

Book Review

Sutapa Dutta (ed), *British Women Travellers: Empire and Beyond, 1770-1870*,
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A compilation of 13 essays, *British Women Travellers: Empire and Beyond, 1770-1870*, edited by Sutapa Dutta, is a pioneering effort towards collating and canonizing a very significant, yet little explored angle of British colonial history. Examined through the lens of British women writers whose travel narratives and experiences attempted at redefining the idea of Britain, and its relationship of reciprocity with its colonies as well as other parts of Europe, this book unravels a new dimension in the field of history as well as gender studies. A comprehensive introduction sets the tone of the book and defines the contours of study. The essays explore a wide range of experiences of British women travellers between 1770 and 1870—a period that was historically, socially, politically and economically quite challenging for Britain and its colonies. Dutta delineates the period in the Introduction by way of identifying and highlighting certain terms and concepts that are further explored in the course of the essays. She divides the book into three parts, where she classifies the women travel writers as British, Non-British and 'other' British. This classification structures the book neatly suitably preparing the conceptual on which cultural edifices are built and discussed.

The first part comprises four essays that discuss the idea of 'Britishness'. Aptly titled as "On the Continent, Framing 'Britishness'," Dutta brings together essays that establish the British supremacy and agency vis-à-vis other European nations. The first part begins with Ben P. Robertson describing Elizabeth Inchbald's experimentation with French themes in drama, and other

genres of writing. Referring to the British fascination for French culture, Robertson's analysis and painstaking research sets the tone of the book, where the emphasis is not just on the cultural appropriation by Inchbald, but also a psychological and a thematic appropriation that the writer touches upon. The next essay juxtaposes the two concepts of Britishness and Otherness in Elizabeth Holland's *The Spanish Journal*. Antonio Calvo Maturana brings forth the writings of Elizabeth Vassall Fox, Lady Holland in a refreshingly new light. Holland's notes displayed her political acumen, and Maturana explores her understanding of the Spanish historiography in an extremely unbiased manner. Even back then, writers like Inchbald and Holland broke the gender stereotypes and Dutta's collection helps us in understanding such writers closely. The next essay by Barbara Tetti explores the experiences of Anne Katherine Elwood and Judith Montefiore. Tetti creates a historiographical narrative of their explorations of classical antiquities and their indigenous cultural paradigms through their Roman experiences. The final essay in this section by Nataliia Voloshkova examines the travel writings of Mary Holderness, exploring the idea of 'otherness' and ethnographic details of Russia and colonial Crimea. The essays in Part I act as signposts of the British women travellers' narratives, their journeys and their nuanced observations with much political substance.

Comprising six essays, Part II tries to investigate matters "In the Colonies, Defining 'Non-British'." It opens with Georgina Elisabeth Munn's essay illustrating Janet Schaw's diverse experience of eating unknown things. The metaphor of food becomes a meta-narrative of imperialist discourse where the colonial subject can only be seen indulging in gluttony, while the British counterpart is engrossed in consumption. The subtle layered critical

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undercurrent marks this essay as the perfect beginning to the second part. The idea of cultural consumption is elicited by Lacy Marschalk in her discussion of Maria Graham's works, particularly, *Journal of a Residence in India* (1812). Marschalk discusses how Graham's work on India established her popularity since she stuck to more factual accounts, but also subtly highlights her creation of the colonial other as part of the Eurocentric discourse. In the next essay Dutta presents her views on the politics of 'gaze' upon and by the protected and guarded colonial women. The Memsahib-Zenana dichotomy laid down the cultural paradoxes that furthered the process of 'othering'. The next essay also focuses on the shaping up of India in the colonial times through the eyes of Isabella Fane. Shannon Derby puts forth the various identities that women donned even while being stereotyped within specific socio-cultural constructs. Derby argues how the Englishwoman was supposed to carry the cultural repertoire of 'Englishness' while herself being subjugated through her gendered identity. From here we move on to Michelle Adler's essay that examines the letters of Mary Moffat and her understanding of a geographically and culturally alien South Africa. The final essay in the second part by Sarah Irving explores Mary Eliza Rogers' experience in Palestine and the imperialist and gendered negotiations she encountered there. The essays in the second part emphasise on the cultural negotiations and

gendered constructs that these women travel writers were subjected to.

Titled as "In the Settler Colonies, Furthering the 'Other' British," Part III includes three essays that focus primarily on the settler colonies, as they were called, under British dominion. The first essay here is by Sophie Cooper where she explores the idea of 'Britishness' through the memoirs of three women travellers, Clara Isabella Aspinall, Ellen Clacy and Emma Macpherson, in their experiences of Australia. The study brings out the sharp contrast between British imperialism and her imperial settlements vis-à-vis the position of women in respective societies. Justyna Fruzińska's essay examines the American scenario from a similar perspective, focussing on the accounts of five British women travellers to America. The final essay in this collection recounts the journey in Upper Canada by Anna Brownell Jameson. Sophie Anne Edwards in a fascinating study unravels the connection between these travellers and the territories through varied means of transport.

Put together, the essays in this collection encompass a wide range of travel writings that explore cultural, historiographical and historical possibilities in this field of study, with special emphasis on the identity of women. The editor offers a detailed Index, and the inclusion of several images in appropriate places, makes this book complete, exhaustive, and a scholar's delight.