



# Image of Oriental Turkmen Female Travelers in the Nineteenth Century Western Travel Writing

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## Abstract

One of crucial issues which Western travel writers in their journeys to the Orient specifically in the height of colonialism in the nineteenth has addressed is Oriental women. Entrapped and conditioned by their cultural baggage and operating on the basis of Orientalist discourse, they have mostly presented a reductive image of their Oriental female travelers as exotic, seductive, sensual, secluded, and suppressed, in lieu of entering into a cultural dialogue and painting their picture sympathetically and respectfully. To convey their lasciviousness, they have expatiated on Oriental harems and to display their oppression foregrounded their veil and ill-treatment by their allegedly insensitive and callous menfolk. In the same period in the context of the Great Game the politically oriented Western travel writers in particular the British ones set out on a voyage to Central Asia where they encountered ethnic Turkmen. Besides gathering intelligence, the travel writers devoted considerable pages to their Turkmen female travelers as well. But their images in these travel books have not been subject to rigorous scholarly scrutiny. In this regard, the current articles in two sections seeks to redress this neglect by shedding light on how these travel writers portrayed their Turkmen female travelers in seemingly unorientalist fashion in the first part and how explicitly in Orientalist tradition in the second part.

**Keywords:** Challenge Turkmen Female Travelers, Seemingly Unorientalist manner, Explicitly Orientalist, Travel books, Nineteenth Century

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Brief History of Travel writing

By definition, travel writing refers to a non-fictional, first person narrative in prose which relates what happens for the narrator/travel writer in the course of his travel (Youngs, 2013). Similar to other genres, it has been subject to changes. In the Middle Ages, travel writing primarily focused on pilgrimage as Bale (2016) puts "the most common genre of medieval text that best be called travel writing is *itinerarium* [which is] an itinerary of holy places and first-hand account of a pilgrimage" (2016, p.152) In contrast to previous era when travel writing was saturated with fantasy, from 1450-1750 travel writing "adopted more consistent form and style, and a more empirical and scientific approach inspired by the Royal Society and Enlightenment" (Day, 2016, p. 170) to gather information about external world rather than exploring or conveying the inner world of the travel writers (ibid.) and Thomas Harriott's *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, for example, reveals this drastic epistemological shift in travel writing" (Thompson, 2011). In the eighteenth century travel writing was inseparable from Grand Tour. This travel institution was the privilege of English aristocrats' children traveling around the "continental Europe... [for the sake of] furthering their education, observing foreign courts, learning modern languages, viewing monuments of classical antiquity" (Bohls et al. 2005, p.3). In Romantic period, travel writing was very popular among Romantic (in particular French) authors; this popularity can be explained by freedom which this genres grants to them due to its in-between status (C.W. Thompson, 2016). Romantic travel writing is characterized by digressing, changing theme and tone, incorporating dream, fantasy, poetry and satire, focalizing fragmentary impression to highlight subjectivity, as well as embracing the quests for unknown cultures and arts in elsewhere (Ibid.). In English literature William Beckford's *Dream, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* demonstrates aforementioned features (Thompson, 2011). Travel writing in the Victorian period demonstrated its affinity with Western imperialism. Western travel writers especially British travel writers used it as a vehicle to fortify their superiority, fashion their selves (Moran, 2006). This explains why the alter-space like the East was fabricated as "unrestrained, sensual, infantile, and barbaric" (p.110). Furthermore, travel writers like David Livingstone in his *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* deployed this genre in their travelers in the desperate need of three Cs: Culture, Christianity, and commerce (Youngs, 2013) to legitimize their colonization and exploitation of supposedly primitive zones. In twentieth century similar to modernist novels, modernist travel writing like *Eimi* by E.E. Cummings Emerged. It exhibits the features of modernist literature which include a fractured perspective to illustrate the difficulty of apprehending complicated world, fragmentation to embody the breakdown of cultural wholeness and deterioration of modern life, stream of consciousness to reveal textually the unconscious mind, as well as blurring

generic borders (Farley, 2016). Another important development in travel writing is the emergence of postcolonial travel writing. This type of travel writing is written by travel writers from former colonized countries, yet living in Western countries like Kincaid. According to Carl Thompson, these travelogues are characterized by being alert to “past, present, instances of cross-cultural exchange, hybridization and transculturation, thereby countering the genre’s traditional emphasis on establishing the demarcations between cultures” (p.211). Moreover, travel writing was influenced by postmodern sensibility as well. In postmodern travelogues, travel writers show “tendency to playfulness and parody... a desire to subvert both the conventions and the authority traditionally associated with many Western genres, disciplines and discourses” (Thompson, 2011, p.126). A striking example is Bruce Chatwin’s *In Patagonia* and *Songlines* (ibid.). With regard to travel writing in the twenty first century travel writing in this era has responded to positively to Nature and ecological issues due to “the loss of habitats and species, global warming and the future of the planet” ( Young, 2013, p.184), and this explains why travelogue in the form of nature writing is rising in popularity. Finally besides nature writing, ‘footsteps’ genre, another offshoot of travel writing in which a travel writer records and “retraces the journeys of earlier travel writers” (Keirstead, 2013, p.285) is trendy; it is characterized by “deep immersion in the discursive and personal space of the subjects...and holds unique capacity to undermine the still-powerful cultural myth of the self-sustaining, solitary traveler” (ibid.).

### 1.2 Brief History of Turkmens and their Territory

Since the subject under investigation is related to the Turkmens, it necessitates being familiar with their history. Geographically the Turkmen [In Western travel books, ‘Turkmen’ is written in different ways: *Turcomen*, *Toorcumun*, *Turkemen*, *Turcomani*, *Turcoman*, *Turcomaun*, and *Turkoman* ] inhabit the steppes between Khiva, the Oxus River, and the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea along with the northern frontier of Khorasan in Persia, yet there are still other Turkmens who live as an ethnic minority in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Turkey who were displaced from tenth century onward due to military and political reasons (Sumer, 2001). Etymologically, the word ‘Turkmen’ means ‘pure Turk’, ‘like Turk’, and ‘Turk of faith’ (Vambery, 1868) and the term emerged in the thirteenth century when it replaced the term ‘Oguz’ (Curtis, 1997). Historically the Turkmen belong to the Turkic Oghuz tribes, who originated in Inner Asia and established vast nomadic empires beginning in the third century B.C.” (Diba, 2011, p. 6). In the eighth century, these pastoral-nomadic people migrated to Central Asia (Curtis 1997) where turned into their permanent place. Given their political impacts, it would not be exaggeration to claim that they played a pivotal role in the history of Central Asia, Persia, and the Middle East as well as in the establishment of the Ottoman Empire (Abazov,2005). They demonstrated this crucial role through (1): joining Arab Muslim Armies (which proved for them as a political launching pad when they converted into Islam in the tenth century), (2): establishing the Seljuk dynasty in the eleventh century, (3): forming their own principality in Anatolia in the fourteenth, (4): founding new bipolar states such as Qara Quyunlu (the black sheep) and Aq Quyunlu (the white sheep) in the mid-fourteenth century (Diba, 2011) , and (5): via challenging the sovereignty of Persian central governments and fighting against them when the Persian governments attempted to shatter their autonomy and bring them under their exclusive sphere of control (Khazeni, 2007) as well as (6): by resisting against the Russian’s encroachment on their territory especially in Gok-Tepe war in the second part of the nineteenth century even though they eventually succumbed to their well-armed animus (Hopkirk, 2013 & Abazov, 2007).

### 1.3 Turkmens in Western Travel literature before the Nineteenth Century

Before the nineteenth century, Turkmens and their region per se were not a travel destination for the Westerner ambassadors, merchants, and travelers. Notwithstanding they encountered the Turkmens en route, and briefly dwelt on their culture, habits, and customs in their travel accounts. For example, Marco Polo in his travelogue at the end of thirteenth century, extols them for their excellent breed of horses, carpets and crimson silk cloth, yet he despises them for worshipping supposedly the imposter prophet of Islam and following his rules as well as having brutish law and beast-like lifestyle (Bergreen, 2007). He also expresses his aversion towards them by minimizing them as intellectually dull folk (Youngs, 2013). Unlike Polo, Clavijo (1859) [Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo is the Spanish ambassador who makes a journey to Samarkand to attend Tamberlaine’s court in the fifteenth century (Bassnett, 2003)] is not judgmental. He just objectively reports that the Turkmen live in the plain where there is abundant pasture and water. He thinks that their pastoral and nomadic lifestyle has to be very tiresome especially for children who must stay on the camels for long time in their nomadic journeys. Similar to Marco Polo, Anthony Jenkinson (1886) [A British merchant, sea captain, and ambassador, Anthony Jenison who is supported by Muscovy Company and Czar travels from Russia Persia in 1559 and on his way he meets the Turkmen (Pursglove, 2003)] displays a condemnatory attitude towards his Turkmen travelers in his voyage to Persia in 1558 through portraying them in negative color,

wee [we] founde them to bee [be] very badde [bad] and brutish people, for they ceased not dayly to molest vs [us], either by fighting, stealing or begging, raising the prise [price] of horse and camels, and victuals double, that the wont [scarce] was there to bee [be], and forced vs [us] to buy the water that wee [we] did which caused vs [us] to hasten away (1886, p. 65).

In the seventeenth century, William Lithgow, a Scottish travel writer, also briefly dwells on Syrian Turkmen’s lifestyle and religious belief system on his way to Aleppo. His description of the nomadic Turkmen transforms them into an exotic and cultural Other due to holding a religion which is a mixture of Devil worshipping and Islam,

They differ also in religion from all the other Mahometans in two damnable points. The one is that they acknowledge that there is a God...is so gracious that he neither can do harm, nor authorize any ill to be done; and therefore more to be loved than fared. The other is that they confess that there is a Devil, and that he is tormentor of evil-doers, and of himself so terrible and wicked, they are contended even for acquiring his favor and kindness, to sacrifice in fire their first-born child to him, soliciting his devilishness not to torment them too

sore when they shall come into his hands. And yet...they think afterward...by mercy of Muhammad, they shall go from hell to paradise (1999, p.163).

#### 1.4 Turkmen in Western Travel Literature in the Nineteenth Century

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the Silk Road lost its commercial appeal for the Western merchants and travelers when the sea routes to the New World were opened, thus this new alien world superseded Central Asia and turned into the hub of fantasy and the locus of absolute otherness for the Westerners (Bassnett, 2005). Nonetheless, during the nineteenth century the spotlight brightly shone on forgotten and isolated Central Asia once more due to the Great Game [This term was coined by Conolly, a British agent, but it was Rudyard Kipling who popularized it in his novel *Kim*; it dated from 1831 until 1907 (Foley, 2012)]. The following quotation from Lord Curzon in the nineteenth century clarifies the new significance of Central Asia for the British,

Central Asia has its charm for the historian, the archeologist, the artist, the man of science, the dilettante traveler, for every class—from the erudite to the idle. A wide field of research and a plentiful return await the explorer in each of these region (as cited in Mack & Surina 2005, pp. xiv-xv).

In the context of this Game, the Czarist Russians began to annex western Turkistan, and the Victorian British interpreted their encroachment as a major threat to India, their most precious possession (Hopkirk, 2013). In an attempt to safeguard India from falling into the hands of the ambitious Russians, the British strategists dispatched many spies and travelers (mostly in disguise) to forbidden Central Asia in order to “keep the secret activities of Russia under constant their surveillance” (Gholi, 2015, p. 188), “to observe the terrain for future military purposes...,to evaluate [their travelees] as potential allies or rivals (Diba, 2011, p. 5), and to bring the region into her exclusive domain of influence. In this competitive environment, the Royal Geographical Society which is affiliated to British imperialism demanded its supposedly doughty and virile travelers to document not only the purportedly wild mores and manners of their observees but also the topographical features as well as the flora and fauna to alchemize the knowledge into power (Kabbani, 2008). Back at home, these travelers normally published their travel accounts in the form of travel books, albeit with modification and romanticizaion to please their Western audience hankering after adventures in the exotic Orient (ibid.). Some of as these travel books such as those written by Arminius Vambery, Fredrick Burnaby, and Emund O’Donovan appeared in the Victorian best sellers list. As nomadic (and sedentary) inhabitants of Central Asia, the Turkmen have ubiquitous presence in these narratives. Michael Beard (1972) presents the comprehensive list of these travelers had a contact with them in his article entitled, *European Travelers in the Trans-Caspian Before 1917*. But the current article for its discussion will draw on the following travel books written by following people: James Abbott, Valentine Baker, Fredrick Burnaby, Alexander Burnes, Arthur Conolly, James Billie Fraser, Emund O’Donovan, Arminius Vambery, and Henry De Blocqueville as well as James Morier. The travel writers mostly portrayed them either in overtly Orientalist fashion [through essentailizing as well as erecting cultural and racial boundaries between themselves and the Orientals stemming from their colonial motives (Said, 1979)] or covertly through lauding them as noble savage.

With regard to their former aspect, these travel writers unanimously painted their picture as a ruthless man-stealing horde and diabolic slave dealers [This marauding expedition is known as ‘alaman’ ‘chapow’ or ‘chapaoul’ among Western travelers; chapow’ and ‘chapaoul’ are same Persian word which means pillage or a raid]. This explains why Burnes (1834) compares the Turkmen to Spaniards who “sacked the empires of Mexico and Peru, and butchered their inoffending inhabitants” (p.64) [According to Hontanilla (2008) the Spanish in the eighteenth century British travel writing were characterized as brutal and barbarians] or why Vambery remarks that the Turkmen “would not hesitate to sell into slavery the Prophet himself, did he fall into their hands” (as cited in Hopkirk, 2013, p.137). In the same spirit, James Morier in his picaresque novel cum travelogue: *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* immortalizes the ferocious image of Turkmen by exaggerating their marauding forays,

We proceeded without impediment to Tehran, where we sojourned ten days to rest our mules, and to increase our numbers. The dangerous part of the journey was to come, as a tribe of Turcomans... were known to infest the road, and had lately attacked and plundered a caravan... Such were the horrors related of the Turcomans, that many of our party, and my master in particular, were fearful of proceeding to Meshed (1895, p.7).



Fig. 1. Return of Slaves from Merve. Diba (2011, p.10).

These travel writers also pigeonholed their Turkmen observees as primitive. This one-track understating is evident in

Burnes (1834) when he observes that “the Toorkmuns have neither science nor literature” (p.260). Resonating Burnes, O’ Donovan (1883) indicates their purportedly primitive and backward state by referring to their allegedly crude perception of time and distance,

Turcomans have little or no idea of the lapse of time. They cannot tell whether an event happened twelve, or twenty, or thirty years ago...In regard to distance, the Turcoman’s computation is unsatisfactory ...[since] their computation depends upon the distance which an ordinary horse can travel at his usual pace, in the course of a day (pp.412-413).

Another undesirable behavioral trait by which the Oriental male Turkmen are excoriated is their idleness. The case in the point is Baker (1876). He notes that the Turkmen “when not engaged in predatory expeditions, lead a most indolent life; looking after their horses, smoking, and gossiping being their usual occupations” (p.213). In sync with Baker, Fraser (1838) maintains that “not a [Turk]man put his hand to anything [at home]” (p.368). In the same vein Vambery adds that,

In his domestic circle, the nomad [the Turkmen] presents us a picture of the most absolute indolence. In his eyes it is the greatest shame for a man to apply his hand to any domestic occupation. He has nothing to do but to tend his horse...or joins one of the group that squat on the ground before tents, discussing topics connected with politics, recent raids, or horseflesh (pp. 864 320).

Furthermore, the Turkmen are humorously lambasted by the supposedly abstemious travelers as gluttonous species; for example, O’ Donovan claims that,

A Turcoman is ready at all moments to devour any amount of food of any description, which may be placed before him. He seems never thoroughly satisfied even with the heaviest meal, and in five minutes more is ready to face the biggest dish of pillaff [rice dish] or broth that can be put before him. The *appetite* of Turkmen seem really *phenomenal* (Emphasis added, 1883, pp.263).

Likewise James Abbott confirms this manner of their travelees when he describes eating habit of his host who stands in a synecdochical relation to all Turkmen by deploying bestial imagery, “as for Khaloofauh [his host] he showed himself as a man of might in the mysteries of table, tearing large handfuls of mutton from the bone as a bear might claw the scalp from a human victim” (1867, p. 44).

In addition to their supposed immoderacy, the Turkmen are envisioned as superstitious people. This Orientalist feature finds its testimony in O’Donovan when he in his travelogue relates how his Turkmen host prevents him from whistling near to a window in the evening because like other the Turkmen he widely holds that in the evenings,

The ghouls and gins are abroad and are wandering to and from. If they hear you [the travel writer] whistle, they will suppose you are calling them; and Bismillah [in the Name of Allah] we [the Turkmen] have no desire for their company (1883, p.264).

Similarly Vambery in his journey with some Turkmen in the desert testifies to the superstitious mentality of them by accounting how they revere the wood baskets and the belongings of some travelers who passed away there,

I was told that the travelers who had been seated therein [kedjeve or wood baskets] had perished in the desert, and everything that had held men was respected amongst the Turkomans, and its destruction regards as a sin. Singular *superstition!* (emphasis added, 1864, p.108).

Another motif which is interlaced into the structure of these travel books is their enigmatic and inscrutable nature. O’Donovan for example sheds light on it. From his perspective, it is paradoxical that the Turkmen who are accustomed to perpetrate vicious crimes against innocent people by tearing them from their families and selling them as commodities in the slave markets in Bokhara or Khiva, are tender towards dumb animals,

The extreme fondness of Turkomans for all species of dumb animals, and the contrast of their tenderness towards them with their ...ferocity towards human beings is very notable...This old man [referring to his Turkmen servant] who would have cut down women and children without the least compunction when engaged upon the war-path, would put himself to inconvenience find food and a comfortable lodging for the animals which I entrusted to his care (1883, p.306).

Additionally, they are lopsidedly misconstrued and demonized as the implacable nemeses of civilization due to inhibiting its march towards Central Asia; and Vambery points to it by deploying a rhetorical question,

Civilization, some may think [that] has a predilection for the way that leads from the south to the north; but how can any spark penetrate to central Asia, as long as the Turkomans menace every traveler and every caravan with thousand perils? (Vambery, 1864, p.328).

Last but not least, the theme of disease is prevalent in these travel accounts, and therefore, the travelers have portrayed the Turkmen as people suffering various sort of diseases. In fact, they deployed this topos as an instrument to indicate that filth and dirt, and sickness is rampant in Turkomania or the Turkmen region. From the vantage point of David Spurr (1993) it is a type of debasement. Spurr does not deny factual validity of the report of disease; however, he argues it symbolically effective in equating the travelees’ terrain with disease and health problems. An example for Henry de Blocqueville’s travelogue will illustrate it,

Scrofula [the tuberculosis of lymph glands of neck] and other disabilities which are called leprosy in Iran is widespread among Turkmen. In addition to that, most Turkmen suffer from rheumatism due to sleeping on ground [nor in a bed] even when the ground [of their tent which its floor covered with carpets] is wet (my translation, 2014, p. 118).

In alignment with Blocqueville, O' Donovan elaborates on a widespread disease among the Turkmen,

As a rule, the Turcomans are extravagantly fond of fat and oily matters; and the almost universal derangement of their digestive organs is probably owing to the consumption of so much fatty matters during the extreme heats. It is a rare thing to meet a Turkmen whose liver is not out of order, and who does not suffer to a very great extent from biliousness [nausea] (1883, p.340).

These Western travel writers have also brought into light the positive qualities of their Turkmen travelers, yet their praise is not a sincere gesture since their virtues mold them as noble savages. Hospitality, independence, egalitarianism, and religious tolerance as well as loving can be extracted from these travel books as their qualities. Conolly (1838) in his travelogue gave a graphic description of their gracious hospitality,

The Toorkmans pride themselves much on their hospitality, and they feel affronted if a traveler passes their camp without stopping. When a stranger comes to an oubeh [village], he is invited to into the first tent, the master of which welcomes him by taking the bridle of his horse, orders his wife to prepare refreshment for their guest (p.134). In the same spirit, Vambéry (1868) notes that "hospitality [among the Turkmen] is...almost instinctive...he may be cruel, fierce, [and] perfidious, but never inhospitable" (p.84). Another meritorious virtue of the Turkmen travelers which captured the attention of the western travelers is their sense of equality which is intertwined to their autonomy. According to Diba (2011) the Turkmen in the eyes of the Western travelers "were fiercely independent and egalitarian" (p.12). In the same spirit, Khan-Iomudskii observes that "the Turcoman is freedom-loving, and freedom for him is more important than life itself; that is he would not allow anybody his rights and interfere in his family life" (as cited in Andreeva, 2010, p.180). Equally Fraser remarks that "they do not have any governors, chiefs, or nobles among them, and if anyone should attempt to arrogate superior consideration to himself, or openly aim at power or superiority, it would be signal to his destruction" (as cited in Mervin, 1881, p.130). For Baker, "it is difficult to define the Turkoman government, as they are nearly the only people in the world who really appear to rule themselves" (1876, p.212). In the same manner, Conolly affirms that the "Turkmen possess the French revolutionary motto, 'Liberte, Egalite'... [and] each Toorkmun is lord of his own and salve to the beck of no man" (1838, p.138). Blocqueville also refers to this quality, among the Turkmen "there is no difference between the head of a tribe or a simple shepherd; [for instance] in the councils held among them anyone can express his view regardless of his social status (my translation 2015 88). Moreover, the Turkmen are shown as tolerant folk in terms of the region. O' Donovan for example expresses his surprises to see Jews are permitted to practice their religion unmolested since Jews "in other portions of the border Persian territory...are not allowed the free practice of their religion, but were compelled to attend mosque on Friday" (1883, p.129). Lastly, Turkmen are cast as the great lover of their horses in the Western travel books which lights that they are close to Nature. The case in the point is Vambéry (1864),

The main instrument, the one to which the Turkoman gives the preference...is, beyond all question, his horse...prized by the son of desert more than his wife, more than his children, and more than his own life. It is interesting to mark with what carefulness he brings him up, how he clothes him to resist cold and heat, what magnificence he displays in the accoutrement [equipping] of his saddle" (p. 320).

### 1.5 General Image of Oriental Women in the Western Travel Literature

Since the main subject of the current article is Oriental Turkmen women, it is wise to be familiar with the image of Oriental women in Western travel literature. One of indispensable issues to which Western travelers have allocated sufficient space in their Travelogues dealing with the Orient is their female travelers. For Euben (2006) the significance of women in travel writing lies in the fact that they function like a map through which one can decode entire culture of traversed territory. Linking women with Orient, Andreeva (2010) observes that "the theme of women is...significant since women are symbolizing the Orient" (p.157). Similarly Stamm maintains that "the idea of the Orient as a site of sensuality, beauty, and mystery becomes fully condensed in the figure of the Oriental women" (as cited in Brisson, 2013, p. 98). With regard to the portrayal of the Oriental women, the Western travelers are asymmetrically divided. Only a tiny minority of Western traveler writers have presented a sympathetic depiction of their Oriental women. For instance, Western travelers during Renaissance lauded that Oriental Muslim women for their "reticence, obedience, frugality, modest apparel, and behavior" (Matar, 1976, p.61). These travelers invoked the approving image of their female Muslim travelers as a medium to assuage their anxiety since Christian women had begun entering male dominated sphere during the Renaissance (ibid). Likewise, Nicolas de Nicolay, a French royal geographer, in his travelogue entitled *Four Books of Oriental Images and Pilgrimages* presents Oriental Turkish women in hammams [bathrooms] not sensual but "fully clad and respectable figures" (Holmberg, 2016, p.375). To give another example, Lady Montagu, the wife of British diplomat in Turkey in the eighteenth century does not view the veil of Islamic women as the sign of their oppression. Instead, she regards it not only as a means for defying the male's sexualized gaze but also as an opportunity for sexual adventures. She also highlights her female travelers' better conditions in terms of their financial independence (Fay, p. 2001). In a similar vein, in the second half of eighteenth century, Carsten Niebuhr in his scientific expedition to Islamic Orient refutes the claim that the situation of the Muslim women is dark in their society. In contrast, he believes they are luckier than their Christian counterparts due to exercising authority over their husbands in domestic affairs thanks to their private properties over which their husbands do not have any right (Mikkelsen, 2015). Unlike the first group, most Western travel writers have described the Oriental female in unfavorable terms. From Phillip's perspective, negative image of Oriental women including Mongolian, Chinese, and Indian was prevalent in Western travel literature written from 1245-1510. She argues that the Mongolian women represented as "warlike and formidable", Chinese women as "enticing and seductive", and Indian ones "exotic" (2014, p. 102) for their voluntary practice of sati. Moreover, Menon (2003) demonstrates that Indian women in the fifteenth century are depicted as nymphomaniac too. For example, Varthema's [the fifteenth century Italian travel writer] description of them provides a testimony to his claim: the Indian women "intend nothing but their lust, and think that if they die virgins, they shall

never enter into paradise” (ibid.). Commenting on the nineteenth century travel writers, similarly Yahya and Ghaderi (2012) point to the lascivious depiction of Oriental women and note that this feature makes the Oriental women appear “exotic and immoral” (p.783). To illustrate their exoticism, a travel writer like Ella Constance Sykes (1863), refers to Oriental women’s dress (Ibid.) and to highlight their immorality, she expatiates upon their beautification and risqué dancing in harems (Ghaderi & Karimi, 2016). In the same spirit, Edward Said (1979) remarks that the Oriental woman who is symbolized by *Kuchuk Hanem*, an Egyptian courtesan, for a famous French traveler like Flaubert is the embodiment of “unbounded sexuality” (p.187). Another cliché image about the Oriental women in Western travel writing is their oppression in their patriarchal societies. This explains why Andreeva states (2010) that the Western travel writers have depicted their veiled female travelers as oppressed, sealed and secluded slaves whom their husbands deny any romantic affection and treat inhumanely. Likewise Brisson (2013) in her article, *Discovering Scheherazade: Representations of Oriental Women in the Travel Writing of Nineteenth Century German Women* shows how that the three female German travel writers revive stereotypical notions about their Turkish female observees since they translated their travelers’ veil as the emblem of their subjugation, their habit of going bath as the sign of immorality, and their presence in the harems as that of captivity. One can see these contradictory images of Oriental women as sensual (associated with harems) and oppressed (symbolized with their veils) in two different images of Oriental women which appeared on the cover page of Nerval’s travelogue entitled *Le Voyage En Orient*,

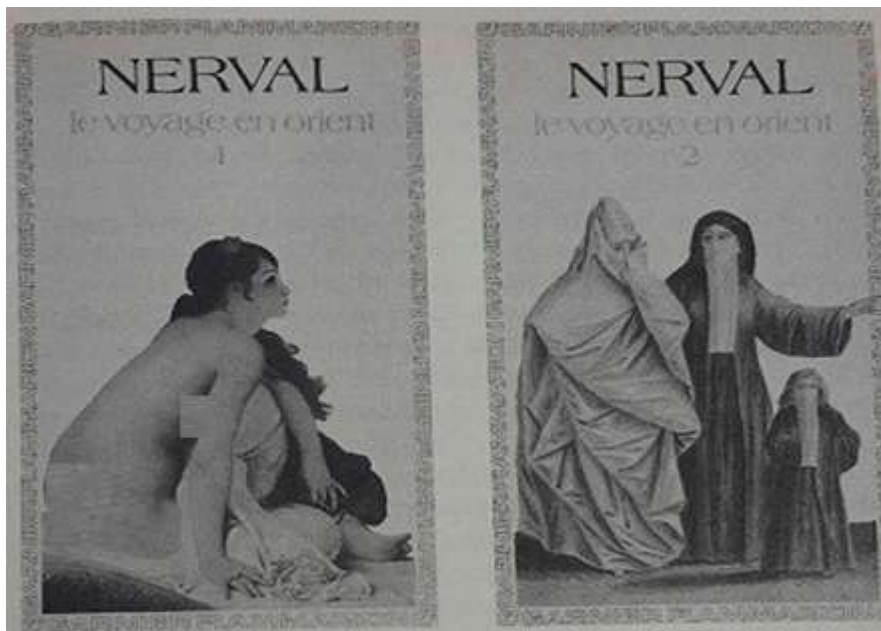


Fig. 2. The Cover of Nerval’s *Voyage En Orient*, vols. I&II., Behdad (1994 p.19)

## 2. Review of Literature

Turkmen women’s image in the nineteenth century Western travel literature has elicited meager interest from the scholars of travel studies. This neglect can be attributed to the remoteness of their region, the obscurity of Turkmen and their culture in general as well as the classification of the Turkmen women with Central Asian women due to sharing cultural, religious, and linguistic background with them. Notwithstanding some researchers have sought to illuminate their social, cultural, and economic position in the nineteenth century, yet their works are either very brief or do not specifically address the image of Turkmen women. Harris (1996) in his article: *Women of Sedentary Population of Russian Turkistan through the Eyes of Western Travelers* states that Western and Russian travelers due to operating on the basis of their cultural baggage fail to present three dimensional picture of these women, instead they propagated Eurocentrist image of them; that is, they were “subjugated by their menfolk and religious leaders, treated as chattels, forced into hellish marriages, and leading lives of virtual slavery” (p.75). Looking from another perspective, Rafis Abazov (2007) in his book: *Culture and Customs of Central Asian Republics* observes that the Western travelers who visited Central Asia in the nineteenth century portrayed Central Asian women [including Turkmen women] in a romantic color. They depicted them as “moon-faced, red cheeked, [and] appear to perfection on horseback” (p.215). Andreeva (2010) in her book entitled, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelgues and Orientalism* in the light of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* specifically concentrates on Russian travelogues dealing with Iranian culture in the nineteenth century. In this book, she briefly raises the issue of Turkmen women and notes that unlike Iranian women, their image is positive. She ascribes their approving image to the common trope which frequently emerges in colonial discourse: “idealization of the savage” or to “idealization of primitive” (p.176) that is, the Turkmen female travelers as ‘Other’ live “in a state of freedom, whose social order is based on natural and simple laws, who are closer to Nature and therefore possess better or purer moral quality...than [those] who are spoiled by their civilization” (ibid.). In other words, she casts doubt about the sincerity of the positive their response, and implies that behind this attitude lies imperialistic motive. Looking from socio-economic angle, Mustafa Gökçe (2008) in his article entitled, *Woman of Turkmenistan in 19th Century According to Travelers* argues that the Western travel writers have differentiated the Turkmen women from other Muslim women due to their active role in their traditional society since “Turkmen women

perform in every area of society actively. They, together with working to correspond the basic requirements of their houses, also help their husbands and make an effort for education of children according to tradition and custom" (p.231). However, his scope is limited to history. Karimi (2015) in his book: *Among Turkmens: A Report on Seven Travel Accounts* deals with the image of Turkmen women, yet he is selective and mostly focuses on their positive qualities such as hard working, free, chaste, unveiled, and family-oriented. But he ignores the negative aspects of them. Unlike the aforementioned works, the current article specifically seeks to specifically analyze both seemingly unorientalist and explicitly Orientalist image of Turkmen women in the context of the nineteenth century Western travelogue.

### 3. Seemingly Unorientalist Image of Turkmen Female Travelers

The favorable image of the Turkmen female travelers in the nineteenth century Western travel literature not only seems anomaly in the discourse of Orientalism but also raises a major question: does the approving image challenge the discourse of Orientalism? One can seek the answer for this irregularity and perplexing question in two main factor: in the depiction of them as noble savages and their compatibility with Victorian Ideal womanhood, albeit partly.

#### 3.1 Noble Savages

Entrapped in the Orientalist discourse, Western travel writers in the nineteenth both fostered and buttressed the idea that "Islam is innately and immutably [is] oppressive to women" (Ahmad, 1992, p.152). From their perspective, the so-called injurious impact of Islam are reflected in the Oriental Muslim women's veil, segregation, and victimization by their husbands. In fact, they held Islam accountable for the degradation of Muslim women; therefore, they appropriated discourse of feminism to justify their colonization by claiming that solely they could emancipate them from their plight and endow them with freedom and much desired equality (ibid). However, sometimes the Orient with its multicolored cultures startled these travel writers and colonial officials with an exception. The case in point is the nomadic Turkmen culture. In the same period, when the Western travel writer encountered these nomadic people in the contact zone of Central Asia, they realized that their Turkmen travelers were not faithful followers of Islamic rules like the sedentary inhabitants of Central Asia. To give an example, Burnes (1834) states that the Turkmen "are even without mosques, though not altogether without religion" (p.260). Corroborating the Western travel writers, Rafis Abazov (2007) states that,

Nomads of Central Asia [including the Turkmen] had little access to the great works of the thinkers, and nomadic people who wandered for thousands of miles across inhospitable steppe, deserts, and mountains had little opportunity for exposure to formal religious education and rarely had access to skilled clergy. Largely illiterate and much of the time struggling simply to survive, they could not access the works of the Central Asian Islamic theologians, philosophers, and writers of the distant past (p.60).

Similarly, by drawing on Russian ethnographic resources, Edgar (2003) confirms the travel writers' view and states that "the Turkmen practiced a popular or folk Islam typical of tribal and rural populations, centered to a large extent on saintly shrines and lineages; they had few mosques, and little familiarity with the great textual tradition of Islam" (p.134). By popular Islam, Edgar means that the Turkmen have domesticated Islam in a sense that they have infused it with their pre-Islamic beliefs namely shamanism. In congruence with Edgar, Blackwell (2001) observes that Islam has exercised less influence on the Turkmen than 'adat' their common law which has been orally transferred since antiquity. According to Edgar, the nomadic Turkmen women by virtue of their belief in popular or folk version of Islam are "exception to the bleak European view of women's condition under Islam. Because they are unveiled...enjoy greater freedom and higher social status than women in sedentary societies" (p.134). Accordingly, this explains why the Russian travel writers have lauded their Turkmen female travelers in their journeys to their terrain, "a Turkmen woman has comparatively more independence before her marriage. She often participates in her family affairs, and her voice is taken into consideration in deciding many issues" (Andreeva, 2007, p.181). To illustrate their theses, both Edgar and Andreeva rely on only Russian travel accounts and ethnographic studies. To redress this imbalance, the current article attempts to demonstrate this positive responses other Western travel writers in particular those from Britain.

Baker (1876) in his travelogue: *Clouds in the East* paints the approving image of his nomadic Muslim travelers, and to do so, he sheds light on their being free, unveiled, and safe from polygamy "Turkmen have rarely more than one wife; and the women have *great latitude* [freedom] accorded to them. They are never *veiled*, as in most other *Mahomedan* [Muslim] countries" (emphasis added 212). Similar to Baker, Burnes (1834) asserts that the whole Turkmen do not practice wearing the veil, "for the first time in *Mahomedan* country, we see the ladies *unveiled*; but this is a prevalent custom throughout the Turcoman tribes" (emphasis added, as cited in Mervin 1881, p. 135). Like Baker, Fraser (1838) in his *Winter Journey from Constantinople to Tehran with Travels through Various Parts of Persia* presents an approbatory portrait of his female travelers; in his description there is no trace of their victimization and abuse at the hands of their husbands and fathers, instead the travel writer attests to their liberty and enjoyment of love instead of forced marriages,

The Toorkomans do not shut up their women; and there being no such a restraint on the social intercourse between the sexes as in most *Mussulmauns* [Muslim] countries, love matches are common. A young becomes acquainted with a girl; and mutually attached and agree to marry (emphasis added, p.372).

In this atmosphere of trust and respect, it is not surprising to hear O'Donovan's comment: "divorce altogether is unknown among these semi-nomads" (1883, p. 412). Likewise, Conolly (1838) says that "putting a woman away is hardly a thing known among the Turcomans" (as cited in Mervin 1881, p. 147). He also (1838) demarcates the Turkmen from the other Muslim in the terms of their treatment of widows in their societies, "unlike the Arab, who considers marriage with a widow ill-omened, the Toorkmans prefer them on the account of their superior knowledge of ménage [of] domestic affairs" (p.131). By the same token, Fraser (1838) refers to the privileged status of the widows in the Turkmen community; he notes that the Turkmen value them for their character, strength, and skill. Last but not least,

Blocqueville who has been captive among the Turkmen for the fourteenth months, narrates how they treat their womenfolk with respect. Hence he distinguishes them from other Muslim societies, “the Turkmen respect their wife more than other Muslims” (2015, p. 94); to illustrate it, he remarks that “the Turkmen girls marry at the age of the sixteenth or seventeenth; their parents *do not set them on hard works* so that they preserve their beauty...since these *nomadic women* do not wear the *veil* ...it is easy for the men to choose their own prospective wives” (emphasis added, pp.105-106). He also points how these women enjoy the security on their living place, “one Turkmen woman can walk a long distance in his trip another tribe without worrying about being harassed by anyone” (p.103).

On the surface, it seems that these travel writers are problematizing the Orientalist discourse and presenting a fresh perspective on the Oriental female travelers without replicating clichés weaved around them, yet the closer inspection of this idealized images reveal that these Western travelers are actually hailing a primitive nomadic Oriental culture which has been less influenced by the allegedly misogynist Islam. As Raheb succinctly puts in Central Asia [including Turkmen society] a nomadic life style has made men adopt “more liberal and less restrictive attitude towards women” (2005, p. 73). As a result of this nomadism, the travel writers presented valorizing image of their Turkmen female travelers. In fact, their celebration is synonymous with constructing them as noble primitives. In this regard, Andreeva’s of comment about the Russians travel writers equally holds true for other Western travel writers, “a certain ‘*idealization of savage*’ or ‘*idealization of primitive*’ can be observed in many accounts when the travelers write about the non-Persian people and tribes [including the Turkmen]” (emphasis added, Andreeva 2003,p. 177). This explains why O’ Donovan (1883) compares the Turkmen to “the North American Savages (106) and Fraser (1838) finds similarity between the Turkmen and “Africans and American Indians” (p.362). Thus these positive views do not challenge the Orientalist discourse about the Oriental Turkmen female travelers, they just reiterates and invigorates it in a different way, albeit by utilizing approving comments. This is why Thompson (2011) is cynical about the travel writers’ laudatory responses, and considers them as a type of ‘Othering’ fueled by the travel writers’ imperial impulses since “even admiring and highly favorable accounts of other cultures... constitute in subtle ways a form of colonial discourse” (p.152). For instance, anglophile Vambéry clearly reflects this tendency in his travelogue about Central Asia,

However much condition of half savage nations [including Turkmen]...may be extolled ...yet a practical observer must feel convinced that *our civilization* is preferable and it is a sacred Duty on our part to transplant it to every clime and country (emphasis added 1868, p.126).

### 3.2 Consistency with Victorian Ideal Womanhood

The second reason behind the desirable image of the Turkmen female travelers is their compatibility with Victorian ideal femininity in terms of their centrality in domestic affairs along with their chastity. One of the important features attributed to this feminine ideal in the Victorian period, according to Mitchel (2009), is being “entirely centered on the home” (p.266) that is, devoting herself to the domestic affairs and leaving external affairs to their husbands. This idea was propagated by eminent poets and writers like Lord Alfred Tennyson and John Ruskin. The former in his poem, *The Princess* mirrors the concept of Victorian ideal womanhood,

Man for the field and women for the hearth;  
 Man for the sword, and for the needle she;  
 Man with head, and women with the heart;  
 Man to command, and women to obey;  
 All else confusion (as cited in Mitchell, p. 267).

In this fragment, Tennyson as the representative of Victorian mentality clearly expresses that the domain of women is restricted to the home and she should dedicate all her energies to this arena, and be its good manager while the men belong to the external world and are expected to discharge his energy in farming and the hostile world of war. Likewise Ruskin in his *Sesame and Lilies* emphasizes that the centrality of women at home,

[The man’s] energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman’s power ... for *sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision*. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places. Her great function is Praise; she enters into no contest...The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial...often he must be wounded, or subdued; often misled; and always hardened... This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home (2007, p. 44).

In the above passage, the ideal women is associated with the domestic domain, and therefore her main responsibility revolves around it, and departing from it is tantamount to spoiling it with anxieties of the world.

Back to main discussion, Western travel writers in the nineteenth century portrayed the Turkmen women as the epicenter of their yurt [tent]. This is the reason why Vambéry (1868) praises them, “indeed the Turkmen women deserve such [praise] nowhere in the East have I met with their equals in ... [their] devotion to their families” (47). Similarly O’ Donovan notes that the Turkmen “wife is the guiding spirit of the household, and until she has grown up female children, she takes up *entire household work*” (emphasis added 1883 412). Fraser’s description of the active and dutiful Turkmen women is also the verification of their vital role at household affairs,

By daybreak in the morning I observed the same lady [representative of Turkmen women] working energetically at churning the milk in the huge skin before the site of tent, she had herself packed up preceding



evening and half an hour later she was loading sundry camels with the property of the family...everything connected with domestic matters...is in the *female department*... [Whereas the men work outside]...in these occupations you never see a woman employed. Thus the labor of men is only periodical, while that of women is incessant (1838, pp. 368-369).

In conjunction with Fraser, Conolly presents the full picture of their dynamism and significance in running the domestic duties,

Early in the morning they milk the camels, bring water, make buttermilk, and gather bushes to bake bread, after noon they milk the sheep and goats, make curds...and provide the evening meal...then they weave carpets and make felt cloths and horse-clothing (1838, p. 140).

Another prominent characteristic of a Victorian ideal woman is her chastity and defense of sexual morality, "some discussion of ideal womanhood insist that a respectable girl should be completely ignorant about sex and sexuality until initiated by her husband on the wedding night" (Mitchell, 2009 269), and their chastity was "routinely celebrated in written and visual culture and continuously reinforced through religious teaching, medical and psychological theories" (Moran, 2006, p. 34). The chastity in this period was such a sensitive and crucial quality that violating it led to the exclusion that woman from her family and society "a middle-class woman who engaged in sexual activity outside marriage faced exclusion-from fiancé or from husband and children from the parental home, from friends and polite society" (p.37).

In contrast to the supposedly licentious Oriental female in Western travel accounts, Western travel writers emphasized the chastity of their Turkmen female travelers in their accounts. Fraser for, p. example asserts that "the accounts I gathered of the morals of Goklan [a Turkmen tribe] even among their obahs [encampment] were anything but favorable to their characters (1838, pp.373-374). Conolly (1838) in the same manner points to his Oriental female travelers,

The *chastity* of the Turcoman women settled near the Persian border is a *proverb*; but there is this to be said that no Kizilbash Lothario [Persian seducer] would be found hardy enough to venture into the desert to seduce them. Of the Turcoman ladies farther north, indeed, I heard stories, from Persians who had traveled among them; but a Persian's account of his *bonnes fortunes* [good fortune of making love with Turkmen women] is like Frenchmen's (emphasis added, as cited in Mervin, 1881, p. 148).

In the passage the travel writer refutes any stories about the immorality of his female travelers narrated by the Persians who penetrated into the Turkmen's encampment. Here the travel writer posits that the Persians like the Frenchmen are unreliable since they are well-known for their flight imagination and romantic exaggeration.

The positive views which female Turkmen travelers have received from the Western travel writers on the account of their moral decency and their central role in the domestic matters indicate that they bear resemblance to the Victorian ideal womanhood or the Angel at Home, to borrow Patmore, and this appears to dislodge the discourse of Orientalism. But Behdad (1994) strongly argues that this type of favorable comments do not destabilizes it; instead it demonstrates how strong, heterogeneous and resilient this discourse is. Moreover, this type of positive comments for Behdad's perspective functions as safety valve and enable the discourse of Orientalism to maintain its power and status because he holds that Orientalist is based on discontinuity,

What allows the colonial power to sustain its dominant status is its political resilience... [And its] capacity to utilize effectively its voices of dissent [that is voices which deviate from its norms] ...it is precisely in the account of these discontinuous practices one can account for the shift [or flexible]...nature of Orientalist discourse that ensures its cultural hegemony (p.17).

#### 4. Explicitly Orientalist Image of the Turkmen Female Travelers

##### 4.1 Orientalist Attitude through Exoticism

Western travel writers in the nineteenth century explicitly exhibit their Orientalism when they portray their Oriental Turkmen female travelers in terms of exoticism. Exoticism in postcolonial studies is defined "as process [informed by an asymmetrical power relations] through which the cultural other is translated [and] relayed back through the familiar" (Huggan, 2001, p.ix). Exoticism for Savigliano (1994) is not a natural and innocent response, rather, it is synonymous with disrespect, exploitation, and colonialism albeit it has the semblance of harmlessness,

Exoticism is a way of establishing order in an unknown world through fantasy; a daydream guided by pleasurable self-assurance and expansionism. It is seemingly the harmless side of exploitation...it is will to power over unknown, an act of indiscriminately combining fragments, crumbs, of knowledge and fantasy in disrespectful [and] sweeping gestures (p.189).

Echoing Savigliano, Yahya et al. (2012) contend that colonial travel writers have deployed it "to perpetuate the demarcation line between the Orient and West to create binaries of self/other informed by their country's various ideological imperatives" (p.782). Equally Huggan (2001) observes cultural injustice in the exoticism since from his viewpoint it is "superimposition of dominant way of seeing, speaking, and thinking onto marginal peoples" (p.24). Unlike previous scholars Ghaderi and Yahya (2014) inspired by Victor Segalen's thesis refutes monolithic interpretation of the exoticism, they argue that there is another type of exoticism which is appreciative and respectful towards cultural others, "Segalen's...emphasis on the autonomous worth of difference and the flexible relation between the self and other allows for a plurality of exoticisms with versatile uses. It also helps strip exoticism of its monolithic and negative definition in postcolonial theory" (p.127). Given two different types of exoticism, the Western travel writers in the nineteenth century represented their Oriental female travelers as exotic beings in the sense of cultural others fueled with colonial impulses. Their depiction lends supports to Said's view: "since antiquity [the Orient] has been place of ...exotic

beings” (1979, p. 1). To demonstrate their exoticism, they focus on their traditional ornaments as well as their romantic marriage custom.

#### 4.2 Exoticism through Traditional Ornaments and Jewels

Turkmen are well-known for their silver ornaments and jewelry in which they intermingle Turco-Mongol motifs with Islamic ones (Diba, 2011 & Blackwell, 2001). These ornaments include silver headdress, headband, necklet, cuffs, bracelets, earring, to name a few. Turkmen women do not put on these ornaments and jewelries mainly for aesthetic purposes. They wear for other reasons as well,

The parure [matching set of ornaments and jewelry] was an indicator of woman’s ethnic identity and stage of life. Her jewelry varied according to her age and marital status, identifying her as a young girl, newly married, and it became increasingly elaborate as she became older. Jewelry played an important role in Turkmen wedding ceremony not only to adorn bride, but also as a dowry, and wedding gift...[their ornaments] also served as a safeguard against all manners of ills [since] carnelian ...and turquoise were widely used in for their protective properties in [these ornaments]...another significant function of silver ornament was its use as portable money; many accounts describe moving scenes of Turkmen women divesting themselves of their precious jewelry to ensure survival of their tribe (Diba, p. 36).

However, in the nineteenth century the Western traveler writers failed to appreciate the aesthetic and practical values of the ornaments and jewelries worn by their female travelers. They instead appropriated them in their accounts to validate the Turkmen women’s exoticism; that is to say, they are “oddly different” (McLeod, 2002). Additionally, disrespect accompanies their descriptions. Edmond O’ Donovan in his travelogue overtly embodies their exoticism when his narration focuses on his hostess, Gul Jemal as the representative of whole Turkmen women,

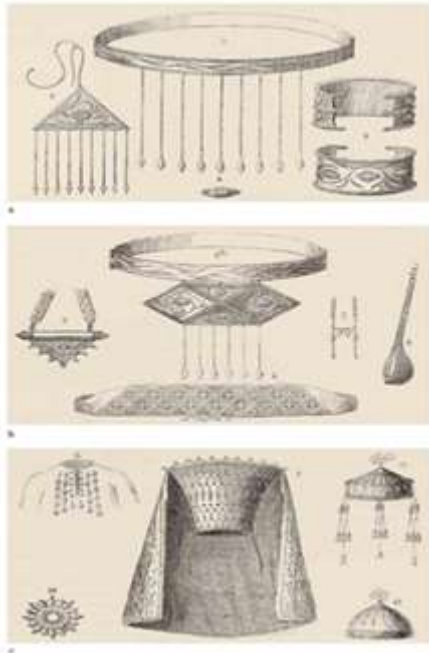
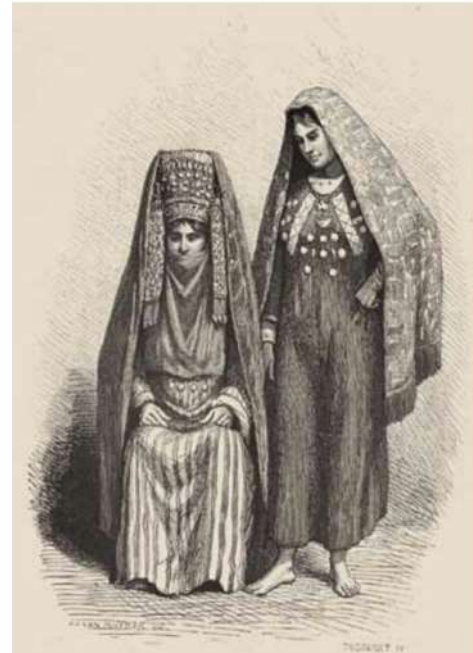
Around her neck was a ponderous resembling that of *Newfoundland dog* [breed of a large dog], and from it, suspended by numerous was engraved plate chased with gold and arabesque and set with cornelians [reddish translucent gemstone], not unlike *urim and thummim* [sacred oracles worn] by a Jewish priests. On her wrists were *ponderous* bracelets set also with flat cornelians. The breast and stomach of the shirt were so set over with closely-hung large silver coins as to give her appearance of wearing a cuirass [armor] scales. On her head was *casque* [knight’s helmet] of open silver work, showing the red cloth beneath, and surmounted by a *spike* like that of *German soldier’s helmet*. Her entire appearance was in her silver panoply [armor and dress] like Minerva-like [Roman Goddess who patron of art] in extreme...The Yamud [one of main Turkmen tribe] women wear a *fearful head covering* of the size and shape of ordinary hand-box...anything *more awkward, more unbecoming or more generally ungraceful, it would be difficult to image* ...the Merv women also wore same *abomination* (emphasis added 1883, pp..261-262).

The above passage is reminder of Cervantes’s humor in *Don Quixote*. When Don Quixote encounters an Oriental woman for the first time, he exclaims “is this lady a Christian or Moor? Her dress and silence makes us think she is what we hope she is not” (as cited in Kahf, 1999, p. 81). Here one can perceive that the travel writer deliberately showcases her as a peculiar and fascinating spectacle to cater for his readers’ exotic fantasies. In this regard, he strips her from femininity and places her in the context of war, battleground, hunting and even false religion [Judaism for the Christians is superstitious and perverted by likening her host to Minerva the goddess of war, knights, soldiers, Jewish priests, and even dogs. In other words, these analogies help the travel writer not only mold his traveler as ferocious Amazons, Greek mythological female warriors, but also demarcate self/the Western women from other/his allegedly alien female traveler(s). Moreover, to make the analogies more dramatic, he insensitively describes her ornaments as abomination, ungraceful, awkward, ponderous, and unbecoming.

By the same token, Fraser, Conolly, and Vambéry also reiterate O’ Donovan’s fallacy when they fail to appreciate their ornaments and compare the ornaments to unartistic objects. Fraser notes that so-called ‘barbaric’ ornaments of his Turkmen female travelers are suitable for harness of horses, “this *barbaric* ornament... fitter for a *horse than a woman*, hangs down behind (emphasis added, 1838, p. 371). Here Fraser implies that these so-called primitive ornaments make his female travelers look very odd and absurd; accordingly he insinuates that they should not wear. Rather they should bedeck their horses with them. Echoing O’ Donovan, Conolly draws an analogy between his female travelers’ headdress and soldiers’ helmet, “it is a privilege of a married woman to put upon her head a *heavy and ugly cap*, something like a hussar’s [a military man]” (1838,p. 140).

Lastly, consistent with previous travel writers, Vambéry finds a parallel between the ornaments of Turkmen women with those of horses and soldiers’ jackets,

Turkmen is very fond of such clatter, and attaches articles that produce it either to his *wife or his horse*... He renders his the lady’s attire complete, a Hungarian dolmany (*Hussar jacket*) is hung from shoulders which only permitted to be so long as to leave visible the ends of hair plaited with ribbon (emphasis added, p. 316).

Fig. 3. *Turkmen Ornaments*. Diba (2011, p.15).Fig. 4. *Turkmen Women*. Diba (2011, p., p. 21

#### 4.3 Exoticizing through a Marriage Custom

Another common technique at the disposal of Western travel writers to exoticize their travelees is drawing on Romanticism (Gholi, 2016). Romanticism is characterized by its interest in remote places, strange customs, legends, folklore and medievalism among the other (Baldick 2001 & Abrams, 2000) to achieve wonder. The case in point is Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, *The Rime of Ancient Mariner*, and *Christabel* as well as Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. In these poems both poets intermingle medievalism, bizarre world, superstition, and legend to generate wonder, thereby keeping their readers interested. From the perspective of the postcolonial scholars, this interest is not unrelated to Western imperialism since it arouses curiosity and desire in the Western audience, and implicitly propel them to traverse, experience, and to dominate their region and its people (Fulford & Kitsen, 1998). Similar to the romantic writers' The Western travel writers also in their journey to the terrain of the Turkmen appropriated this topos to depict their female travelees bizarre. To do so, they directed their narration on their marriage custom in which Turkmen women are akin to the heroine of old myths, epics, and tales. Fred Burnaby in his travelogue, *Ride to Khiva* (1895) for instance demonstrates this romantic tendency when he narrates a marriage custom among the Turkmen,

The Turkomans sometimes decide the knotty point of who is to marry the prettiest girl in their tribe in the ... primitive manner. On these occasions the whole tribe turns out, and the young lady, being allowed her choice [best] of horses, gallops away from her suitors. They follow her. She avoids those whom she dislikes, and seeks to throw herself in the way of the object of her affections [that is the boy whom she likes]. The moment that she is caught she becomes the wife of her captor. Further ceremonies are dispensed with, and he takes her to his tent (p.204).

The travel writer by selecting and incorporating this alien marriage custom in his travelogue bestows dreamy, aesthetic and romantic ambience to his description. Here the pretty Turkmen is girl reminiscent of the heroines of Greek myth and epic. Her horsemanship and daring connects her to Amazons, who are notorious for performing deeds which are in the domain of men like horse riding. Her morality is the reminder of faithful Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, who reject the romantic attempts of the many suitors in the absence of her husband as she frustrate those she does not adore and waits just for her lover to throw into his arms.

Fig. 5. *Pursuit of Fiancée*. From *The Country of Turkomans: An Anthology of Exploration* from The Royal Geographical Society (1977, p.72)

In addition, to romanticize her Turkmen travelee(s) and distinguish her from the western women, the travel writer seems that intentionally has adopted and modified this fragment from Clarke's successful travel book, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa* (1813) and attributed to the Turkmen women,

The ceremony of marriage among Calmucks [the Russian Tartary] is performed on horseback. A girl is first-mounted, who rides off in full speed. Her lover pursues; and if he overtakes her, she becomes more his wife, and the marriage is consummated upon the spot; after which she returns with him to his tent. But it sometimes happens the woman does not wish to marry the person by whom she is pursued, in which case she will not suffer to overtake her; and we were assured that assured that no instance occurs of a Calmuck girl being thus unless she has a partiality for her pursuer. If she dislikes...until she completely escaped, or until the pursuer's horse is tired out, living her at liberty to return, to be afterwards chased by some more favored admirer (p.221).

Arminius Vambéry (1864) also in his travel book, *Travels in Central Asia* mentions this marriage ceremonial and refers to it as 'Kokburi' meaning 'green wolf'. Notwithstanding, his description varies from Burnaby's account. From the vantage point of Vambéry the custom is not to determine a prospective husband for a beautiful girl, but it is a cultural vehicle for the bride to exhibit her horsemanship to her bridegroom and other young pursuers who are trying hard to catch the carcass of goat or lamb placed on her lap,

There is also the marriage ceremonial where the young maiden, attired in bridal costume, mounts a highbred courser taking on her lap the carcass of a lamb or goat, and setting off at the full gallop, is followed by the bridegroom and other young men of the party, also on horseback; but she is always to strive, by adroit turns...to avoid her pursuers, that no one of them approach near enough to snatch from her the burden on her lap (p.323).



Fig. 6. *Tartar Horse Race-Pursuit of Bride*. Vambéry (1864, p.322).

Similar to Burnaby, Vambéry utilizes the cultural practice to highlight them as romantic in a sense that they similar to people in the pastoral past are freer and less restricted to by shackles of civilization thanks to living a nomadic and primitive way of life which enabled them to give expression to their romantic sentiments rather suppress them. In addition, the travel writing by focusing on her prowess connects the bride to both amazons and the heroines of ballads and folklore who are capable of galloping the horse like knights and soldiers.

Like Burnaby's account, Vambéry's pseudo ethnographical description is doubtful. It seems that he has heard about the event from a Central Asians instead of witnessing it with his own eyes. His intention has been fashioning romantic and exotic exotic version of Oriental Turkmen women who to be different from the Western women and at the same time live up to his audience's expectation. Here Williams Langland's saying holds true for aforementioned travel writers, "a traveler may lie with authority and no one could prove he was talking through the top of his hat" (as cited in Manser, 2007, p.279).

## 5. Conclusion

The majority of Western travel writers have fashioned the image of Oriental female travelees specifically the Muslim women in disapproving light as lascivious, oppressed, sealed, secluded and exotic. In the eyes of postcolonial scholars like Leila Ahmad (1992), highlighting and exaggerating this negative portrayal serves as a justificatory vehicle for the Westerners to colonize them, that is, the emancipation of the Oriental women from their dreadful plight is possible only through them. Similar to other Oriental women, Turkmen women have been the object of inspection for the Western travel writers in the nineteenth century when their territory was contested by two colonial powers: Tsarist Russians and the British. The travel writers presented a paradoxical picture of them, albeit without challenging the discourse of Orientalism. On the one hand, they demarcate them from the other Oriental Muslim women for not wearing veil and enjoying freedom as well as respect thanks to their nomadic lifestyle which kept the Turkmens immune from supposedly misogynist Islam. Notwithstanding, their positive responses do not undercut their Orientalist attitude, instead their favorable reaction casts them as noble savages in the need of their civilizing power. Moreover, these travel writers valorized their Turkmen travelees on the account of their vitality in the domestic sphere as well as chastity which are compatible with the travel writers' concept of ideal femininity. Again their laudatory accounts do not problematize the discourse of Orientalism, they rather reflect the flexibility of this discourse and indicate how it can maintains its power despite deviating from its norms. On the other hand, the travel writers treat their Turkmen female travelees like other Oriental women when they craft their image as exotic in two ways. Firstly, by directing their

description on their ornaments and jewelries which from their perspective make the Turkmen women resemble nothing so much as soldiers, the goddess of war, and Jewish priests. Secondly, by romanticizing them when they account how Turkmen girls or brides skillfully ride horses and choose their prospective husband or how they outrun ardent pursuers in the marriage ceremony. This romantic portrait of the Turkmen female travelers is the reminiscent of the heroines of myths and tales which artistically demarcates from the Western women.

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