "But whatever their religion, God has called men of that religion our friends. We ought not on account of their religion but because of the order of God to be friendly and faithful to them. If our Hindu brothers of these provinces and the Bengalis of Bengal and the Brahmans of Bombay and the Hindu Madrasis of Madras wish to separate themselves from us, let them go, and trouble yourself about it not one whit. We can mix with the English in a social way. We can eat with them, they can eat with us. Whatever hope we have of progress is from them."[218]

Syed Ahmed's loyalty to the British crown was derived from his sense of belonging to their culture and which to him represented superiority. For him to show allegiance to the English, he had to reject his own customs and assume a detachment from its traditions.

5.2.1 Sir Syed on Education

Syed's proposals for educational reform for the Muslims were similar to those proposed by the early English reformers. He criticised the maintenance of the vernacular as a medium for instruction in the schools, arguing that in order to acquire advanced Western knowledge, it was necessary to have the language of the Westerners. Syed had been impressed by Western scholarship during his visit to England when he visited the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. He convinced himself that only through the establishment of a similar institution in India, could his fellow Indians acquire the necessary qualities that would enable them to compete with the advanced civilisations of Europe. Syed also argued for the unequivocal integration of the native Indians and the resident English inhabitants. This, he stressed, could not be achieved without the assimilation of the English Language through the medium of education.

[218] Ahmed Syed, Present State p 50-51

He said:

> "I often asked myself how it was that a century of English rule had not brought the natives of this country closer to those in whose hands Providence had placed the guidance of public affairs. For a whole century and more, you gentlemen have lived in the same country in which we have lived; you have breathed the same air, you have drunk the same water; you have lived upon the same crops as have given nourishment to millions of your Indian fellow subjects; yet the absence of social intercourse which is implied by the word friendship between the English and the natives of this country, has been most deplorable. And whenever I have considered the causes to which this unsatisfactory state of things is due, I have invariably come to the conclusion that the absence of community of feeling between the two races was due to the absence of the community of ideas and the community of interests."[219]

Syed argued that since most of the technical knowledge necessary for the advancement of the country was contained in books written in the English Language, if the Indians were to acquire this knowledge, they would have to learn the language of the written medium. There were some that did not agree with this theory. It was argued that it was unrealistic to expect the whole population to become so proficient in a foreign language so as to enable them to acquire the knowledge of another culture.

> "The cause of England's civilisation is that all the arts and sciences are in the language of the country. Although in some parts of England the dialects are such as to make it difficult to understand their English, still on the whole English in England corresponds to the Urdu of the North West Provinces and Behar, which every one understands. Those who are really bent on improving and bettering India must remember that the only way of compassing this is by having the whole of the arts and sciences translated into their own language."[220]

Syed's own preference was for the instruction of the Western sciences to

---

[219] Graham life p 188

[220] Graham Life, p 132

be given in the English Language and this coincided with the view of some reformers who were in favour of eradicating the traditional system of education and replacing it with one similar to the English. Prominent reformers such as James Mill, Edmund Burke and John Stuart Mill contributed substantially through their influence on future developments in India. Their ideas and thoughts filtered down to native Indians who had been conditioned through close contact with the Westerners, into accepting favourably the ideas of the West. The objective of the reformers was to develop the country and make it compatible with England using Western political, economic and social theory as their guide. While this may have appeared probable to some reformers, to others it posed an insurmountable predicament. The impracticalities of changing the entire cultural characteristics of a nation by compelling them to accept alien qualities as a natural phenomenon was considered by some to be too ambitious.

The proposed structure of the reform was the development of a middle class tier along the same lines as that in England and through this to encourage the entrepreneurial class in their endeavours. This was suggested by James Mill in the House of Commons in 1831:

> "The right thing in my opinion is to teach people to look for their elevation to their own resources, their industry and economy. Let the means of accumulation be afforded to our Indian subjects; let them grow rich as cultivators, merchants, manufacturers; and not accustom themselves to look for wealth and dignity to successful intriguing for places under government."[221]

Similar sentiments were voiced by another governmental official, Charles Trevelyan who communicated this to William Bentinck during his appointment as Governor General to India.

> "India is on the eve of a great moral change. The indications of it are perceptible in every part of the country. Everywhere the same

[221] Parliamentary Papers; 1831, v. 1397-1405, 17th June 1828

> decided rejection of antiquated systems prevails; everywhere the same craving for instruction in a better system is to be witnessed, and the abolition of the privileges which the Persian language has in the courts and offices of government will form the crowning stroke which will shake Hinduism and Mohamedanism to their centre and firmly establish our language and learning and ultimately our religion in India."[222]

With the English view so firmly in favour of establishing their language as the medium of instruction, disciples of the movement towards secularisation actively promoted the transition from the vernacular to English as the medium for instruction in the government schools. As well as the wide-scale teaching of English in schools, Syed Ahmed set in motion his ambitious plan for the development of an institute that would impart to the next generation of Indians, education that would elevate them to a level competitive with the European. This perspective was so important for Syed's goal, that he said regarding its relevance.

> "In 1854 when the despatch was written, India was certainly in a condition which might justify our thinking that the acquisition of knowledge through the medium of the vernaculars of the country would be enough to meet our immediate wants. But now such is not the case. Vernacular education is no more regarded as sufficient for our daily affairs of life. It is only of use to us in our private and domestic affairs, and no higher degree of proficiency that what is acquired in primary and middle vernacular schools is requisite for that purpose; nor is more wanted by the country. It is English education, which is urgently needed by the country, and by the people in their daily life.
>
> "We see that an ordinary shopkeeper who is neither himself acquainted with English, nor has any English knowing person in his employment, feels it a serious hindrance in the progress of his business. Even the itinerant pedlars and *boxwalas*, who go from door to door selling their articles, keenly feel the necessity of knowing at least the English names of their commodities, and of being able to tell their prices in English. It is high time that government as well as the people should exert themselves to their

[222] Charles Trevelyan to William Bentinck, 9th April 1834. {Lord William Bentinck's Papers in the Portland Collection (Bentinck MSS)}

> utmost in extending this popular education, if I may be allowed to call it so."[223]

Syed's view conflicted with those who considered that the most effective way of transmitting Western knowledge to the natives, was through the translation of selected English works into the vernacular thus making knowledge accessible to a greater number. One such proponent, was John Stuart Mill whose thoughts on the state of Indian education reflected aspects of his utilitarian philosophy.

Mill held the view that it was not practical or possible for all the natives to acquire enough of the English Language to understand the intricacies of Western thought. Rather, hesuggested that if only a few understood the concepts, they could present the foundation of the structure through the vernacular, thus making the exercise more productive since it would allow a greater number of natives access to the knowledge.[224] Syed's insistence on the universal application of the English Language was a view that he shared with Lord Macaulay who wrote in his famous minute on education:

> "We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must teach them some foreign language.... In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of government."[225]

Macaulay's proposal to establish English as the medium for learning in Indian schools was not without its drawback. Increasingly Indians were drawn towards acquiring English Language skills in order to gain employment in governmental posts rather than to develop their intellectual capacity, as was hoped by the reformers.

---

[223] Graham, Life p 217-18
[224] Bearce George, British Attitudes towards India 1784-1858, pp 285, OUP, 1961
[225] The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay: by his nephew Sir George Otto Trevelyan Bart. pp 290-91, Longmans Green and Co, London, 1889

The objective of the Aligarh College, which was the brainchild of Syed Ahmed, was the development of European Science and Literature in a format that would form the basis of the curriculum. This was to be accomplished in two ways. The first as has already been explained was through the medium of English Language. The second was through the use of European personnel on its panel. The President of the Education Commission, W. Hunter describes how this was put into practice.

> "The Allygurh College has to import an English principal, and at least one European professor, and t pay them at the high rate of European labour current in this country. Yet it offers an education and a school life modelled on the English public school pattern, at about one-tenth of what practically costs an English boy to live at an English public school."[226]

Despite considerable opposition, the Aligargh College was reported to have been a success for its founder. Within a relatively short time it became established as the centre for learning for those who desired the vestiges of a Western style secular education. The success of the college was due to several factors not least of which was the presence of the English government and Syed's useful connections with members of the government and the English aristocracy, both of which were useful not only for Syed's purpose but also for the political design. A comment by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-97) during his exile from Egypt observed about Syed's 'marriage of convenience' with the British.

> "he called himself a naturist and began to attract sons of the rich, who were thoughtless youths. Some of them gave ear to him, slipped away from the bonds of the Glorious Law and gave rein to their beastly passions. His ideas were agreeable to the English authorities, and they seeing in him a useful instrument to demoralise the Muslims, began to praise and honour him, helped him to build a college in Aligargh, and called it the college of the Muslims, that it should be a trap in which they might catch the

[226] Graham, Life p 227

sons of the believers in order to rear them in the ideas of this man Ahmad Khan... and he made propaganda for the abolition of all religious... and proclaimed: 'nature, nature', in order to cause people to believe that Europe made progress in culture, civilisation, knowledge and techniques and excelled in power and ability, only by giving up religion.

"Ahmad Khan and his followers took off the garb of religion and by making propaganda to induce others to do the same, they spread unbelief among the Muslims and carried on to undermine their (i.e. the Muslims') tenets. They made their deviations still worse by sowing discord between Indian and other Muslims, and they wrote various writings against the Islamic caliphate."[227]

5.2.2 Syed on Women's Education

Syed's position in India on the status of women was no different to the belligerent stand taken by English middle class men of the mid-Victorian period. For Syed as well as for the Englishman, familial, domestic issues were at the centre of social order and any deviation from this necessary Implied a move away from the civilised structure as they knew it. For Syed the distinct gender order with its accepted strata of the husband and father as supplier of the family income and the wife and mother in their natural roles as domesticated housewife provided the basis for the good old-fashioned family structure. In this milieu, it is not surprising that the position of women's education should also have assumed a secondary status. Syed patronisingly stresses that the moderate level of education taught to the women of the upper classes is adequate for their needs. He says:

> "The general idea that Mohammedan ladies of respectable families are quite ignorant is an entire mistake. A sort of indigenous education of a moderate degree prevails among them, and they study religious and moral books in Urdu and Persian, and in some instances, Arabic. In families of the better classes, there have been ladies in comparatively recent times who possessed a high degree

[227] al-'Urwat al-Wuthqa, Cairo ed. (1928), p 474-75, quoted in Baljon J.M.S. The Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, published by Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1964

> of ability. The poverty of the Mohammedans has been the chief cause of the decline of female education among them."[228]

The acceptance of the minimum standard as satisfactory for the female is the same reasoning that was applied to the Victorian women in Englandand about which Mary Wollstonecraft wrote:

> "I shall not go back to the remote annals of antiquity to trace the history of woman; it is sufficient to allow that she has always been either a slave or a despot, and to remark that each of these situations equally retards the progress of reason. The grand source of female folly and vice has ever appeared to me to arise from narrowness of mind; and the very constitution of civil governments has put almost insuperable obstacles in the way to prevent the cultivation of the female understanding; yet virtue can be built on no other foundation."[229]

Syed believed that women's education would not benefit Indian society unless the men had received the level of education that would enhance their development. Syed's understanding was the outcome of traditional beliefs founded on the patriarchal structure whereby the dominant male in society dictated the terms for the power struggle. Preventing the women from acquiring education simultaneously as the men was not due to lack of resources, but because the education of men was perceived to be infinitely more important. Insufficient strength in women's lobby for education consequently relegated their needs to the background. Hence during the period that Syed was clamouring for public recognition in his demand for improved education facilities, there was no equivalent female representative. When the condition of the government schools discouraged parents from patronising these schools, Syed's view was that they were justified in keeping the females at home.

---

[228] Graham, Life, p 223
[229] Wollstonecraft, Rights p 60-61

> "I admit however, that the general state of female education among Mohammedans is at present far from satisfactory. I cannot blame the Mohammedans for their disinclination towards government girls' schools, and I believe that even the greatest admirer of female education among European gentlemen will not impute blame to the Mohammedans if he is only acquainted with the state of those schools in this country. In have also seen a few of the girls' schools in England. Were these institutions for a moment supposed to be just like those in India in every respect, would any English gentleman like to send his daughters for education to them? Certainly not.... Those who hold that women should be educated and civilised prior to men are greatly mistaken. The fact is, that no satisfactory education can be provided for Mohammedan females until a large number of Mohammedan males receive a sound education. The present state of education among Mohammedan females is, in my opinion, enough for domestic happiness, considering the present social and economical condition of the life of the Mohammedans of India.[230]

Syed's justification for the low status of girls education is strengthened by the shortage of suitable institutions and his assumption that the conditions prevailing in such places bear testimony to their own disadvantage. His image of the female schools carry the same sexual overtures as presented by the English in relation to the treatment of their own females. This representation of the female as a secondary citizen, whose requirements are subordinate to the male, is affirmation of the degraded identity that is the woman's lot in colonial India. Of course, Syed's admittance of his awareness of the plight of female education does not mitigate; on the contrary, it deepens the moral obligation of all Indian males towards the moral equality of their women. Syed's opinion of what the government should do is described below. As a representative of the British Government his opinion reflects the prevailing colonial view that is presented in the guise of native discourse.

> "What the Government at present ought to do, is to concentrate its efforts in adopting measures for the education and enlightenment of Mohammedan boys. When the present generation of

[230] Graham, Life p 223-24

> Mohammedan men is well educated and enlightened, the circumstance will necessarily have a powerful though indirect effect on the enlightenment of Mohammedan women, for enlightened fathers, brothers, and husbands will naturally be most anxious to educate their female relations. Any endeavours on the part of Government to introduce female education among Mohammedans will under the present social circumstances, prove a complete failure so far as respectable families are concerned, and in my humble opinion, will probably produce mischievous results, and be a waste of money and energy."[231]

It hardly needs emphasising that the colonial rhetoric at work in the colonies was played out by partisans such as Syed Ahmed in whose interest it was to deploy a pro-imperialist stance.

5.3 Conclusion

Syed's association with the Europeans emphasised his conviction that Western, secular education would greatly enhance the socio-economic status of his people. His recommendation for the adoption of Western culture and lifestyle, whilst emphasising the advantage to the Indians seemed nevertheless, to originate from his experience as a privileged native aristocrat. His obsession with the West and the superiority of its culture above others gave an indirect insight into his philosophical psyche.

It would appear that the most damaging aspect of inculcating the program of western learning, was the broad sweeping affect its adoption was to have on traditional values. Syed also incurred immense disapproval for his attempt at explaining the Holy Qur'an and at his interpretation of the religious text. He incited resentment from his fellow Muslims on his apparent disrespect for events narrated in the Qur'an as well as instances of doubt on matters explicitly stated in Qur'an and essential to the tenet of

[231] Graham, Life p 223-24

Islam. Some of the matters were so explicitly contradictory that he was, according to subsequent biographers, labelled a blasphemer.[232] Syed expressed that his views on women were derived from the traditional school of thought where, as we have already seen, he concurred that women's education should take secondary status. Women were under-represented in the education sector at all levels, but this factor was exacerbated in rural areas and by economic conditions. For most women who sought employment outside the home, *pardah* represents a partial solution. The *pardah* enabled the woman to maintain the anonymity that was expected of her, while attending to her duties outside her home.

Cora Vreede-De-Stuers in her study of *pardah* in Northern India found that the practice was still maintained by all sectors of Indian society and in both rural and urban environments.

> "Although Partition and the subsequent fierce economic competition might have been expected to end the *parda* system in India, such was not the case. *Parda* appeared anew, not only among the generation brought up in it, but also among the new generation. It is not possible to generalise about women who are in *parda* and those who have abandoned the veil. Both old and young, rich and poor, still keep the old traditions. In the years since the nightmare of Partition, the principle of *parda* has infiltrated all classes and environments and has manifested all its previous complexity".[233]

> "At the beginning of the twentieth century, therefore, the general tendency, both in the very orthodox environment of the petite bourgeoisie and in the liberal atmosphere of the higher middle classes, was to confine women to 'their own realm' in the interior of the home. There, in the *zenana*, (the Indian equivalent of harem) they were obliged to lead the life of parasites. The voices that dared to rise against this system were rare, and were quickly silenced. The usual misconception of a peaceful feminine life without problems behind problems behind the protective walls of the *zenana* was but seldom corrected and then only by isolated

[232] Baljon Reforms p 105-119

[233] Vreede-De-Stuers, Parda: A study of Muslim Women's Life in Northern India p 59 publishers Royal VanGorcum Ltd, 1968

publications".[234]

That *pardah* was associated through its usage with family honour and respect and hence was accepted without question, this made any attempt to eradicate the custom all the more controversial. *Pardah* in the form of seclusion had also acquired a status symbol whereby wealthy households took pride in their ability to keep their women secluded. To the lower classes seclusion therefore became symbolic of class status and for those who did not have the economic means to provide seclusion, they aspired to the belief that the situation may, one-day change. Vreede-De-Stuers found evidence of this in her study.

> "For those scarcely in a position to provide separate apartments where their women can lead the protected and idle life so much sought after to prove their *izzat* (respect), it is the idea of *parda* that dominates their minds. With regret, they content themselves with a partial *parda*, all the while cherishing the hope that on day they – or their sons – will succeed in publicly showing their increased *izzat* by applying a more rigorous *parda* to their women. These women will submit to it eagerly, since they will 'rise in status' while further escaping the notice of the outside world".[235]

The enduring characteristics of *pardah* were due therefore to a combination of factors. For many, the boundary between religion and family honour had become obscured until the difference between culture and religion became difficult to ascertain. In fact for many of the uneducated classes, the *pardah* was to be accepted without question. This understanding was emphasised by some of the *ulema*s (religious scholars) who reinforced their understanding of the *pardah*. Vreede-de-Stuers cites evidence of this in her study.

> "The lower middle class, that of the artisans, small shopkeepers, and clerks, is very orthodox and therefore attaches a religious value to the wearing of the veil. The *maulavi* never cease to repeat the verses of the Qur'an (24:31 and 33:53 and 59) which 'prove'

[234] Vreede-De-Stuers ibid p 53

[235] Vreede-De-Stuers ibid p 63

> the obligation – or, in the present time of transition, the legitimacy – of wearing the veil. In requiring their women to spend their lives in strict anonymity under a *burqa* of as dull and neutral a colour as possible, these people aspire to distinguish themselves as good Muslims, conversant with their faith and conforming their conduct to it".[236]

It is important to note that the role of the *ulema* would have been influential in both the implicit and explicit expectations of the people. Hence for many women without personal understanding of religious obligations, it may have been difficult to contradict the guidance given by the so-called religious authorities.

It was in the interest of the British Government to encourage a pro-Western method of education and towards this they made extensive use of missionaries to help them achieve their objective. The government was also helped in its endeavours through the proactive involvement of its pro-British alliances. Natives with a personal interest in promoting the English administration in its endeavours were very effective in introducing through the native dialect, the advantages of English culture and habits.

[236] Vreede-De-Stuers ibid p 61

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions

This study is the outcome for a need to understand the reaction against the Islamic *hijab* by feminists, both Muslim and others, and the different social groups whose opposition towards an innocuous traditional custom was seen as inexplicable. Muslim women had been wearing the *hijab* for centuries and yet had never before encountered such a challenge to its existence as the one that was presented during the imperialist age. The environment within which the nineteenth century colonialists interacted had been conditioned by a system that had established a perceived superiority over other cultures. Antagonism towards Islamic culture and values was not new; however, the colonial focus on the *hijab* and the emphasis on women's issues, set them apart from earlier narratives.

The drive to investigate the assumptions surrounding the *hijab* involved uncovering many interconnected issues such as gender, patriarchy, ethnocentricity, misogyny, racism and of course imperialism, all of which contributed to the reforming process. The presence of all these factors made it inevitable that the study would be a multi-dimensional analysis.

The phenomenon that was colonialism achieved its objectives through the disruption to traditionally based societies and through the conversion of the subject people to a Western ideology. The success of colonialism was achieved by the ability of the colonists to implement the culture they represented in the social environment they had come to occupy. Imperial history is recorded through experiences of the men who travelled the empire in search of adventure that fulfilled the criteria for the exotic. To the Victorian Englishman, the culture and tradition of the mysterious East

provided all the elements for the making of a colourful fictional drama. Hence, while Britain dominated the occupied territories, the image of the colonial native provided the canvas for the imperialist framework. The supremacy of the white man was never more powerful than during this period when he assumed the role as representative of civilisation. Having accepted the role of the dominant race, the Briton viewed the natives of the colonies as inferior, backward and uncivilised. The native men were viewed as lazy, indolent and savage, the women as sensuous, seductive and promiscuous, all the qualities that were inconceivable in the Victorian English gentleman and gentlewoman.

Two of Britain's colonies, Egypt and India were used as the backdrop to the most prolific documentation on imperial experience. The men who served in these colonies left copious records of their experience with the natives and culture of the colonised people. Through these records it is possible to understand and analyse the views of the colonisers and their perception of the indigenous population. Perception that allowed the cultural strength of one race to dominate and subjugate another and indulged in a supremacist dialogue with strong patriarchal undertones. Colonial propaganda accused the eastern societies of misogyny and subjugation of their women, while these same people upheld a strong opposition for women's liberation in their own country. It used this platform to launch its attack on the *hijab* as an intrinsic custom established to derogate the woman.

To the European, the *hijab* through its visibility became a symbol of backwardness and subordination. Through this apparent visibility the *hijab* was projected as the symbol of eastern oppression representing a physical target for the colonial reforms.

They argued that its presence was detrimental to the society and only by abolishing the practice, could the Muslims expect to make any progress. To Cromer, the veiled Egyptian woman represented the anchor that was preventing her country from joining in the progressive reforms of the twentieth century and he used his arguments to influence the secular minded Egyptians to incite change. The success of the colonial rhetoric against the *hijab* was confirmed when the feminist movement in Egypt confronted convention and removed the face veil. In India too, increasing influence of Western lifestyle encouraged the subsequent relaxation of *purdah* regulations in all but the most remote village regions.

Their first act of defiance against what they perceived as the link with 'old values', was the removal of the veil covering from their faces thus marking the beginning of the Egyptian feminist movement. For most of the twentieth century eastern societies that had followed the traditional lifestyle of previous generations gradually absorbed the culture and influence of Western civilisation and developed into pseudo-Western enclaves that co-existed alongside the traditional order. The pressure to 'westernise' was consistently applied to eastern societies especially those with a history of imperial occupation.

It would therefore appear from this study that the ideology of the Egyptian feminist movement gained popularity due to the increased native-European contact both at home and abroad. Huda Sha'rawi, the leading feminist at the time, recorded in her memoirs the influence of her mentor and confidante, Madame Eugenie Le Brun and other Europeans. The colonial strategy to target *hijab* was perceived as an attack through the back door on the religion, since the *hijab* represented deep traditional values of Islam. To unveil the Muslim woman was in effect removing her from the protection of the symbolic covering, the family honour, and

exposing her to external influences, the uncontrolled liberation of western culture. The Muslims consequently saw this as an attempt by the colonialists to undermine and damage religious culture and values. The *hijab's* correlation with religion provided the colonial strategists with the justification they needed to target its removal.

Ultimately the Christian-Muslim, East-West dichotomy was a subjective use of colonial polemics that served the imperialist objective. It may be seen as the strategic use of ethnocentric evaluation to dominate another culture and subjugate its people. Through the use of such established frameworks, the West came to associate strength with its own culture and the East with weakness also due to its culture. The significance of this diversity was not lost on those aspiring to achieve the success promised by the Western representatives. Muslim feminists in the colonial empire and in the contemporary period appear to have found the call to modernise according to the so-called progressive culture irresistible.

Contemporary feminist Fatima Mernissi represents a trend of writers who have moved away from their traditional past and now appear to speak on behalf of a small percentage of secular Muslims. In her book[237], she questions the status of women in Islam and the 'return of the veil', a phrase she uses frequently to describe her perception of the subordinate position of women. She also refers to Muslim men as 'fundamentalists', and uses the case of veiled women and fundamentalist men to juxtapose her argument against Islamic practices.

Her criticism of the veil is a reiteration of the colonial argument in a Muslim voice, the same way that Qasim Amin over a century ago voiced his belief when he echoed Cromer by asking the women to modernise

[237] Mernissi Fatima, "Beyond the Veil", Indiana University Press, 1987

themselves by learning from the Europeans. Mernissi focuses on the harem culture in much the same way as the nineteenth century Western writers did in order to justify their perception of female oppression, subjugation and subordination. Mernissi's call for a cultural and social transformation bears distinct resemblance to Cromer and Amin's nineteenth century proposal for women's reforms. It would seem that Mernissi is using her interpretation of Islamic knowledge and background, like so many before her, to justify her understanding of the complex social issues within which traditional Islamic values are based. However, her arguments appear to be directed more from the Western perspective than an Islamic point of view, since her critique of the veil and harem culture is much the same as that presented by the Western polemists.

Mernissi's arguments against the veil appear to be the embodiment of secular feminist rhetoric, which have become so popular within contemporary scholarship. In spite of her background, Mernissi's understanding of the Islamic *hijab* appears to be influenced by the images that were projected by the colonial episode. These images of superior white man's culture reinforced the inference that the east was in every way inferior. What is also important to remember is that the colonies of the empire were predominantly male constructs that had developed on a generous dose of extreme ideological rhetoric and social Darwinism. The superiority of the white European nations over those of inferior natives of the colonies was ingrained within the language of the empire and its doctrine was followed almost religiously by many who believed that it was their Christian duty to civilise and educate the backward people of other races.

This study was conducted to establish the link between colonialism and the Western attempt at reforming the Muslim subjects of the British

Empire. Through the process of colonisation the imperialist regime appears to have implicitly and explicitly influenced the eastern culture and tradition by its attack on the established custom of the *hijab*. The study has also attempted to show how the process to inculcate the custom of the coloniser was effectively based on ethnocentric ideology.

In the final analysis it may be fair to say that the colonial attempt to discredit the *hijab* in the eyes of the natives achieved only partial success. It was predominantly the upper middle classes and the ruling elite who had the opportunity to interact with the colonial structure and to evaluate the difference between the two cultures, and who stood to benefit from adopting the European habit. The Egyptian feminists who responded to the call to unveil came from an essentially wealthy middle class background. Their rallying call to unite the movement into wide scale acceptance of the feminist ideal received only a limited response. It did however attract a great deal of publicity and notoriety, all of which served its purpose well.

Ongoing research and interest in the subject area of *hijab* has shown that it will continue to dominate the scholarship on both sides of the east-west divide. Contemporary understanding of the *hijab* in the West has considerably improved since the days of Cromer and Lane. However, established stereotypes still abound especially in the popular press and media where there still lurks a penchant for the extraordinary. The continual Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East and the Western need for Arab oil both ensure that Muslims and Islam remain focal points of interest in both the media and the public eye thus ensuring that the *hijab* continues to remain as a visible reminder of Islam.

The substantial increase in Western travellers to the east and vice versa has had some beneficial affect on the Western perception of the religion of Islam and its beliefs, however, there still exists considerable ignorance on many central issues that negate some of the progress that has been achieved. The contemporary phase in the *hijab* continuum is the gradual return to pre-colonial concepts when focus was placed upon the traditional Islamic precepts. The reinstatement of the symbolic status to the *hijab* by the young Muslims has been the result of their own convictions. Their association with secularism has allowed them a glimpse of a culture that they appear to have voluntarily rejected in favour of their own established values.

Bibliography

Ahmed, L	Women and Gender in Islam New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992
Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Abi Shayba,	Musannaf, Vol 3 Lebanon [nd]
Ali Ibn^ al-Hasan Abu'l-Qasim	The ^Aqidah of Ibn^Asakir Damascus 1332
Abu, Daud al-Sijistani	al-Sunan Beirut, 1350
Adams, C	Islam and Modernism in Egypt Oxford University Press, 1933
Ahmed, S	The Present State of Indian Politics Pioneer Press Allahbad, 1888
Al-Jabarti	Chronicles of the French Occupation, 1798 Marcus Wiener, Publisher, Princeton, 1997
As-Raziyy, Al-Fakhr	Explanation of the Qur'an Vol 30, pp 94 Damascus, 1730
Baljon, J. M. S	Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmed Mohammad Ashraf & Co Lahore, 1964
Baring, E	Political & Literary Essays, 1908-1913 Macmillan and Co Ltd London, 1913
Baring, E	Cromer Papers Lord Cromer to Mr Davidson-FO/633/8 Cairo, 23rd January 1900
Bart, T. O. G	Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay Longmans, Green and Co London, 1889

Bayhaqi, Ahmad ibn al-Husayn	Al-Asma' was-Sifat Hyderabad, 1350
Bearce, G	The British Attitudes towards India, 1784-1858 Greenwood Press Westport, Connecticut, 1982
Beckford, W	Vathek, translated from the original French version W. Clarke, London, 1823
Bewley, A	A Glossary of Islamic Terms Ta-Ha Publishers London, 1998
Blunt, W. S.	My Diaries: Being a personal narrative of events Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt Martin Secker London, 1908
Burton, R	Love, War and Fancy William Kimber London, 1964
Carlyle, T	The Nigger Question Appleton-Century-Crofts New York, 1971
Crow, D	The Victorian Women George Allen & Unwin Ltd London, 1971
Daniel, N	Islam and the West Edinburgh University Press, 1960
De-Stuers,V	Parda: study of Muslim Women's life in Northern India Royal VanGorcum Ltd, 1968
Disraeli, B	Tancred Henry Colburn Publisher London, 1847
Doughty, C	Travels in Arabia Deserta, Volume 1 Philip Lee Warner Publisher London, 1921

El Guindi, F — Veiling Infitah with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement Social Problems Vol 28, no 4, April 1981

Galland, A — Les Mille et une nuits Paris, 1704

Garnett, D — The Letters of T.E. Lawrence Jonathan Cape London, 1938

Graham, J. F. I. — The Life and Work of Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan Oxford University Press Karachi, 1974

Hall, C — White, Male and Middle Class Polity Press Cambridge, 1995

Halsband, R — The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu Volume 1 1708-1720, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1965

Haythamiyy, Ali ibn Abi Bakr al — Al-Fatawiyy al-Kubra, Vol 1 Cairo 1352

Haythamiyy, Ali ibn Abi Bakr al — Hashiyah Sharh al-Idah^ala al-Manasik An-Nawawiyy Cairo 1356

Hobson, J.A. — Imperialism: A Study George, Allen & Unwin Ltd London, 1938

Hofmann, R. H. — The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil Methuen, 1966

Ibn Hajar, Al-Asqalani — Fath al-Bari, Vol 11 Cairo 1319

Ibn Hibban — Al-Ihsan Bi^tarib sahih Ibn Hibban, Vol 1 Cairo, 1340

Kabbani, R — Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of the Orient Pandora Harper Collins, 1994

Kiernan, V. G.	The Lords of Human Kind Weidenfeld and Nicolson London, 1969
Lane, E.W.	Manners & Customs of the Modern Egyptian John Murray London, 1860
Lane, E.W.	Arabic-English Lexicon William & Norgate London, 1863
Lawrence, T. E.	Secret Despatches From Arabia The Golden Cockerel Press, London
Lawrence, T. E.	Seven Pillars of Wisdom: a triumph Jonathan Cape London, 1926
Leared, A	Marocco and the Moors Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington London, 1792
Mabro, J	Veiled Half-Truths I. B. Tauris London, 1996
Maududi, S Abul, A'la	Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam Delhi, 1974
Mernissi, F	Beyond the Veil Indiana University Press, 1987
Midgeley, C	Gender and Imperialism Manchester University Press, 1998
Mill, H. T.	Enfranchisement of Women Virago Press, London 1983
Mill, J. S.	The Subjection of Women J.M. Dent, London, 1929
Mill, J. S.	The Negro Question Appleton-Century-Crofts New York, 1971

Mill, James	The History of British India 2nd, Edition, London, 1820
Naipaul, V.S.	An Area of Darkness Andre Deutsch London, 1964
Patai, R	Dynamics of the Westernisation of the Middle-East Middle-East Journal, Vol 9, no 1 Winter 1955
Philby, J. B.	Arabia Ernest Benn Ltd London, 1930
Robson, J	The Collected Works of J. S. Mill Toronto University Press, 1963
Said, E	Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient Penguin Books, 1995
Siddiqi, M. Z.	Hadith Literature: Its Origin, development and special features Islamic Text Society Cambridge, 1993
Stanley, M.H	Through the Dark Continent Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington London, 1878
Stowasser, F. B	Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretations Oxford University Press New York, 1994
The Bible	New International Edition Hodder and Stoughton London, 1997
Tirmidhi, Abu Isa, Muhammad ibn Isa, al	Jami^al-Tirmidhi Delhi, 1315
Trollope, J	Britannia's Daughters: Women of the British Empire Pimlico London, 1994

Winter, T. J — Al-Ghazali, The Rememberence of Death and Afterlife
Islamic Text Society
Cambridge, 1995

Wollstonecraft, M — Vindication of the Rights of Woman,
Martin Secker
London, 1919