

Rupkatha Journal

On Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities

An Online Open Access Journal

ISSN 0975-2935

www.rupkatha.com

Volume V, Number 2, 2013

Special Issue on Performance Studies

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The “Politically Correct Memsahib”: Performing Englishness in Select Anglo-Indian Advice Manuals

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Abstract

Examining select Anglo-Indian advice manuals written after the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and during the ‘high imperialism’ period of the British Raj, the essay proposes that this cultural artefact served the purpose of constructing and naturalizing the English Memsahibs’ gendered racial identity. By reiterating the performance of gender, class and race imperatives to construct a unique identity prerequisite for the Anglo-Indian community as well as the Indian colony, these texts aimed at the crystallization of this identity that will strengthen the idea of the British Raj. Such reiteration- apart from revealing the imperial anxiety of the subversion of the Memsahib identity- were useful to caution the English women new to the colonial environment. Reading these Anglo-Indian advice manuals produced for the consumption of the Anglo-Indian community, what the essay further proposes is that the performance of gendered-racial identity of the English women in India constituted not only the governance of their bodies and the Anglo-Indian spaces, but also their management of travel and material consumption including food. Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* provide useful insights to study the performance of the “politically correct Memsahib” identity and its attendant relation to the imagining of the homogenous British Raj.

[**Keywords:** Anglo-Indian women, memsahib, advice manuals, British Raj, performance, identity, gender, race, class]

Introduction

We do not wish to advocate unholy haughtiness; but an Indian household can no more be governed peacefully, without dignity and prestige, than an Indian Empire. (Steel 18)

The above epigraph appearing in Flora Annie Steel’s *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* demonstrates how the governance of the British Empire is defined as the extension of the management of the Anglo-Indian domestic space. An investigation of Anglo-Indian advice manuals written after the Indian Mutiny in 1857 for the consumption of the English women in India show how the onus of strengthening the British empire was placed on these women residing with their men as wives, sisters, mothers and relatives. In her scholarly work, *Empire Families*, Elizabeth Buettner examined how the continuity of the British Raj relied on these English women when the interracial sexual liaisons –tolerated in the

earlier centuries- became a moral anathema from the early decades of the nineteenth century.¹ Alison Blunt has convincingly argued that the political implications of British imperial domesticity became significant even beyond the boundaries of the home.² Rosemary Marangoly George draws upon Maud Diver's *The Englishwoman in India* and *Captain Desmond V.C.*, and proposes that 'the imperial occupation of India allowed for the prescription of the domestic as the most fulfilling arena in which a modern female subject operate' (97). In their respective studies of British colonial writings on India, George locates a "public domesticity" while Blunt explores an "imperial domesticity". In a recent study of Alice Perrin's fiction, Pramod K. Nayar has effectively argued that the social sphere assimilates into itself the features of both the public and the domestic and calls the hitherto private space of domesticity a "political domesticity". To practice this politically charged domesticity, the English women in India had to perform an identity that will comply with the British imperial ideals. Many authors- specifically, the British imperial officers and their female relatives- of Anglo-Indian advice manuals took up the imperial task of promulgating this identity on themselves. They reiterated the need for the performance of what I term, the "politically correct Memsahib³" identity by the English women in India. Disseminating the imperial idea of the much needed Memsahib identity, the English women along with their male counterparts were conscious of producing the imperial knowledge of India. Examining both select Anglo-Indian men as well as women's advice manuals, the essay demonstrates how the Anglo-Indian writers- irrespective of gender differences- reiterated the "politically correct Memsahib" identity to arrest the unstable identities of the English women living in India. My point is that this distinctive identity necessitated by the specific historical moment is inflected by gender, class and race imperatives. The construction and reiteration of this Anglo-Indian woman- upper and middle class English women -ideal by these cultural artefacts helped in solidifying and normalizing it. In addition, the essay proposes that the performance of Englishness expected of the English women in India constituted not only the governance of their bodies and the Anglo-Indian household, but also their material consumption including food. The Queer thinker, Judith Butler's theory of performativity drawn from her texts such as *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* provide useful insights to examine how Englishness was performed in the Indian colonial environment where seeing and being seen underpins the imperial power relations.

Background Contexts

Examining the British migration during the nineteenth century, James Morris states that the most interesting migrants were 'the groups of young women who, carefully chaperoned and segregated, went out in batches from England to the white colonies' (Morris 68). The opening of Suez Canal in 1869 made the travel between Britain and India faster and easier for the English women. They recorded their lived experiences in India and represented their encounter with natives in

several empire texts that signalled their entry into the male dominated epistemological terrain.

After the Indian Mutiny in 1857, the process of creating a distinctive culture intensified in the Indian colony. This process was informed by the participation of the English middle and upper-middle class men in the British Raj service leading to a paranoid obsession with the practice of social rituals and elaborate etiquettes. The English women settlers in India tried to transplant the Victorian domesticity that constituted the imagined separation of the gendered spheres of the private and the public. The middle class wife was at the centre of the household management and the middle-class husband went out into the public space to face the competitive world. Promoting gender and class differences in her household manual, Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management* defines the ideal Victorian woman thus: AS WITH THE COMMANDER OF THE ARMY, or the leader of any enterprise, so is it with the mistress of a house.... there are none which take a higher rank, in our estimation, than such as enter into a knowledge of household duties; for on these are perpetually dependent the happiness, comfort, and well-being of a family (Beeton 23). By reinforcing the idea that 'She ought always to remember that she is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega in the government of her establishment' (Beeton 35) in the rhetoric of politics, she demands the citizen status for the Victorian women who ensure peaceful domesticity. J.E. Dawson writes, in an article titled 'Woman in India: Her Influence and Position' in *The Calcutta Review* that 'If ever motherhood deserved the dignity of being recognised as a mission, requiring all the exclusiveness of enthusiasm and of self-devotion, it is in India' (356). As Susan Zlotnick puts it, their domesticity became one of the most visible and remarked upon signs of their-and their nation's- superiority. Kumari Jayawardena has captured the essence of these English women's lived experiences thus: they were 'isolated in the home as a woman and alienated in the colony as a foreigner' (4). Though the Anglo-Indian domesticity was modelled on Victorian domesticity, it was not without certain negotiations needed to suit the demands of the Indian colonial environment. Often, the English women entered the public and social spaces in the empire alongside their husbands. However, they did not have contacts with natives other than servants who participated in the construction and the maintenance of the Anglo-Indian household. Swati Chattopadhyay and E.M. Collingham have usefully argued that the overlapping of the private and public spaces, made inevitable by the colonial situations, informed even the construction of bungalows in the colonial space.⁴ Mrinalini Sinha has demonstrated that though the European clubs tried to reproduce the Victorian sociability in colonial India, it was equally "vulnerable to the tensions and contradictions of inscribing a specifically "Eurocentric" logic in a colonial space" (493). The Anglo-Indian officialdom was anxious over their women's presence in these clubs; they were seen as potential threats to the carefully nurtured class and race differences. She points out that the English women in colonial India gained entry to the European clubs where the

gendered space for women was termed “special ladies’ quarters’ or ‘moorghhi khanna’. Chattopadhyay notes that ‘what passed as ‘Indian’ at these (Anglo-Indian, here) tables was a peculiarly Anglicized version of Indian food – the latter made suitable for English tastes’ (257) while Zlotnick contends that the ‘British women helped incorporate Indian food into the national diet and India into the British empire’ (65).

The "Politically Correct Memsahib"

To convert their presence in India into an imperial mission, the English women in India had to perform a distinctive identity embodying the essential Englishness. E.M. Collingham has effectively argued that though the body of the nabobs demonstrated a certain ‘Indianization’, the Anglo-Indian women’s body-the nabobinas’s body- did not undergo any much transformation even during the eighteenth century though there were exceptions like Marion Hastings⁵. It will be useful here to look at his argument: "Women’s position in British society as the repositories of morality meant that within India they acted as the primary indicators of the civilized state of the West" (42). He states that even in masquerades, only acceptable imitation of Indian costumes were allowed to be worn by the Anglo-Indian women. There was an intense fear that these women may fall under the native men’s gaze as the native women fell under the gaze of the British men. Deeply entrenched in gender differences, the English women's body suffered more severe restrictions from the early nineteenth century onwards. Any negligence to follow the rules of behaviour was equated to the loose morals by the rigid Anglo-Indian community. Studying the creation of the English female ideal as represented in the conduct literature and fiction of the eighteenth century, Nancy Armstrong writes thus:

Conduct books for women, as well as fiction in the tradition of Richardson, worked within the same framework as Locke, but they constructed a more specialized and less material form of subjectivity, which they designated as female... then pedagogical literature mapped out a field of knowledge that would produce a specifically female form of subjectivity. (Armstrong 14)

Her study of the eighteenth century fiction and conduct literature meant for women is relevant for the present essay. The essay helps to demonstrate the role played by the Anglo-Indian advice manuals to contain the "disorderly memsahibs"(Indrani Sen's term)⁶ facilitated by the alien Indian colonial spaces.

Judith Butler and Performativity

Insights drawn from the Queer thinker, Judith Butler’s theory of performativity elaborated in Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* prove useful to better understand and examine the formation and performance of the "politically correct

Mem sahib" identity, its process of 'recitation' and the discursive practices of the English women's body. In her influential work, *Gender Trouble*, Butler states thus: "Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders" (10). All bodies are gendered from the origin of their social existence and that there is no existence that is not social. She draws the conclusion that gender is not something that one is, but it is something that one does. She explains that gender is more of a sequence of acts- a doing rather than a being- imposed upon us by normative heterosexuality thus:

In this sense, gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of freefloating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. ... In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. ... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 33)

She emphasizes that the act of performativity determines who we are. In her viewpoint, there is a difference between performativity and performance; performance presupposes a preexisting subject whereas performativity contests the very notion of the subject.⁷ For her, a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies. Further, her argument is that

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 43-44)

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler seems to draw her theoretical stance from Derrida's views on re-citation. Derrida emphasizes that linguistic signs can be transplanted into unforeseen contexts. They are vulnerable to appropriation and reiteration, and Derrida terms it 'citational grafting'. She notes that the heterosexual normativity alone does not work as the regulatory regime that condition the body and even, race is yet another imperative. However, her argument is that racial differences are not subordinate to sexual differences and emphasizes that both race and heterosexual matrix have its implications for the condition of subjecthood. Neither racial differences occur before sex and gender differences nor they are autonomous or discrete axes of power. Her core argument is that "the subject is produced by racially informed conceptions of sex" (Butler, *Bodies* 130).

Personal Care and The "Politically Correct Memsahib"

Advising on many aspects of colonial life like their sea voyage and arrival to India, personal care, child care, travel to many Residencies, household management, material consumption, relationship with natives and their retreat to the metropolitan Britain, the Anglo-Indian advice manuals reinforce the performance of Englishness by the English women in the Indian colonial space. This performance constituted, most importantly, their domestication of the hot climatic conditions, food consumption, consistent health care and adequate exercises. Many advice manuals start with instructions for combating the discomforts posed by the erratic sea voyage. *Tropical Trials*, a popular advice manual meant exclusively for the Anglo-Indian women starts its pedagogical logic thus:

Few can realise the sacrifices they will be called upon to make in taking such a decided step; many home comforts, and the host of nameless social fascinations, so dear to a woman's heart, have to be given up, while the attractions offered by the irresistible "day's shopping," the box at the opera, a few of our summer recreations and nearly all our winter amusements, must be temporarily relegated to the list of past pleasures. (Hunt 1-2)

Starting with a warning to the English women travelling to India, it represents the colony as a difficult space which demands sacrifices like giving up 'home comforts' 'the host of nameless social fascinations', 'day's shopping', 'the box at the opera', 'summer recreations' and 'winter amusements'. What the narrative seems to hint is that these women should not expect any fun or adventure in the Indian colonial space. Instead, they should be ready to devote themselves to the cause of the imperial mission. These 'past pleasures' should not be an integral component of their colonial life in India. The construction of the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal is contingent upon the change in their attitude towards the purpose of their stay in India. They are expected to transform their identity even at the instance of their entry into India during the British Raj period. As Butler points out, norms have the potential to force a citation which is socially acceptable.⁸ During the British Raj period, the transformation of an identity to uphold the British imperial ideal became a political act. The reiteration of this norm was essential to naturalize it and this imperial task was taken up by writers of these Anglo-Indian advice manuals.

Representing India as a space capable of depleting physical strength and mental vigour, many narratives represent the English women as weaker than their male counterparts in combating the erratic Indian weather conditions. Expressing a sense of racial superiority, *Medical Guide for Anglo-Indians* states that the Indian climatic conditions definitely have its impact on their physical and mental constitutions. Suggesting that the English women choosing to live in India must not be under eighteen years, it represents these women as weaker than their male counterparts and it is difficult for them to combat the hot summer in India:

Females suffer perhaps even more than males. Their lives, especially those in affluent or easy circumstances, are generally torpid, and too little relieved by occupation.... but little, often far too little, interest in domestic affairs; they become listless and apathetic, and they succumb to the climate sooner than men.

A lady's health is almost invariably so affected by the climate of India, after six or eight years' unbroken residence,... Great sacrifices and self-denial, financial as well as social, are often made and endured, by husbands, sending their wives and children "home", that they may be removed from the morbid influence of India that their constitutions may become invigorated by a residence in England,... (Mair 6)

Similarly, even the narrative in the handbook meant for women, *Tropical Trials* reiterates the Victorian medical thoughts implicated by gender differences. However, it advises them to exercise 'calm judgment' in managing the difficulties in India:

Notwithstanding this comparative physical inequality, much may be done by a woman of sound sense, to maintain body and mind in a healthy state,... she will exercise her calm judgment in meeting difficulties as they may arise, as there is no reason why she should not come off victorious in her struggle with *tropical trials*. (Hunt 6-7)

Both the narratives reiterate the gender specific Victorian idea of the health management.

Forewarning that life in India is going to be extremely difficult for these English women, the former narrative hints that the lack of occupation contributes to their deteriorating health conditions. It showers its sympathy for the tiring English men who choose to send their wives and children to England and protect them 'from the morbid influence of India'. The latter narrative states that 'a woman of sound sense' will take care of her health and tackle all sorts of difficulties. What these narratives imply is that being useful⁹ is an integral component of the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal established in discursive practices.

These English women residing in Anglo-India are even represented as more prone to mental sickness. It will be useful here to look at the narrative in *Tropical Trials*:

During your residence in the tropics, you will often come across many remarkable examples of the different effects which will be produced by the heat on women of various temperaments and habits. Some women are of a highly sensitive nature; their nerves, to use a common expression, are "highly strung." Such people become alternately elated or depressed by the most trivial occurrences. The tropical heat seems to exaggerate this

condition, and they often suffer, for days together, from fits of depression, which are not traceable to any sufficient cause. (Hunt 183-184)

Florence Marryat in her memoir, *Gup* confesses that it is extremely difficult for these women to combat the hot weather: "From whence the evil arises, heaven only knows; their minds and energies may rust and dull from the effects of the climate, or the tone of their morals become lowered from the want of spiritual instruction, in the up-country stations..." (39-40). She records her lived experiences further by stating that the Indian climate 'drains the mind of all desire to improve itself' (59). However, in the popular advice manual, *The Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, Steel notes that half the English women suffer from 'neurasthenia' and anaemia as 'they live virtually in the dark'. In fact, studying the case histories of many *memsahibs*, Waltraud Ernst has effectively argued thus: "Given the typical and stereotypical field of action of women, indicators of mental problems were necessarily seen in such things as a Memsahib's failure to fulfil her role as a good daughter, wife, or mother.... Each patient had thus failed to pursue their expected—gender-specific—role" (363-364). Instead of criticizing the undue onus placed on these English women, these narratives merely focus on the failure of these women to combat the difficulties as Nayar puts it in his study of Alice Perrin's¹⁰ fiction. To reinforce the idea that the Englishwomen in India must give up being indolent, Hunt's narrative even draws a contrast to the 'sickly-hued woman':

A painful contrast is afforded by the sickly-hued woman, who having taken her breakfast in bed, can just find strength sufficient to don a dressing-gown and slippers, and then resume a recumbent posture on a sofa, where, under a punkah, with closed doors and windows, and the lightest of literary trash for her eyes to the trifle with, she will remain until after sundown, when, the exertion of dressing over, she will recline languidly in an open carriage for an hour or so, and submit to be driven along a dusty road "for the benefit of her health." (Hunt 180)

The failure to adhere to the gendered imperial norm turns these women into a mental wreck. The shifting identities definitely damage the agency of the subject. My point is that this narrative strategy of presenting 'the sickly-hued woman' is an attempt to enforce and naturalize the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal.

The construction of the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal constitutes the preservation of their health in spite of the adverse Indian weather conditions. So, Steel advises that these women should consider the sun as their friend and enjoy the morning ride in the early morning sun. She presents the need for spending some time in the day light in a tone of concern thus:

The writer believes that the forced inertia caused by living without *light* is responsible for many moral and physical evils among European ladies in the Tropics. In the chapter 'In the Plains' more is said on the subject of making the sun your *friend*. (Steel 171)

While Steel advises these women to befriend sun, Hunt in *Tropical Trials* instructs that the health in the tropics depend largely on their taking 'a regular and sufficient amount of out-door exercise, either in saddle or on foot' (Hunt 20). Even *Medical Guide for Anglo-Indians*, inscribing gender differences, advises against indolence promoted by the Indian colonial space thus:

Ladies in India, as a rule, stand much more in need of exercise than men, and perhaps nothing sooner causes them to succumb to the influence of the climate, than the want of it. Confined, as they mostly are to their houses, during nearly the entire day, leading generally very sedentary lives, having little or no mental or physical occupation, they soon droop, become listless, languid, and apathetic, and eventually are incapable of any exertion at all. ... The amount of exertion which some will undergo night after night in ballrooms during the cool season in India, would, if directed in another way, namely walking or riding in the open air in the early morning, do much to preserve their health, and enable them to prolong their residence beyond the seven or eight years which is at present about the seven or eight years which is at present about the average during of their stay in India. (Mair 29)

Here, the narrative advises against the ballroom dances and encourages walking or riding in the open air. It appears that these narratives hint at the need to focus on the imperial mission at hand rather than enjoying the social life in the colonial space. Apart from physical activities, even the pursuit of mental activities is recommended by many advice manuals like *Tropical Trials*:

Ample mental resources may be found in the shape of reading, drawing, painting, fancy work, &c. &c.; occupations that will not unduly tax the energies, and that will agreeably serve to fill up time, that would otherwise be found to hang heavily on the hands. (Hunt 181)

The ideal mem sahib's daily regime included a morning walk or a horse ride that were believed to have helped in safeguarding their health. Further, they were expected to focus on certain less demanding occupation like reading and drawing that will not draw more energy from them. Apart from being inscribed by gender differences, this narrative seems to reveal an imperial anxiety over the mobility of these English women in the colonial political space. Their mobility is restricted by the suggestions of just a morning walk or a ride and their possible adventurism is pre-emptively contained.

Many advice manuals condemn even over-eating as it induces indolence. Flora Annie Steel clearly advises against over-eating in the Indian colonial space. She states that people in the hot weather conditions 'seem to eat simply because it passes the time'. Her advice on food consumption is that one light entrée and a dressed vegetable can replace 'a meal of four or five distinct courses placed on the table' (Steel 57). Even *Tropical Trials* advises against excessive indulgence in food:

Not only the nature of the food, but the quantity partaken thereof ought to be carefully considered, for, while in temperate climates, any injudicious indulgence in the pleasures of the table, is only attended with temporary indisposition, a like course in a hot climate, would be followed by a train of disasters, often the gravest description, and which sometimes result in permanent injury to the health. (Hunt 116)

While Hunt's narrative suggests that the food should be 'plain, well cooked, and not highly seasoned' and 'fancy dishes should be but sparingly indulged in' (Hunt 117), Steel even insists that food and drink should be 'simple' and 'digestible'. *Medical Guide for Anglo-Indians* provides advice against the consumption of alcohol by the English women as it will ruin their mind, character and health:

Many women, educated, refined, and in easy circumstances, take such quantities of alcohol in some form or other, at different times during the day, openly or secretly, as to cause the very symptoms just described, - precisely those, in short, of chronic or permanent alcoholization. ... In women, owing to physiological differences, and a more susceptible nervous system, intemperate habits paralyse the will earlier than in men; they become sooner the creatures of impulse, and less able to resist the seductive influence of alcohol, while its effects upon them are more ruinous to mind, character and health. (Mair 25)

Marked by the Victorian notion of gender differences, the narrative hints that even educated women indulge in excessive drinking. Hunt's narrative points out that the consumption of 'a few sips of sherry', 'a glass of stout', and 'a modicum of weak brandy' will become a confirmed habit and it places on record that 'except in cases of sickness, and under medical advice, a woman should abstain from the use of alcohol in any of its forms' (Hunt 120). Further, it suggests that fish, poultry and vegetable must become the staple food. Food consumption is translated into a norm to arrest the shifting identities of the English women promoted by individual choices.

Costume and The "Politically Correct Memsahib"

Many of these manuals advise even on the clothes to be worn by the English women in India. The list of personal outfits provided by *Indian Outfits and Establishments* includes:

- Two plain white dresses (washing).
- Two afternoon dresses (regular costumes).
- One black silk, with two skirts and two bodices.
- One cloth costume (cold weather wear).
- One ulster dress (waterproof).
- Two evening dresses (for ordinary wear, with bodies and slips).
- One lace ditto (ball dress).

One dinner dress (full toilette).

One dinner dress (demi toilette).

Total, twelve dresses (besides four wrappers) (An Anglo-Indian 9-10)

The above list of personal outfits demonstrates how different clothes were used for different occasions. An Anglo-Indian's narrative offers advice on the use of thin woollen clothes during the cold weather and the need to avoid using velvet dresses in the Indian weather conditions. Afternoon costumes were made of cashmere, tussore and merino. *Indian Outfits and Establishments* recommends many cotton wears to be taken: One dozen cotton nightdresses, thin; one dozen cotton nightdresses, usual thickness; One dozen pair of cotton drawers, thin; one dozen pairs of cotton drawers, thicker (An Anglo-Indian 9-10). The same narrative states that bonnets will not offer protection against the sun and hence, one bonnet is enough. Even A Lady Resident states that hats have replaced bonnets as they are too expensive in India. Specifically, it strongly suggests that they should not wear high 'brass-tipped affairs' which is fashionable in England but not suitable for India as comfort is more important than adopting the fashion of the day. Cautioning to treat the sun as an enemy, Steel provides a list of clothes to be worn during the hot summer in India thus:

The writer, however, never wore it day or night, and she never once went to the hills unless on leave with her husband, which means that two hot weathers out of every three were spent entirely in the plains. She wore silk, discarded stays, &c., and, as a rule, had her dresses of nuns-veiling or thin serge. And during the hot weather she used a thin white Rampore chuddar or shawl instead of a sheet. The aim and object is, however, to avoid chills and heats. ... unless, indeed, the claims of fashion are allowed to overbear those of comfort and health. (Steel 171)

Besides suggesting the suitable clothes for the Indian weather conditions, Steel emphasizes that she has not left her husband alone in the plains and escaped the summer heat and adds that 'sound good sense and energy' are essential to survive in India. What the narrative implies is that they must develop the imperialistic spirit and should not focus on 'the claims of fashion'. As the English women's performance of Englishness is dependent on their health, she states that 'the claims of fashion' should not dominate matters concerning comfort and health. It will be useful here to look at the narrative that insists on giving up the Victorian way of dressing thus:

And there is really no reason why the Englishwoman in India should burden herself with the same number of petticoats, shifts, bodices, and what not, that her great-grandmother wore in temperate climes. We do not advocate any sloppiness in dress; on the contrary, we would inveigh against any yielding to the lassitude and indifference which comes over the most

energetic in tropical heat, but we would have people as comfortable as they can be under circumstances. (Steel 209)

Steel makes it clear that the adaptation of dressing to the Indian weather condition does not mean 'any sloppiness in dress'. Her point is that the English women in India must wear clothes that will provide comfort and keep them in good health. However, she insists that they should not yield to 'the lassitude and indifference which comes over the most energetic'. Further, for social gatherings, she offers the following suggestions in a pedagogical tone:

For this the married lady will find tea-gowns very suitable, while girls are the better for at least two simple nicely-made dresses of nuns-veiling or pongee silk. Ball dresses are a necessity, and one should always be ready for an occasion. On the other hand, nothing suffers more from the voyage, and for girls especially it is better to have at least two silk bodices and slips, one white or cream, and to take out net, lace, ribbon, flowers, &c., for various trimmings and skirts. In addition, a black lace dress should be in every outfit. (Steel 211)

Her advice on outfits demonstrates that married women and unmarried girls wore different clothes. The emphasis on ball dresses show that costumes suitable for various occasions were worn. Hull suggests that they could wear 'low dresses of muslin or grenadine' to a ballroom 'with the thermometer at 85° or 90°'. A black outfit seems to be an important component of their wardrobe meant to be worn for the social and political spaces in colonial India. My argument here is that while these narratives hint at maintaining the essential Englishness, they also insist on adapting to India. It appears that the construction of the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal does not depend on following the British imperial norm alone, but also on adapting themselves to the Indian climatic conditions and imperial environment.

Social Rituals and the "Politically Correct Memsahib"

The Anglo-Indian officer and his wife had the imperial task of demonstrating racial superiority in the colonial space. Specifically, the entry of the lower class English men into the British Raj service made them observe social rituals elaborately and their aristocratic life-style resembled the living pattern of the Victorian gentry. E.C.P. Hull's advice manual titled *European in India* comments on the stringent rule of precedence thus:

Rules of precedence in India are very minute and punctiliously regarded; a host sometimes finding it no easy matter to know which of the ladies he ought to give his arm to, or which of the gentlemen he should ask to support mistress of the house of the dining room. Then, at the end of the evening, the most important guests must leave first, and the rest of the company in due order: a grave offence being considered to have been

committed by anyone who, from whatever cause, is obliged to disregard the rule. (Hull 181)

The above narrative demonstrates how the Anglo-Indian rules of social behaviour are too rigid and complicated. Further, it shows how the code of precedence conditioned social relations in Anglo-India. It represents how even the Anglo-Indian women participated in naturalizing the Anglo-Indian social norms. Any negligence to follow the rigid Anglo-Indian rules was met with astonishment, as Florence Marryat puts it in *Gup*:

"Not going to attend the levee!" she exclaimed. "Why, it's your duty to go."

I told her that I could not view the matter exactly in that light, considering that it was only the invitation of one lady to another and that I was not under the orders of Mrs. A _____, as my husband was under those of the Commander-in-chief.

"No," she replied, compelled to agree in the truth of my argument, although evidently shocked at my audacity in coupling the names of Mrs. A _____ and myself together; "of course not, but you will allow that she is the rankest lady in Madras, and therefore I think we are all bound to show her respect." (Marryat 17-18)

In the above narrative, it appears that attending the calls is considered to be an important imperial duty though Marryat appears to be the 'disorderly Memsahib' keen on violating the rules of manners. The most important revelation in this narrative is that how the Anglo-Indian husband's rank has its implications for the *memsahib* and how their identity is defined by their husband's professional credentials. Referring to their garden-parties, Margaret Macmillan notes thus:

Garden parties were usually more formal. Women wore their most attractive afternoon dresses and huge hats, sometimes lined with paper against the sun's rays....Garden party food was fairly predictable: in Lahore, for example, it was lettuce and tomato sandwiches, curry puffs, little iced cakes and Nedou's toffees'. ... Then the band struck up God Save the King, and up walked Lord Curzon in frock-coat and top-hat,...walked to a large shamiana[marquee] and sat down with Lady Rivaz...and Lady Curzon presently moved out to converse pleasantly with friends. When the sun had sunk low in the clear heavens, the Viceroy and Lady Curzon left the grounds together, and thereafter the festive crowd dispersed.' (Macmillan 160)

The narrative here emphasizes on the formal way in which parties were organised. At the same time, it demonstrates how the Anglo-Indian social space was gendered and how their women's identity was constructed around these rituals and protocols. Identifying the differences in the social customs that were followed in India and Britain, Margaret Macmillan states that 'Calling cards, dance programmes, long white gloves lingered on in India well after they had

disappeared at Home' (154). Even Florence Marryat in *Gup* records this difference with regard to morning calls thus:

In the first place, the last arrivals are expected to call upon the residents, and the introductory visit is made by the gentleman alone. Even married men make their first round of cantonment calls without their wives, and (if her acquaintance should be desired) the return visit is made by the gentleman and lady together. This custom must, I fancy, have been instituted in those days when there was oftener an objectionable than an unobjectionable female amongst the officers' household furniture, and some such protection against their forcible entrance into respectable families was stringently needed. (Marryat 10-11)

Here, the narrative refers to the 'objectionable' female-native women- who got married to the English men. Thus, the social space seems to be a sanitized space free from the native intrusion and the contamination of racial purity. Bachelors can call at any house which they choose to enter and they were generally not denied entry. Marryat says that 'This species of free entrance to the houses of their countrymen has its origin in the spirit of patriotism which draws people of one nation so strongly together' (11). Social rituals were modified to suit the Indian colonial environment, however, they were strictly followed to demarcate the racial, class and gender boundaries in the colonial space.

Native Language and the "Politically Correct Memsahib"

These manuals advise the Anglo-Indian women to learn the native language to manage their servants. In the section titled "The Duties of the Mistress" in *The Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, Steel refers to language learning as the first duty of these women:

The first duty of a mistress is, of course, to be able to give intelligible orders to her servants; therefore it is necessary she should learn to speak Hindustani. No sane Englishwoman would dream of living, say, for twenty years, in Germany, Italy, or France, without making the attempt, at any rate, to learn the language. She would, in fact, feel that by neglecting to do so she would write herself down an ass. (Steel 12)

The narrative shows how native language learning is important to manage servants. Language performance is an integral component of the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal. Similarly, in *The English Bride in India*, Chota Mem advises thus:

Do not let it trouble you when you first arrive in India, that you cannot speak Hindustani. Nearly all servants, especially in the South, can speak a certain amount of English and you very soon pick up the ordinary every day words. I certainly advise trying to learn the language as soon as possible, as

the MemSahib not being able to speak Hindustani is the cause of many misunderstandings with her menials.(Chota Mem 59)

Though the narrative says that the new arrivals need not worry much about the language learning in the South as the natives 'can speak a certain amount of English'. However, she insists that they should learn Hindustani as the lack of it would 'cause many misunderstandings with her menials'(59).

Native Servants, Children and The "Politically Correct Mem sahib"

Advice on household management is an important chapter in many advice manuals like Steel's *The Indian Housekeeper and Cook* and Maud Diver's *The Englishwoman in India*. The narratives of household management reinforce the idea that the Anglo-Indian women must take up the role of a supervisor and manage the Anglo-Indian household, thereby, contributing to the British imperial enterprise in India. Steel advises against the intensive labour in the presence of native servants in *The Indian Housekeeper and Cook* thus: "Never do work which an ordinarily good servant ought to be able to do. If the one you have will not or cannot do it, get another who can." (Steel 15). Even Chota Mem's *The English Bride in India* reiterates the supervisory role to be performed by the Anglo-Indian women thus:

Half-an-hour should be sufficient time for your housekeeping, so after first seeing the cook (who by-the-way comes to you, instead of you going to him as is the English custom) sally forth to your store-room or godown, where your servants will come to you for their different requirements.... Go to your cook house and see that every utensil is spotlessly clean and that the sweeper has brushed the floor and put phenyle in sink, and while you are outside, some mornings look round the stables, and in places where water might lie have Kerosine oil put down to stop mosquitoes breeding. After finishing with the servants I advise you to enter up accounts, and do any necessary writing, and then you will always find plenty of work in the way of dress-making, and making things for the house, such as curtains, cushion covers, lamp shades, etc., etc. (Chota Mem 7)

The given narrative insists on the managerial skills essential for the English women and nowhere in the narrative, there are references to intensive manual labour to be pursued by them. Studying the role of the Anglo-Indian women and differentiating it with that of her British counterpart, Ralph Crane has observed thus:

Here, the housewife had to manage servants marked by racial and class difference; here, the accounts were carried on in a foreign currency and supplies were procured through bazaars and importers; here, her responsibility to uphold standards was overlaid with imperial assumptions about racial and cultural superiority (and by corollary, vulnerability to the strangeness of India). (Crane xviii)

Mary Procida sets up an argument that the British domesticity demanded intensive labour while the Anglo-Indian domesticity needed surveillance and managerial skills alone.¹¹ It must be stated here that the lower class English women like missionary and barrack wives definitely devoted themselves to intensive labour and these manuals are overtly silent about these women. In fact, Indrani Sen points out that despite "a fairly large social presence, poorer whites (barrack wives, especially) remained more or less peripheral to the discourse of Anglo-India" (13).

Without the labour of the native servants, the English women in India could not have managed their household. The Anglo-Indian home is the site where these English women encountered the native servants and gained the status of a national subject oft denied within Britain's boundaries. Here, the English women-subservient to the English men- subordinated the native servants who were largely male. She considered these effeminate male servants to be her children who have to be subordinated and domesticated. In the first chapter titled 'The Duties of the Mistress' in *The Indian Housekeeper and the Cook*, Steel advises the Englishwomen to treat them as a child. She wrote thus:

The Indian servant is a child in everything save age, and should be treated as a child; that is to say, kindly, but with the greatest firmness. The laws of the household should be those of the Medes and Persians, and first faults should never go unpunished. By overlooking a first and first faults should never go unpunished. By overlooking a first offence, we lost the only opportunity we have of preventing it becoming a habit. (Steel 12)

Even Chota Mem suggests the same in *The English Bride in India* thus: "Be patient with your servants and treat them more or less like children, remembering they love praise, and don't treat them as if they were machines" (55). Though many advice manuals represent the native servants as untrustworthy and unreliable, An Anglo-Indian in *Indian Outfits* provides a different view where the narrative suggests that a sympathetic treatment of native servants will help them immensely in the household management rather than being rude to them. It will be useful to look at the narrative here:

I answer, much, Indian servants are like English servants. If they are made happy and comfortable, they will be faithful, and often attach themselves to you surprisingly. If they are treated like dogs, cuffed here and kicked there, very naturally they will render you grudging service, will lie, cheat, steal, and circumvent, and think it fair play. (An Anglo-Indian 46)

Even E.C.P. Hull's narrative advises against 'too much harshness and severity' and adds that this advice is applicable to servants of all nations. By showering kindness and by treating them like a child, the Indian servants' obedience and subjugation are ensured. Further, there is no obvious threat to the honour of the English women staying in India. Steel's narrative suggests that *buksheesh* could be given to reward their good service and she refers to the administration of castor oil by

memsahibs who believe 'there must be some physical cause for their inability to learn or to remember' (13). Most importantly, all these narratives concerning the native servants hint at the judicious management of them upon which the "politically correct Memsahib" identity is dependent. Anglo-Indian advice manuals like Steel's advises these women to focus on taking care of their husband and children indicating that the feminine roles should not be given up for the want of amusements in the colonial environment. Insisting on the rearing of children by young mothers in the chapter titled 'Hints on Management of Young Children', she writes thus:

Nature can supply the demand, and the nursing mother retains her usual occupations and amusements in moderation, and enjoy cheerful society and ordinary wholesome food, though stimulants had best be given up. She must not let herself be worried nor imposed upon by the ayah, who, whenever she wants to run and have a smoke, will tell her that the child is hungry. ...during which the mother can fulfil her outdoor social engagements, and longer than which no woman who loved her home, husband and child would care to be away. (Steel 160)

Steel seems to hint that a woman who loves her family will not spend much time in outdoor activities. Thus, by indicating their gender role in the colonial domesticity and restricting their mobility outside the Anglo-Indian home, the Anglo-Indian women were expected to confine themselves within the domestic boundaries. Many narratives suggest that children must be kept under their supervision as dirt and cultural practices may pose threats to the young children's body and mind. The oft-repeated perception is that the proximity of the native servants leads them to pick up the ways of 'the lowest class of natives'. Referring to the accent of the Anglo-Indian children, E.C.P. Hull warns against the learning of the native accent thus:

The nasal twang and shrill unmusical tone of voice so generally found in native women of the lower orders, give a most unpleasing peculiarity of tone and pronunciation, often noticed in Anglo-Indian children, and one which may, if care is not taken, cling to them through life. (Hull 141)

Many advice manuals such as Hull's caution the Anglo-Indian community against the native language learning by the Anglo-Indian children. They had the imperial duty of motivating their children to perform their racial superiority linguistically. So, they insisted their children to speak English. Many Anglo-Indian women writers like Steel gave a personal touch to their advice manuals. Besides providing suggestions on food for infants, she says that the author herself has given bath to her child. Insisting that the young mother should take care of the infant herself in the first year without relying on the native servants, in an authoritative tone, she says: The mother should bathe her infant herself the first year.... The present writer bathes her own infants when fifteen days old, the tub being placed on her bed and the clothes all laid ready...(Steel 163). By indicating that she took care of

her infant herself, Steel not only sets an example but also adds credibility to her advice manual. E.C.P. Hull's narrative suggests that the Anglo-Indian children must be removed from India "before the evil influences of native servants have had time to produce an ineradicable impression on the young mind" (345). Suffering the separation from their children stoically was the major component of the "politically correct Memsahib" ideal. Nupur Chaudhuri rightly points out that the Anglo-Indian women 'merely exchanged the restrictions of Victorian society for those of the colonial world' (519).

Conclusion

Locating the relevance of Butler's theory of performativity, in this essay, I examined the select Anglo-Indian advice manuals written after the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and during the 'high imperialism' period of the British Raj and proposed that this cultural artefact served the purpose of constructing and naturalizing the English Memsahibs' gendered racial identity. I argued that by reiterating the performance of gender, class and race imperatives to construct a unique identity prerequisite for the Anglo-Indian community as well as the Indian colony, these texts aimed at the crystallization of this identity that strengthened the idea of the British Raj. Such reiteration- apart from revealing the imperial anxiety over the subversion of the "politically correct Memsahib" identity- was useful to caution the Englishwomen new to the colonial environment. What the essay further demonstrated is that the performance of gendered-racial identity of the English women in India constituted not only the governance of their bodies, spaces, the Anglo-Indian household, but also material consumption including food.

Notes

¹ Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India*_(Oxford: Oxford University Press)6.

² Alison Blunt, "Imperial Geographies of Home: British Domesticity in India, 1886-1925," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24.4 (1999) :423.

³ The term 'memsahib' originates from 'madam sahib'. Alison Blunt states that the middle class women who read household guides were known as memsahibs and they were predominantly wives of army officers and civil servants.

⁴ Swati Chattopadhyay, "'Goods, Chattels and Sundry Items': Constructing 19th-Century Anglo-Indian Domestic Life," *Journal of Material Culture* 7.3(2002): 243-271, see E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c.1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001) :100.

⁵ Marion Hastings is the wife of Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of Bengal.

⁶ Indrani Sen, *Woman and Empire: Representations in the Writings of British India (1858-1900)* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2008)16.

⁷ Lynne Segal and Peter Osborne, "Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler," *Radical Philosophy: A Journal of Socialist and Feminist Philosophy* 67 (Summer):32-9.

⁸ Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville, ed., "Judith Butler- In Theory," *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006):4.

⁹ Utilitarianism and Evangelicalism played an important role in defining British attitudes towards India during the early nineteenth century. See Udayon Misra, *The Raj in Fiction: A Study of Nineteenth-Century British Attitudes Towards India* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1987):34, Michael Mann, "Torchbearers Upon the Path of Progress': Britain's Ideology of a 'Moral and Material Progress' in India," *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*, ed., Harald Fischer-Tine and Michael Mann (London: Wimbledon Publishing Company, 2004):1-26.

¹⁰ Alice Perrin is one of the popular Anglo-Indian women writers.

¹¹ Procida states that Steel and Gardiner highlighted the division of duties by including a separate chapter entitled "Advice to the Cook," in which they addressed the(implicitly male and Indian) cook directly, while the remainder of the text was clearly intended for the Anglo-Indian woman in her supervisory capacity. See Mary Procida, "Feeding the Imperial Appetite: Imperial Knowledge and Anglo-Indian Domesticity," *Journal of Women's History* 15.2(2003):133.

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