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Travelling through an ‘Oriental Eye’: A Reading of *Atiya’s Journeys: A Muslim Woman from Colonial Bombay to Edwardian Britain*

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Abstract

India witnessed a paradigm shift in the status of women in the middle of the nineteenth century. As a result of the changes the newly evolving women stepped out from their ‘Home’ into the ‘World’. As an outcome of their literacy and the opportunity to be outside, they gradually started recording their experiences through their writings. This was the scenario when Atiya Fyze, doubly marginalised – first as an Oriental subject and secondly, as a woman dared to ‘write’ Edwardian Britain while she visited the places in 1906-07. Remembered as the first full-fledged travel narrative with daily acquaintances by South Asiatic Muslim Indian woman, *Zamana-i-tahsil* (Trans. *Atiya’s Journey*) is significant because it records the cultural interaction between East and West as the woman ignores the territorial boundary which had previously confined her within home fold. In the contemporary time, the relevance of this travel writing is also due to the fact that the Western culture is described from the perspective of a Muslim woman from Colonial Bombay. The paper will attempt to define the way in which a Muslim woman traveller ‘look’, ‘describe’ and ‘compare’ a distant shore standing in opposition to her homeland.

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Introduction

India witnessed a paradigm shift in the status of women in the middle of the nineteenth century. As a result of the changes the newly evolving women stepped out from their 'Home' into the 'World'. The 1850s brought in certain changes in the living condition of the people from what it was previously. With the oncoming of the Renaissance, advancement took place in the field of education, religion and in the domain of social practices and prevalent literatures of the period. Renaissance also had its influence on the position of the women. Prior to the Renaissance, women seldom articulated their presence. They existed solely as a machine of creation and recreation of the populace; they were a dependent stereotype, habituated to lead their life depended to men. It took a subsequent period of time to change the outlook of the Indian women and the enlightenment brought in by the Renaissance was responsible to a great extent. The men of India responded more enthusiastically and naturally to the spirit of cultural upliftment and revival that accompanied the Renaissance than it was evident among the Indian women. In fact, it was the man who was openly protesting against the social malpractices forced upon the woman. Social reforms took place in this era decrying child marriage, perpetual widowhood for the chaste Hindu women, sati or widow burning on the husband's funeral pyre, etc. During the nineteenth and twentieth century India, the spread of formal education among women received impetus encouraged by various nineteenth century social reform movements; it was followed by the nationalist movement during the early twentieth century that once again emphasised on the spreading of women's education. This reciprocal relationship between education and the changing status of women, as it has historically evolved over time, witnessed a paradigm shift in the domain of Indian womanhood. As a result of these changes, we can find the emerging concept of the 'new woman' who crossed the 'threshold' of her 'home' (to use the title of Chakraborty's article) stepped out into the 'world'. Women, on the one hand, were firmly rooted in their cultural tradition, were well aware of the traditional customs, respected the old beliefs but, on the other, also had an exposure to the 'written word', debatable philosophies, most of which were common in west and in east; they were encouraged to voice their opinions and 'write' their experiences, a gesture that was seldom made to a woman before. She shed her veil and



shattered the walls of the home that had stifled and fettered her since centuries. Women recorded their experiences in autobiographies, short essays, and travel writings that remain glaring instances of the changing ‘face’ of the Indian woman from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Geraldine Forbes has analysed the position of women in modern India.

The genre ‘Travel Narrative’ is one of the very significant literary groups. Like history, the act of travel recorded the shifting of humanity on this earth. With the advent of the practice of writing the travelling ‘self’, one can records the experiences of the journey s/he had. The experiences are interwoven with details of the flora and fauna, people, cultural practices of places the traveller has visited. But all the individuals who are travelling are not the same; there is a difference between the touring self and the travelling self. The touring self generally acts like a tourist and planned the travel beforehand and mostly the interaction with the people of that place become minimal. A true traveller does not limit the self only with chalked out format but mingles with the other culture and ultimately returns with acculturated self. Simultaneously, the process of acculturation takes place through negation and acceptance. India has a rich history of travel since pre-colonial time to the contemporary time. But the corpus of Indian travel definitely prescribes more male travel writing than female one.

By and large, the condition of women was not similar across the nation. Women from India can be categorised into three groups in terms of the dominance of religion. Being the majority of the populace, the first group of Hindu women had to struggle with the shackles of ‘Andarmahal’ in order to step out for the act of travelling and writing about the experience respectively. The significant travel writings by Krishnabhabini Das, Durgabati Ghose, Chitrita Devi, Sunity Devee and the women from Tagore’s household paved the way for the generations thereafter. The second section of Christian women were permitted to taste the fruit of liberty because their newly formed Christianity tried to articulate them with the shadow of the West. The renowned sisters Aru and Toru Dutt created a set of instances for acquiring education from England. The third group of Muslim women had to restrict themselves under their veil of ‘purdah’ even within the sphere of four walls. Consequently,



compared to the others, Muslim women took a long period of time to establish the position in the public place. ‘Colonial harem, to use the titular phrase of Malek Alloula, was a matter of immense curiosity for the British readers.

Although it is very contradictory to note that unlike other religious practices the act of crossing the ‘Kalapani’ was not a taboo in Muslim conviction, the first group of Indian men who crossed the threshold of black water were Dean Mahomet, Mirza Abu Taleb Khan in 1794 and during the year 1799 to 1803 respectively. While in the realm of women took a century to cross the strata of marginalization, women faced three distinct levels of marginalization. Firstly, patriarchal structures defined them as an inferior ‘other’. Secondly, they were confined by the ‘purdah’ system, forcing them to navigate the rigid ideologies of their own communities. Finally, they were further oppressed as colonial subjects under the authority of Western powers. Apart from all the challenges the act of travel took place where women did travel across. Historical fact provide data that during the century 1830-1930 nearly 30 million Indian travelled overseas. For filling up the gap in working spheres a number of nursemaids (ayahs), sailor (lascars) as well as many unnamed people shift to overseas for expecting wages more than home. Unfortunately, history records their travel as numbers but being illiterate they could not record their journey.

Within the corpus of travel writings by Indian women during the period mentioned above, the experience penned not only speaks of the cross-cultural encounters between India and the West, but also of the cultural interaction countries within East such as Japan, China, Nepal. England, Italy, and Paris are some of the prominent countries of the West where the women had travelled. The response of the writers to the eastern cultures is different from the way in which the western cultures had influenced them. In this context, this article explores the inter-relationship of travel, colonialism and a voice of a Muslim woman who dared to travel and write her experiences from Colonial Bombay to Edwardian Britain. In addition, this paper takes a journey with the narrative pattern and tries to define the way in which a Muslim woman traveller ‘look’, ‘describe’ and ‘compare’ a distant shore standing in opposition to her own homeland.



1. Discussing the ‘Self’ of Atiya Fyzee Rahamin

Being born in Istanbul with Indian lineage, Atiya Fyzee Rahamin (1877-1967) is remembered as the first South Asiatic women who joined the University of Cambridge. In spite of being brought up across India, Atiya Fyzee grew up and spent most of her adult life in Bombay during the era of Colonialism. In the span of her lifespan, she explored the places like Calcutta, Aligarh, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Agra, Delhi to Lahore, Srinagar, Banaras and many other places under the rules of Colonialism and Princely system. *Zamana-i-tahsil* (1921) [Trans. *Atiya's Journeys*¹ (2010)] is significant because it records Atiya Fayzee's journey to Edwardian Britain and the places she visited during 1906-07. Written in a format of chronicle diary, Atiya's writing is unique in terms of recording the cultural interaction between East and West as the woman ignores the territorial boundary which had previously confined her within her home fold. Apart from her travelogue, Atiya Fyzee is famous for her other two books *Indian Music* (1914) and *The Music of India* (1925) which depict her as the musical muse and contribute to the realm of cultural practices. In 1906, government scholarships of £150 per year were awarded to Mrs. Mitra and Miss Atiya Fyzee to pursue educational training at Maria Grey Training College (currently Brunel University). This two-year program was designed to prepare these women – representing both the Hindu and Muslim communities – to return to their societies as qualified educators (Hurley 216).

With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the journey from the East to the West became significantly accessible. Thus, without being any exception in 1906, Atiya Fyzee's first journey through steamboat to Britain maps a route to Aden, Suez Canal, Port Said, Mediterranean islands of Sicily, Corsica and Sardinia and Dover. During this journey her brother Ali Azhar, nephew Tyab accompanied her. The generations of Tyabji Clan followed the trodden path by their forefathers who travelled to the imperial capital Britain for higher studies in the field of trade and politics. In her stays in London and in Cambridge, she was reunited with the family members who were already inhabitant there. It is interesting to note that during their stays at the colonizers land, one of Atiya Fyzee's brother challenged the stereotype getting married to European or North American lady. However, her visit to the land of Edwardian Britain ended prematurely and she returned back to Bombay in 1907. Her



premature withdrawal from her travels can be attributed to homesickness and struggles with her studies. However, while returning back, she stepped in Holland, Germany and France.

Subsequently a year after in accompaniment with her elder sister Nazli and her husband nawab of Janjira, Atiya Fyzee crossed the oceans by steamboat to Europe. Their travel prolonged till next six months and in between the two sisters lodged at their birthplace Istambul for few days. During her stays in abroad, Atiya Fyzee was acquainted with Mrs Krishnabhabini Das (1864-1919). After undertaking travel and extended stay for eight years in England, Mrs Das published the account of her travel writing anonymously as *England-e Bangomahila* (1885). Gradually because of the popularity of the work Krishnabhabini Devi had to reveal her name as the author and her travel writing became the first travel writing by a Bengali woman to England. This period of cultural interactions served as a catalyst for Das's subsequent intellectual shift toward the growth and development of female education.

Atiya Fyzee broke with the social norm of early marriage for Muslim girls by remaining single until she was thirty-five. It was not until 1912 that she married Samuel Fyzee-Rahamin (1880–1964), a Pune-based Indian artist and writer. Atiya Fyzee was way ahead in her time as her husband was a converted Muslim from Jew origin and three years younger to her. Being schooled from the distinguished Sir J.J. School of Art in Bombay, Samuel had already stayed for four years in Britain under the internship of renowned American portrait painter, John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) and British pre-Raphaelite painter, Solomon Joseph Solomon (1860-1927). The artistic spirit of Samuel attracted far more attention in the West than in India. Gradually Atiya Fyzee had more opportunity to voyages abroad for the painting exhibition of her husband. Following years till 1930, Atiya Fyzee visited occident quite often and in 1948 she retreated to Karachi for permanent residence. As a result of the partition, Atiya and Samuel had to settle in Karachi from Pakistan because of their religion. Afterwards during her lifespan there was no travel by Atiya not even in her homeland Bombay.

2. Unwinding the Travel Account

As a first-person narrative genre, travel writing allows the 'travelling self' to function



in diverse ways, particularly regarding how authors represent their experiences and select their subject matter. These accounts are far from one-dimensional. The work often overlaps with other literary forms, incorporating elements of autobiography, ethnography, memoir, and epistolary exchange. Tim Youngs discusses the protean nature of travel writing. Furthermore, they frequently draw upon personal diaries or journalistic reporting of specific incidents, blurring the lines between these distinct genres. In this context, the identity of the traveller – defined by gender, race, class, and positionality – plays a pivotal role in shaping the narrative. These socio-political markers act as a filter through which the world is observed and recorded. Consequently, a clear disparity often emerges between the male and the female perspectives. These differences are manifested not only in the subject matter chosen for inclusion but also in the underlying narrative patterns, reflecting the distinct lived experiences and social constraints of the authors. While moving to the alien land, it becomes difficult for a male to locate the internal spaces in domestic sphere whereas usually the females were not allowed to take a part of external affairs. The distinctions can be examined in the travel accounts by Mirza Abu Taleb Khan in contrast to Mrs Krishnabhabini Das's on England. Simonti Sen has explored a wide range Bengali travelogues and also referred to Taleb. Being the 'Persian Prince', Abu Taleb select the system of law and order, business, politics even the autopsy as his subject of writing. The Bengali woman self of Krishnabhabini Devi mostly focuses on the position of women in the private and public provinces. But both the travelling subjects carried and faced the same imperial strata in shores apart being under the period of colonialism.

Without being any exception from the travels from colonial time period, the shift in Atiya Fyzee's travel involves an asymmetrical power position where she journeys from the land of colonised to the land of the colonizers. Unlike other colonial subjects the 'self' of Atiya shifted with more confident and privileged power as she has received government allowance to pursue education and blessed to have support of well-built family background. During the time of Atiya's travel, London was a great imperial city with political authority, commercial dominance and financial supremacy. In the span of travel, Atiya Fyzee does not limit herself within the places where she sojourns but she has also acquainted with nearly one



hundred fifty people in her individual capacity. The panorama of her of documentation includes the nature, people from diverse classes, society and diasporic communities.

Atiya Fyzee's travel narratives, originally composed in Urdu – a linguistic domain predominantly reserved for the male intelligentsia – serve as a strategic act of resistance. This subversion of patriarchal literary norms occurs within the historical context described by Partha Chatterjee, who argues that Indian male nationalists attempted to 'resolve' the 'woman question' by relegating the feminine to a private, sacred, and domestic sphere that represented the spiritual essence of the nation. While Atiya Fyzee appropriates this nationalist focus on the domestic, her detailed observations reframed the private space not as a traditionalist metaphor for a 'sacred motherland,' but rather as a foundational site for modern development. This shift in perspective was a direct consequence of her unique positionality; as an Indian Muslim woman pursuing professional education, she navigated a transition from a secluded, veiled Muslim society to a visible, mobile presence within the colonial and domestic landscape.

Atiya Fyzee's *Zamana-i-tahsil* provides not only the events in public places but also routine of everyday matters. Thus, the Muslim woman self gives the tone of authenticity to the autobiographical narrative outline. It takes the form of 'ethnography' where she describes the people from Edwardian era, their cooking process, their houses, garden, servants, dress, weather, the physical illness, love life, leisure time, travel, and the gods which they worshipped too. Atiya Fyzee was unlike the men who travelled to England during that period and who selected the places like Westminster Abbey, Buckingham Palace as their subject of writing. She narrates everyday matter in details with judgmental views regarding her view in cultures, social expectations and in economic concerns too.

Upon embarking on September 1, 1906, Atiya's ambition to visit Europe remained vital; she documented the journey's hardships while framing the region as a vital landscape for opportunity: "It is not easy going to Europe. I immediately realized how challenging my ambition was" (Hurley 110). Attracted by the perceived superiority of the colonizer's societal structures, the colonized moved to internalize the very systems that anchored Western global



dominance. Education was treated as a universal benchmark, seen as a practical means of personal and national ‘improvement’ through the adoption of Western pedagogical models. Atiya mentioned that her third brother Dr. Ali Azhar Beg and her nephew Tyab Ali Kbar and Mrs Mitter were going to abroad for receiving higher degree (Hurley 110). Miss Saila Bala Das, a fellow passenger, was similarly sailing abroad to attend a training college; she intended to utilize her foreign education to establish a school in her native Cuttack (Hurley 111). The significance of the text lies in Fyzee’s ability to synthesize about the exterior and interior setting. The steamboat was divided into three levels – the third level is quite high and wind, the second level is half in hurricane and half in spar deck whereas the ground floor is located on the mail deck. There were arrangements for amusement with a piano and a cabinet full of books and a writing table in decorated room with two large paintings (Hurley 111). The narrative covering the subsequent two days offers a detailed account of the maritime environment and the technical proficiency displayed by the crew in managing the steamboat through heavy swells.

Atiya Fyzee inaugurates her travelogue with a high degree of formality, prioritizing a public expression of gratitude toward Cornelia Sorabji. This opening serves to highlight the significance of Sorabji – a barrister-at-law – In facilitating Atiya Fyzee’s access to the scholarship that underpinned her subsequent academic and professional trajectory. From the outlet of narrative Atiya describes her own concern and opinion regarding food. During the first five days on the way towards abroad from Bombay through the steamboat Moldavia, Atiya presented her bland taste for food and craved for green chili and ordered daal and chutney for the next day lunch “We Indians have such a craving for this kind of food” (Hurley 114).

She added that the Edwardian elite have their excess gluttons for food in terms of quantity not quality. Her passage describes the food portray a clear difference between the culture of colonizers and colonized. In addition to food, Atiya Fyzee gave her remarkable remark on the method of cooking food especially for the chopping, scrubbing and above all the cleanliness: “The cleanliness of the steamboat and the efforts to keep it clean are praiseworthy. Every corner is shining. They polish silver and brass in such a way that you



can see your face as if in a mirror.” (Hurley 115)

The entire credit for the home’s flawless conduct was reserved for the chief of the staff. He was a man of remarkable stature, rising to a height of six-and-a-half feet, whose very silhouette seemed to embody authority. Possessed of a rare alertness and consummate skill, he ensured that nothing was performed with anything less than the utmost diligence. Indeed, under his watchful eye, the machinery of the house moved with effortless precision (Hurley 115). The picturesque description of the surroundings makes Atiya Fyzee’s writing vivid and realistic. The various shades of sky break the monotonousness of the voyage. With the change of the climate, many of her co-passengers had fallen sick and with immediate treatment of the steamboat doctor they recovered fast.

Despite her elite background, Fyzee placed particular emphasis on servants and the subaltern classes in her narratives, documenting their roles and contributions with significant detail. She accounts range from poor friends’ simple room, her brother’s middle class boarding facilities to the Tata’s ‘stately mansion’ and Countess Jersey’s ‘miles big’ country residence. In each case, Atiya recorded the furniture and their style, the home décor, carpet to cover the floor, the color and every other minute detail. Atiya’s gaze witnessed Queen Victoria’s residency too. In contrast to Muslim religion, she glorified the trained animal at their home. Flower was a constant which they used to decorate home from poorest to the richest. The aesthetic sense of Atiya Fyzee makes her notice the planned garden both in outside and inside place. She was mesmerized by the flower and wrote two lines for the crimson tulips. Atiya Fyzee remarked that the sense of horticulture gave them the power to rule to rest of the world.

After her meeting with headmistress Mariya Gray and her two unmarried sisters, she praised their efforts to do all the household works by themselves without depending on others. Besides, she mentioned that the amount of work is done by a single British woman is equal to six servants in Bombay, she added by saying that the main job of any householder in India is to supervise the works. Her stays at the University also have developed a strong association with the other fellow mates as Miss Malvina H. Green and Miss M.H. Goldsmith



and many more.

The documented pedagogical framework reveals a rigorous regimen, characterized by strict regulations that governed students from dawn until dusk. It is significant to observe that, despite her intersectional identity within multiple marginalized groups, Atiya Fyzee sailed across the vast oceans for the pursuit of higher education. Thus, her experiences stimulate a novel sight for all the fellows whom she left at home. The extra lectures by the guest provided the lessons ranging from the basics of hygiene, scripture from Macbeth, teachings on Socrates, Plato and Aristotle to the natural sciences by Darwin. Extracurricular activities like playing hockey and gardening in the college provided a life skill for the students. However, there is no reference to her attending the bi-weekly meeting on weekends, may be intentionally she avoided them because of her introvert nature to speak in public places. There are passages which describe Atiya Fyzee's sheer joy to see the female running in the dart, jumping running in the playground. Overall, the education system shows that they play major role in overall development in life. It is notable that gymnastics were also being introduced in the curriculum in Muslim girl's school in India as a means of improving women's health in preparation for child bearing.

Being away from home, Atiya Fyzee tried to be rooted to her own native religion. She attended community festivals like id-ul-fitr, Muslim organizations like Islamic society. Fyzee's narrative is deeply anchored in her religious identity, evidenced by her spontaneous use of Islamic invocations (*Al-hamdulillah*, *Inshallah*, and *Mashallah*). These linguistic markers in the narrative suggest that her engagement with the Western 'centre' did not come at the expense of her spiritual foundation, but rather functioned alongside it. Her travel experiences are often filtered through nostalgia. While observing festival overseas, she draws a direct parallel to the 'bright days' of Diwali in Bombay, maintaining a constant link to her cultural root.

Fyzee's immersion into the Western cultural 'centre' reached a sensory peak on 6th October during a recital by the renowned pianist Wilhelm Backhaus at the residence of Ratabji Tata. Her reaction to the performance transcends simple appreciation, bordering on a



transcendental experience that she describes as being in an ‘intoxicated state’ (Hurley 138). By noting that she “had not heard such sweet songs even in [her] dreams” (Hurley 139). Fyzee illustrates a profound moment of aesthetic shock where the physical – ‘my hair stood on end’ – meets the spiritual. This encounter highlights her capacity for deep cross-cultural resonance, where Western classical music acts as a powerful catalyst for a ‘wonderstruck’ state of being, further blurring the boundaries between her internal emotional landscape and the external world of European high culture. (Hurley 138)

The newly formed National Indian Associations (NIA) in 1870 was also a gathering for Atiya Fyzee to attend. Mostly, the people with whom Atiya Fyzee interacted were in India at some point of their time. The males were the colonial or the administrative officers whereas, women accompanied their men in their sojourn to India for different reasons. Apart from attending religious ceremonies, Atiya Fyzee had also attended play house performances along with her husband. Likewise, the ‘new tube railway’ was another public space where she explored too. Her elite position from Bombay allowed her to hold the confidence while mingling with the blue-collar race who ruled India. For uplifting the working class, Atiya Fyzee suggested that the handicraft could be a profession which needs to be practiced for filling up their stomach.

Regarding dress, Atiya Fyzee has mentioned that the majority of the people in London dressed in such a well fashioned way that it is very difficult to identify their class. She noticed while visiting Richmond in June 1907 that it was the delicate tasteful clothes of the ladies which made the view pleasing. In the beginning of the stays in Britain, she was often gazed by the western eyes for her covered dress except the face. However, the photographs from her later days confirmed that she started to wear sarees with long sleeve blouse and put the decorative end (pallu) over her head. The exotic view of the Indian women catches the attentions of the dominance of Britain as a Mary Billington continued to publish her series of article called Daily Graphic and later as a book named *Women in India* (1895). Atiya Fyzee after her immediate arrival in London received a request by the Lady’s Pictorial for a magazine photo. The magazine was a ‘newspaper for the home’ indicating the large middle-class female readership about the news of society, wedding, fashions, music, cookery and



sports. The photograph of Atiya Fyzee in that magazine was well appreciated and challenged the stereotyped Oriental discourse. The generalized British imagination of India was a land of half-naked fakirs, child-like- peasants and westernized princess. The firm presence of lady opened a new arena of vision in front of their eye.

The acculturated self of Atiya Fyzee did not accept all the things from the colonizers land; in some sections she directly criticized them too. For instance, once the narrator was present in the Albert Hall to enjoy the songs by popular singer Clara Butt and the presence populace especially the ladies were looking great. Yet, Atiya Fyzee criticized the women's habit of wearing corsets tightly to present their hour glass shape body. It is interestingly to note that in spite of being a woman from colonized land specifically from Muslim family where women were supposed to live life under the veil of 'Purda', she took the subject of British women and took corset as a symbol of patriarchal oppression. On the contrary, Mirza Abu Taleb also mentioned in his treatise called "Vindication of the Liberation of Asiatic Women" that the *purda* actually provided them a zone of comfort, peace and safety from the distorted outward places. After witnessing the intention of ladies to show them as puppet of fashion and object of attraction Atiya commented that "God knows how she can bind herself and sing in such a constricted state, and that too with a smile. These people bear all kinds of tortures for the sake of appearance" (Hurley 143). Fyzee's narrative asserts a distinct Oriental Muslim identity, unapologetically critiquing Occidental norms. She specifically challenges the domestic English attitude toward attire, positioning her cultural perspective as a lens through which she evaluates and critiques the Western social practices. Thus, Atiya Fyzee's stay in Edwardian Britain till 13th September 1907 shows a clear juxtaposition between the East and the West and over the course of time a confident 'self' emerged from the marginalized 'other'.

3. Gazing the Edwardian Britain

Atiya Fyzee's travel to Edwardian Britain looks into the cultural interaction which took place when Indian Muslim women travelled in the foreign territories during the colonial time. The autobiographical narratives provide a 'gaze' into the 'other' culture presenting Atiya's



subjective opinion and ‘looking back’ at her own culture while staying a considerable amount of time in distant shores. Travel writing had always remained a tool in the hands of the western masters to ‘reinvent’ the colonies. Many writers, including Edward Said, had protested against the travel books that encoded and reconstructed the distant lands projecting them to suit the need of the Empire to control and legitimise its rule. The post-colonial ‘gaze’ as spoken of by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) helps to deconstruct the occidental ‘stereotype’ that the Muslim Indian woman in her travel writing attempted by voicing her individual experience; she revised, rejected, reclaimed and surpassed ‘stereotyped’ container in which she was contained. While describing the condition of the Orient, Edward Said gave the example of Kuchuk Hanem, the Egyptian woman whose silence was never voiced, her feelings were strangled and her existence in history blurred by the European ‘He’ who possessed her, spoke for her and represented her (Said 6). However, because of the advancement in transportation to reach the West, Indian women had visited England often accompanied by men. But they were courageous enough to speak and define the occident as they ‘saw’ it. In this context there was a shift that took place when the travel writings were written by the women. Earlier, the Orient was the ‘other’ represented by the west; now, the Occident becomes the ‘other’ as the Indian Muslim woman envisions it in the travel narrative. She gives an ‘insider’s’ view of her own oriental culture and her opinion as she found in interacting with an ‘alien’ culture. Thus, the centre shifts and the doubly marginalized oriental woman stands in the centre. They do not share the opinion put forth by the west and take the liberty to accept, reject or critique the ‘other’ culture.

Travel involves an interaction of one culture with several others. Mary Louise Pratt describes it as a ‘contact zones’, elaborating it as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (7). Pratt’s theoretical postulations capture the response found in the travel writings by Atiya Fyzee from colonial Bombay when she journeyed to an alien nation space.

In a quest for learning, Atiya Fyzee crossed the threshold from a land under colonial rule to the heart of the Empire itself. Her transformation began not on English soil, but upon



the decks of the steamboat – the first true “contact zone” of her journey. The dialectic between the ‘gazer and gazed’ functioned as a mechanism for renegotiating imperial power structures. By positioning herself as the primary observer, Fyzee effectively inverted the ‘colonial gaze’, transforming a site of traditional surveillance into one of critical, subaltern agency. Ultimately Atiya Fyzee’s texts reveals the transcultural self of Atiya Fyzee in a form of autoethnography. Sen analyses Abu Taleb’s travelogue in the light of Pratt’s theory of autoethnography and problematizes the easy tendencies to locate postcoloniality brining in the concept of positionality. Chatterjee has studied autoethnography as a strategy in Durgabati Ghose’s *The Westward Traveller* and claims “There was a sharp increase in the production of travel writing in the twentieth century and women’s participation in this genre on an unprecedented level deserves critical investigation” (qtd. in Chatterjee 40). Though he has taken up the auto-ethnographic theory in his article “Travel to the west: locating the ‘autoethnographic expressions’ in the travelogues of Dean Mahomed, Abu Taleb and Lutfullah”, he has not discussed Atiya Fyzee.

Conclusion

Thus, to conclude we can state that *Zamana-i-tahsil* uncovers the way how a marginalized oriental Muslim woman encounters the Edwardian Britain underneath during the colonial time. It also presents how Atiya Fyzee interprets and establishes herself to exist and survive and also constructs her identity in the realm of educational and cultural domain. The voyage of the individual ‘self’ and the exploration of the ‘other’ functions simultaneously by using travel as an apparatus. The accounts of travel *Zamana-i-tahsil* show how travelling to different parts of world allows a woman to resist the existing norms and to reconstruct a new self for building a nationalistic discourse in late colonial India. Atiya Fyzee’s journey to the Edwardian Britain functions as a conduit to understand the West as gazed by the East and helps to recover the position of Muslim women in the world history.



End Note:

¹ All the textual quotations are collected from the translated text of *Zamana-i-tahsil* from the book *Atiya's Journeys: A Muslim Woman from Colonial Bombay to Edwardian Britain* (2010) published by Oxford University Press.



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