

BRITISH WOMEN TRAVELERS IN OTTOMAN TERRITORIES DURING THE 19th CENTURY

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The works of the women travelers wandering on the Ottoman territories in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are important not only because they possess a literary merit but also because they contributed a lot to the knowledge concerning Turkish culture and folklore. These women travelers though not as famous as their predecessor Lady Montagu still reveal significant clues in regard to Turkish lifestyles of the times in their works. Among these travelers are namely Lady Hornby, Mrs. Harvey, Dorina Neave, Lucy Garnett, Mrs. W.M. Ramsay, and Mrs. Max Müller.

All of these travelers were very successful in getting into contact and becoming acquainted with people from all levels of society. Among them only Mrs. Ramsay, accompanied by her husband Mr. Ramsay, a professor from University of Aberdeen, toured in Anatolia. Her delight in these tours are apparent in the following lines from her book *Everyday Life in Turkey* (London 1897):

“... the great charm of Turkish travel is that romantic and quaint experiences come almost daily to those who look for them.”

In almost every work of travel literature significant cities like Istanbul, Izmir, Mersin, Salonica were almost always mentioned. However, Mrs. Ramsay preferred to travel in Anatolia claiming that such big and popular cities were under the continuous influence of Western civilization:

“... My intention is to tell about the people of the inner country — the dwellers in villages or in the inland cities.”¹

It might be, to some extent, erroneous to assert these women as ‘travelers’; however, their works are undoubtedly classified as travel works. They were invariably concerned with Turkish culture; however, their focus of attention was on Turkish women and consequently the Harem.

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¹ Mrs. W.M. Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, London 1897, p.1.

All of them knew “full well that the town is really enjoyable until all the wonders of it have been visited”² for that matter they tried their best to observe as much as possible the setting they were in. When describing the beauty of Turkish women, Lady Hornby could not help saying she was “a striking picture of the East.” She was obviously willing to help with the emancipation of the Turkish women. Her intentions could be observed from the lines that read “I would help them with all my heart.”

Lady Hornby was of the opinion that Turkish women were very clever and she felt very sorry for the situation the Turkish women were in because of their ignorance: “Pretty, gentle, and intelligent as they generally are, their ignorance would be in the highest degree ludicrous, were it not so lamentable.”

Although the general consensus in Europe was on Turkish women’s being treated as slaves by men, there were some who did not share this view. For instance, Mrs. Ramsay puts her feelings in this regard into words in her work *Everyday Life in Turkey* (1897):

“There is a pretty general belief in this country (England) that the Turkish wives are the abject slaves of their husbands, and the Turkish husband is a sort of Bluebeard in real life. It seems to me that this state of affairs is not nearly so common as outsiders suppose. It is true that, legally, the Mohammedan wife is her husband’s chattel, to do with as seems to him good.”

She could not help but comparing British men to Turkish men after showing them thus, and even accuses the British men of being ruder:

“Cases of brutality on the parts of a man towards his wife are a hundred times commoner among the lower classes of this country (England) than they are in Turkey. I once, but only once, saw such a case during my travels in Turkey, in the country.”

Dorina Neave, however, did not share the same feelings as Mrs. Ramsay, and considered the Ottomans as having deprived their women of all rights whatsoever. She also criticized the Turkish women for staring with questioning eyes at any stranger that they came across. Mrs. Harvey, on the other hand, shows Turkish women as kind, modest, and loving creatures in her work *Turkish Women and Circassian Homes* (1871):

² Mrs. Harvey, *Turkish Harem and Circassian Homes*, London 1871, p. 30.

“It would be difficult to find people more kind hearted, more simple mannered, or more sweettempered than the Turkish women. ... The greatest charm of the Turkish ladies consists in the perfect simplicity of their manners, and in the total absence of all pretence.”

Lucy Garnett was in favor of classifying Turkish women as Sultanas, “cariye”s, “gözde”s, and slaves. She almost always escaped from making a visit to the Harem and explained her attitude in *The Women of Turkey and their Folklore* (1891):

“A visit to a harem was said to be a desirable conclusion to our sojourn in the East, but I, for one, declined to enter such a place of degradation. Were it possible by such a visit to help our poor sisters out of their slavery, I should have been only too thankful to make it, but to visit and see them penned up in their detestable prison was a great deal more than any Christian woman ought to bear.”

Lady Craven who was in Istanbul almost a century before Lucy Garnett mentioned the Turkish women in her work *A Journey Through the Crimea to Constantinople* :

“I think I never saw a country where women may enjoy so much liberty, and be free from all reproach, as in Turkey.
...”

By thus saying she actually refutes Lucy Garnett’s writings. Though Miss Garnett was against the concept of the ‘Harem’, she attributed this to the Turkish women’s love of seclusion and security:

“The seclusion of Moslem women ... is ... the outcome of the great respect and regard entertained for them by the men of their own nation. ... the veil and cloak of a Turkish women render her perfectly safe from insult or molestation, whether on foot in the streets, in train or tram, or on the deck of a Bosphorus steamer. ...”³

Mrs. Ramsay was also fascinated by this love of seclusion of the Turkish women; however, she pointed out in her work that this was not the case throughout the entire country:

“(In Afyon Karahisar) the Christian women are as closely veiled as the Turkish, and their life is, ... almost as secluded,

³ Lucy Garnett, *Women of Turkey and their Folklore*, pp. 444-445.

... (at Kula) none of the women are veiled. ... How pretty the women and girls were!"⁴

Marriage was another common subject dwelt on by these travelers. If we bear in mind the mentality prevalent in the 18th and 19th centuries, we could see that there was truth behind what these travelers were writing: Mrs. Harvey and Lucy Garnett both accepted marriage in a Turkish community more as a civil act than a religious one.

Lucy Garnett, in her work *Women of Turkey and their Folklore* wrote the following on this subject:

"According to the law of Islâm, marriage is not a religious but a civil act. Imam is invited as a matter of courtesy, the validity of the contract consisted in its being attested by at least two witnesses. ... The couples do not see or hold any communication with each other until the conclusion of dugh-un, or week of festivities, which may not take place for some months. ..."⁵

In addition to her concept of marriage ceremonies, she also added the fact that the couple never saw each other before the night of the wedding. Though Garnett never uttered a word on how divorce procedures were carried out, Mrs. Harvey in *Turkish Harem and Circassian Homes* mentions both marriage and divorce in Turkish communities:

"Marriage in Turkey is not a religious ceremony: it is merely a civil covenant that can be annulled for very trivial reasons by either party. Public opinion, however, pronounces such separations disgraceful, and they are seldom resorted to unless for grave reasons."

The economic conditions were getting worse toward the end of the 19th century, and this resulted in a change in marriage systems. Polygamous marriages were no longer practised but monogamous ones were preferred. Mrs. Max Müller was in Istanbul during such a period and quotes the tellings of the Ottoman women who she met at the time —by the way, it should be kept in mind that these Turkish women were well-educated, well-oriented in Western thoughts:

"... we are happier than you, for our husbands may fancy one of our slaves whom we know, but your husbands go about with French actresses whom you don't know."⁶

⁴ Mrs. Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 1897, pp. 38-39.

⁵ Lucy Garnett, *Women of Turkey and their Folklore*, 1891, p. 482.

⁶ Mrs. Max Müller, *Letters from Constantinople*, 1897, p. 176.

Mrs. Ramsay also mentioned that polygamy was not practised everywhere, and if a man happened to marry a rich girl, he was made sure that he would never take another wife:

“Polygamy is far from being the rule among ordinary people, and among the poorer classes practically does not exist. It requires some means to comply with the custom of giving each wife her own private apartment, etc., and only the wealthy can afford such a large establishment.”⁷

The same topic could be seen in Mrs. Harvey’s *Turkish Harems and Circassian Homes*:

“... where a daughter is richly dowered, the father usually stipulates that no other wife shall be taken.”

In the same work, Mrs. Harvey explains the reasons why the Ottoman Sultans practise polygamous marriage from her own standpoint:

“The Sultan’s rank is so elevated —his position is so far above that of every other mortal— that there is no women on earth sufficiently therefore, no legal wife. ... These ladies are not called Sultanas, for only the Princesses of the blood-royal enjoy that title, but the mother of the reigning sovereign is named Sultan Valide.”⁸

Though women seem to be left behind, there were times when the case was just the opposite:

“There are exceptional cases where the wife is the lord and master of her husband. Some great man, even the Sultan himself, I believe, may give his daughter or some lady of his family in marriage to an inferior —even to a slave. In such a case the lady seems to retain her superior position, and treats her husband no more as her equal —much less her superior— than before her marriage.”⁹

Although contrary opinions could be held, the relationship between spouses was perfect enough to set an example to their counterparts in Europe. This cordial and honest relationship drew the attention of these women travelers. Mrs. Ramsay mostly examined the life of the Anatolian women, and wrote that there were many things that the Europeans knew nothing of, like the privileges and rights accorded by the spouses to their

⁷ Mrs. Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 1897, p. 107.

⁸ Mrs. Harvey, *Turkish Harem and Circassian Homes*, 1871, p. 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

wives. This lack of knowledge led, she wrote, to misevaluations, misjudgments:

“... The wife is mistress of her own domain. She manages the household and children; ...”¹⁰

Turkish women usually spent their days by themselves away from the grandeur of the big cities. Their main concern was, Mrs. Harvey wrote:

“... the care of her children, in eating, in the gossip at the bath, and in the weekly drive to the valley of the Sweet Waters.”¹¹

She showed how concerned Turkish women were about their offspring: “Their tenderness is unequalled, but their fault here is over-indulgence of the children, who until ten or twelve years of age, are permitted to do everything they like.”

The same situation must have attracted Mrs. Ramsay as well, for she wrote, “The Turks are fond of their children, and pet them a great deal, and are just as ‘injudicious’ in managing them as the ordinary parent elsewhere.” Not only the mothers were full of love and emotion toward the children, but fathers, Mrs. Ramsay pointed out, equally loved their children, and Ramsay wanted this situation in Turkey to set an example to the British fathers:

“... when the children are old enough to eat, and begin to talk and walk, the otherwise merely ornamental father may frequently be seen acting the part of the nursemaid. He seems to lend himself readily to his occupation, which is probably more of an amusement than a task, and his devotion to his little charge is sometimes almost pathetic.”¹²

Women were aware of the worth of their husbands and this led to more love and respect among family members. Turkish women never left their house prior to their husbands’ consent, and always made it sure to get back before their husbands’ return. Lucy Garnett was fascinated by such an attitude:

“A Turkish wife, whatever her rank, is always at home at sunset to receive her husband, and to present him with his

¹⁰ Mrs. Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, p. 105.

¹¹ Mrs. Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 1897, p. 11.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 123.

pipe and slippers when, his daily work over, he comes to enjoy the repose of his harem."¹³

Women always took the utmost care to manage anything related directly to their husbands, or watched closely the tasks carried out by servants:

"In most households the wife superintends her husband's dinner, and has the entire control over all domestic affairs."¹⁴

Though Lucy Garnett was at times in conflict with what Mrs. Harvey was saying about the Turkish women, in this regard she shares Harvey's opinion:

"Osmanli *Hanum* is an early riser, she prepares her husband's breakfast, attends the cooking done in the kitchen; she herself washes her husband's clothes because she believes in the power of lovespells and potions."¹⁵

Mrs. Max Müller found the life of the Turkish women rather monotonous. She said, "We (Europeans) can hardly realize the full monotony of a Turkish Lady's life," in her book *Letters from Constantinople* (1897) and continued as follows:

"Every woman, rich or poor, with the least regard to her character must be in her house by sundown. Only think of the long, dull winter afternoons and evenings when no friend can come near them as all their female friends must be in their own houses. ... Even the men of their family associate but little with them."¹⁶

Mrs. Max Müller advises everybody not to return to their own countries without visiting the Harem. The reason for this urge on her part stems from the fact that Turkish women carried out all their activities inside the Harem. Contrary to Miss Garnett and Mrs. Harvey's opinions about Turkish women, Mrs. Max Müller claimed that Turkish women never left the harem, and led a rather secluded life. For that matter, they spent their time as described in the following quotation:

"... they have all the more leisure for intrigue and scheming, and it must be remembered that all marriages are arranged exclusively by the female relations on both sides."¹⁷

¹³ Mrs. Harvey, *Turkish Harem and Circassian Homes*, p. 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵ Lucy Garnett, *Women of Turkey and their Folklore*, 1891, p. 453.

¹⁶ Mrs. Max Müller, *Letters from Constantinople*, p. 186.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

However, she denied the fact that there were some very clever and wise Turkish women besides those who spent their time dressing up in a fancy manner, and consuming confectionary:

“(There) are women of keen intelligence, able to manage their husband’s properties, and it is well-known that the Valideh Sultans, or mothers of the Sultans have often exercised immense influence in state affairs.”¹⁸

Ramsay and Garnett also focused on marriage customs and gave examples in addition to their observations on women in general, and in family life:

“Early marriages are encouraged. *Görücüs* go and see the bride. Presents are exchanged. Bridegroom’s mother brings the bride some yards of red silk and some sugar plums. Half a sugar plum which has been bitten by the maiden is given back to the bride-groom’s mother who carries it back to her son as a first love-token. ... Eight days after the betrothal marriage takes place. Expenses of the *Dughun* are covered by the bride-groom.”

These lines quoted from Lucy Garnett’s book tend to give some information on marriage customs; however, it would be quite wise to look at the same subject from Mrs. Ramsay’s viewpoint. These customs actually differed from region to region, and from family to family; however, they had one thing in common, and that was the entertainments were held at both the bride’s and groom’s houses separately. These entertainments at times lasted for days. Mrs. Ramsay personally witnessed these entertainments at the groom’s house. She also observed how the belongings of the bride and later the bride herself arrived at groom’s house on horse or camel back. The bride and groom would wait together for the departure of the guests, and then the bride would wait for the compliments of the groom though these may not be as charming as those in the *‘Thousand and One Nights’ Tales* :

“... the bride-groom is received by the bride with absolute silence —she having been well drilled as to her behavior by her mother and the older women. Her lord, who is not supposed to have seen her before, is no doubt overwhelmed by her beauty and a sense of his own good fortune. ... The

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

bride remains mute, and then he hands her a piece of money. Everytime he addresses her and she makes no reply, he hands her another piece of money. He tries by all the arts ... and by asking her amusing questions to make her speak or laugh. ... She must resist his blandishments to the last possible moment. If she makes the slightest sound ... the contest is at an end. ...”¹⁹

Turkish women were very fond of being out in the open air and wandering over the green pastures. Lamartine expressed this characteristic of the Turkish women using these words:

“The predominating instinct for the Osmanlis is the instinct for splendid sites, shining seas, leafy shades, cool fountains, and wide horizons framed by snowy mountain Summits.”²⁰

Their love of nature and wonderful scenery caused them to have their houses built in scenic areas. However, the muddy or dusty alleys between the houses simply sets a contrast. Though not all houses had yards, there was always an accacia or a berry bush in the courtyard giving them shelter from the sun. Women benefited from these beauties to the utmost; because :

“The Osmanli women are passionately fond of the open air, and the number of charming resorts within easy reach of the capital ... offer every facility for the indulgence of this taste. Nearly every provincial city and town possesses in its vicinity a choice of delightful situations, where the eye can drink its fill of beauty from verdant earth, azure sky, and sunlit sea. ...”²¹

Mrs. Max Müller mentioned that Turkish women were never seen talking to their husbands in the house let alone in the streets. However, Mrs. Ramsay wrote in *Everyday Life in Turkey* that family life in Anatolia was highly different compared to that in Istanbul:

“... the men drew a bag —from his sash and proudly emptied its contents into the lap of his wife. It was the proceeds of the business he had done that day— a considerable number of medjidie. ...

“When we had talked for a few minutes the old man ... pro-

¹⁹ Mrs. Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, pp. 117-118.

²⁰ Lucy Garnett, *The Women of Turkey and their Folklore*, p. 418.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

ceeded to make coffee ... when the coffee was ready, he presented one cup to me on a little brass tray, and took the other himself. As soon as he had drunk it, however, he prepared a second supply for his wife and daughter.”²²

Ramsay also wrote in the same book that it was not possible and to certain extent wrong to simply look into the life of Turkish women in the Harem in Istanbul. A survey without a mention of the Anatolian women would be incomplete, she thought:

“... in the shelter of the harem, surrounded by all the luxuries of oriental life and exposed to none of the hardships, the women preserve their good looks quite as long as European women do; it is the poor peasant woman, working like an ox, badly fed, exposed to all the hardships of endless toil and poverty, who grows old and ugly before her time. ... Many women in comfortable circumstances become lazy, after a certain age, regardless of their looks and dress, and care for only good living and ease, in which case they usually grow enormously fat, and a Turkish lady of this latter sort is an impressive sight.”²³

Another point that attracted the Europeans but which they found rather hard to grasp was the attitude of the Turkish men toward women. No matter how much Dorina Neave accuses Turkish men of being hard and cruel toward women in her book *Life in Constantinople* (1878), Mrs. Müller found Turkish men very polite:

“The highest mark of respect is to turn your back on a lady, and this is *de rigueur* when any member of the Imperial Harem passes.”²⁴

She also noticed during her travels with her husband that she seemed to be the focus of attention and not her husband:

“I flatter myself that even to the men. I was often an object of greater interest than my husband; and sometimes, after a minute or two, one man after another —always the young ones, for the elders would on no account have shown such reprehensible want of manly dignity— would slink round the corner and join our party. Sometimes, for fun, I would pre-

²² Mrs. Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, p. 59.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

²⁴ Mrs. Max Müller, *Letters from Constantinople*, p. 86.

tend to be shocked at their presence, and desire the women to send them away.”²⁵

This close interest in her sometimes frustrated her, though. In Istanbul no man could ever approach his wife nor a woman—even if she is his relation or friend—and speak to her. In Anatolia, however, the situation was not so. In Istanbul, when a woman related to the court passed by in a carriage all men around had to hide themselves or turn their back till she completely disappeared out of sight. In Anatolia, on the other hand, women acted like the men did in Istanbul:

“In districts where veiling is the custom, the attitude of the women towards strangers is sometimes extremely comic. If you are a man, and meet a number of them coming along a road, they immediately stop and turn their back to you, to wait till you pass. If there is a wall or a hedge, they will stand with their faces close against that; if there isn’t, they will sit down in a row in the dust of the road with their back toward you, and no amount of polite entreaty would induce them to budge or take the slightest notice of you.”²⁶

European women were really amazed at how Turkish women took utmost care of their clothing that they even wore in the house. These travelers could not help but saying that the veil suited no other women as much as it did the Turkish women, and they were charmed by the way they wore it. However, they found the loose cloak “feradje” which the Turkish women wore when going out, very ugly and funny looking:

“A large cloak called a ‘feradje’ is thrown over the indoor dress, and this is so long that it has to be gathered up in front when the wearer walks, thus giving her the appearance of a moving bag or bundle. The huge, unshapely yellow boots also give a very ungainly appearance. Love of the fashionable ladies, however, are discarding those ugly overalls, and are adopting French boots without heels.”²⁷

Turkish women used to wear wonderful clothing under those ugly and funny looking cloaks and their houses were somewhat like that, too. When looked from the exterior, there was nothing special about them but once inside, one just could not help being fascinated:

²⁵ Mrs. Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, p. 59.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

²⁷ Mrs. Harvey, *Turkish Harem and Circassian Homes*, p. 33.

“... Large rooms all covered with a rich gold covered matting, and with crimson divans at either end. No other furniture, except an occasional cabinet, filled with grotesque china, ... The ceilings were all carved and painted ... richly. ...”²⁸

The mansions of the rich in Istanbul led the travelers into a dream world; however, the houses in Anatolia were incomparable to those in Istanbul:

“... Such things as washstands are unknown, and even chairs are few and far between. The rooms are usually fitted with divans, which are cushioned and often upholstered in rich material. The floors are spread with soft rich carpets. Carved wooden cupboards, or shelves let into the wonders of the walls, hold the various household utensils, lamps, coffee-cups, candle-sticks, etc. ...”²⁹

Turkish hospitality was a common theme in all the works of these travelers. The interior of the house was organized in a manner to enable guests to come, as it could quite easily be converted to a bedroom:

“Hospitality is almost a religious duty amongst the Turks, and every room is surrounded by cupboards, in which are stored away vast numbers of mattresses and pillows, ready for any chance guest who may arrive. ... the beds are made upon the floor, and besides the mattresses and pillows, have cambric or fine linen sheets and a silk coverlet. ...”³⁰

The general consensus at the time was that just as it was impossible to write about the Harem without seeing it, so was it not possible to talk about the East without seeing it. The six women travelers discussed in this paper shared this generally accepted opinion. These writers, closely concerned with the Turkish customs and traditions, tried their best to jot down almost everything they assumed to be of interest for their own readers, and for themselves.

It is possible to find passages about the open market places, and porters of the time in the accounts of such travelers as Harvey, Hornby and Ramsay. Mrs. Ramsay observed the open market places in Afyonkarahisar and described them to the minutest detail by saying, “business is confined

²⁸ Lady Hornby, *Constantinople During the Crimean War*, p. 238.

²⁹ Mrs. Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, p. 57.

³⁰ Mrs. Harvey, *Turkish Harem and Circassian Homes*, p. 8.

to the bazaars, where each trade has its own street or location, presenting a lively scene." Likewise, Mrs. Harvey and Mrs. Hornby expressed what they felt upon seeing the strength and endurance of the porters. While Mrs. Hornby described the porters "(as people) whose backs were bowed almost to a crescent by constantly carrying heavy loads," Mrs. Harvey could not help comparing the Turkish porters to British laborers:

"These poor fellows notwithstanding their galling toil, are a merry contented race of people. From dawn to sunset they work like beasts of burden, and are satisfied with food that would kill an English workman in a week. ... The repast, slight as it was, was eaten with a cheerfulness and satisfaction that might have been envied by many a gourmand.

"At sunset, they feel themselves amply repaid for the fatigues of the day if they can but gain enough to indulge in an infinite number of cups of the strongest coffee, which, with the soothing pipe, gives them strength to sustain their prodigious toil."³¹

All these travelers were of the opinion that it was impossible to buy anything —whether it be in market places or in stores— without bargaining:

"... the immense amount of bargaining that is required before any purchase can be effected is very amusing ... if anything of importance has to be bought, many hours, sometimes many days elapse between the opening of the business and its conclusion ... an utmost amount of falsehood is told (by both parties) that ought to lie heavily on the consciences of all; but 'do in Turkey as the Turks do' is a maxim which all appear to accept, and so no one dreams of speaking the truth in a Constantinople bazaar."³²

It was customary to offer and even the hubble bubble to a customer to relax him even if there were no bargaining: "If he saw the customer hesitating, his assiduity increased, and he would call to someone to order coffee." It is possible to witness the same situation in Mrs. Harvey's remarks: "When the struggle is at its height, coffee is brought, which materially recruits the strength of all concerned, and should the affair be very important, a friendly pipe is smoked."³³

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

³³ Mrs. Harvey, *Turkish Harem and Circassian Homes*, p. 8.

As eating habits make up a rather significant part of the customs and traditions of a nation, Garnett, Hornby and Harvey must have considered them rather interesting and without any hesitancy wrote down their observations:

“Food is had on a table eight inches above the floor and everybody eats out of the same plate. Spoons are for soups and hoshaf. Even pilaf is eaten by hands. Dipping the spoon first into the bowl is according to the rank of the guests.”³⁴

What Mrs. Harvey witnessed was quite strange to foreigners, and some of these were required by ethical codes:

“... a tray on which were a bowl containing a compote of white grapes, another full of gold spoons, several glasses of iced water, etc.

“Etiquette requires that a spoonful of the sweetmeat should be eaten, and the spoon then placed in the left-hand bowl. Some iced water is drunk, and then the tips of the fingers only should be delicately wiped with an embroidered napkin presented for the purpose.”

Mrs. Harvey also added it was essential and a must to obey these rules completely, otherwise it was possible to encounter quite embarrassing situations. This instance helped her to remember Scott's *Ivanhoe*:

“... Cedric, the Saxon is described as having been despised by the Norman courtiers, because he wiped his hands with the napkin instead of drying them in courtly fashion by waving them in the air; so likewise does a lady lose castle forever in a Turkish harem should she rub her hands with the napkin instead of daintily passing them over the tips of her fingers.”³⁵

On the other hand, Mrs. Hornby who felt as if she were going through a scene in the Arabian Nights upon every sight that she witnessed or event that she lived, said this wonderful image was shattered and no more magical when she observed the eating habits of the Turkish people:

“I was curious to see if they really seemed to like the modern innovation of knives and forks. For the first few minutes they used them, —... but ... failing to secure the particular

³⁴ Lucy Garnett, *Women of Turkey and their Folklore*, p. 460.

³⁵ Mrs. Harvey, *Turkish Harem and Circassian Homes*, pp. 60-61.

piece of chicken ... with a troublesome fork and spoon, threw these incompetent auxiliaries down, and grubbed successfully, and to her entire satisfaction, with her fingers ... to see her lick her fingers up to the last joint after each dish—, to see her lick her favorite tortoise shell spoon bright— we were perfectly disenchanted long before the feast was over ... we began to feel rather sick ... (when) the animal passions of some of the ladies began to be roused by their favorite sweets which they tore to pieces with their fingers, and threw down their throats in large lumps. ...”³⁶

Mrs. Harvey who believed it was impossible to learn about the East without seeing the East claimed that there was something all travelers to this part of the world should bear in mind:

“Whatever degree of intimacy may he attained, it is rare that foreigners obtain a knowledge of more than the surface of Turkish life and manners. Strangers, therefore, should speak with much caution and reserve. ...”³⁷

Sometimes because of forgetting this fact, and at times because of making false judgments due to former biases and prejudices, there are certainly some differences, especially in evaluations, in the travel works. Though these women travelers do at times express different opinions on certain subjects, there are surely cases in which they share common ideas. One of such subjects was the education of women, and the positive and negative aspects of the European influence on this matter.

Some travelers were of the opinion that imitating the West or rather Europe had no positive aspect to it but negative ones like the disappearance of local customs and traditions. Dorina Neave was the first among such travelers. Though not as pessimistic as Dorina Neave, Lucy Garnett also regretted the fact that Ottoman culture was gradually but surely disappearing:

“The culture of the Ottomans of the present day has entirely lost the distinctive character which it possessed in the balmy days of the Empire and become a mere imitation of that of the West; their methods of education have also changed, and

³⁶ Lady Hornby, *Constantinople During the Crimean War*, pp. 252-253.

³⁷ Mrs. Harvey, *Turkish Harem and Circassian Homes*, p. 13.

the schools and colleges of the modern era, for boys at least, are organized more or less, on European models. ...”³⁸

During her travels Mrs. Harvey came across a man who, though completely a stranger to the British, adored them. This man criticized severely his country, fellow men, the Sultan, the management of his country, and religion before the foreigners, and regretted that he was not born a British man. According to Mrs. Harvey such a man was of no use to his country:

“She (the wife) still wears that rag, that symbol of slavery, the yashmak, which I long to see torn from the faces of our women.”

These words uttered by this man just prove to Mrs. Harvey that he was trying to show himself as an important person but in fact he was just degrading himself before her eyes.

Mrs. Harvey really and wholeheartedly felt sorry for the Turkish people being left under the influence of Western culture and civilization to this extent. She interprets the attitudes and behaviour of this so-called modern Turk as follows:

“I did not at all like (our modern Turk) or credit him. He had a sharp, insincere face, and a restless manner, so different from the few I have seen of the fine, dignified Turkish gentlemen of the old school of Eastern manners. ...”

Like Harvey, Lucy Garnett compared the former and present Turkish way of life and the people. She concluded that this imitation led the Turks to fall into a rather comic situation:

“... Orientals seem to lose all sense of congruity, as regards both color, and material, when once they attempt to substitute foreign surroundings for those to which their race has always been accustomed; and the result of the recent abandonment by Turkish ladies of their national garb for imitations of Western finery is for the most part ludicrous and lamentable.”³⁹

On the other hand, when one looks at Mrs. Max Müller’s *Letters from Constantinople*, one can see she had some positive views in regard to this Western influence:

³⁸ Lucy Garnett, *Women of Turkey and their Folklore*, p. 467.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

“Let us hope that with the increase of intercourse between Europeans and Turks, the life of the women must change, and that as the men have dropped their oriental garb the women will in time part with the yashmak, and ferajeh, and that with them their isolated lives will cease. Young Turks who have been educated in Berlin, Paris and Vienna before they marry have been heard to declare that their wives shall be free, and yet when it comes to the point they have all yielded to the tyranny of custom.”⁴⁰

However, she was quite aware that under the strict and conservative reign of Abdulhamit II, such changes were just beyond question.

Undoubtedly, one of the major influences of the West was on educational institutions. Before the European school system was established, co-education was nothing but a dream, in big cities, of course. They could learn the Sacred Book the Quran only in parish schools before they reached the age of 12 or 13. Though new schools were founded toward the end of the 19th century, girls could not receive any other education beyond that age. Mrs. Max Müller explains the reason for this as follows:

“The young girls in Turkey are all being educated, the Sultan having established excellent schools where the girls go till the age of twelve or so, when they ‘put on the yashmak’ and disappear. Up to that age, they may be seen sitting with their fathers in public places of an afternoon, and going to and from school of a morning, attended, if of the higher class, by the usual ludicrous black attendants.”⁴¹

Lady Hornby was of the opinion that if Turkish women were educated, the rate of death among babies would decrease and the boys would be better educated for their prospective governmental duties. She really worked hard on this subject, and tried translating works from English to Turkish. She devoted some pages of her work *Constantinople During the Crimean War* (1863) to this matter:

“The boys are brought up in the Harems, lounging with the women on divans, until fourteen or fifteen: it is easy, therefore, to see the vast importance of teaching mothers how to rear fine and healthy sons, to take the place of the present

⁴⁰ Mrs. Max Müller, *Letters from Constantinople*, pp. 185-186.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

miserably emaciated, listless race of Constantinopolitians.”⁴²

Hornby was in favor of the women and even compared them to the men finding the women superior:

“I am assured that the women of this country are far before the men in intelligence, far less prejudiced, and far more willing to know and to adopt wiser and better ways.”⁴³

Mrs. Hornby couldn't stand the idea of Turkish women's being left ignorant, and tried her best to fill this gap. She believed that if mothers were educated then they would be better esteemed by their children especially their sons. She always imagined a Turkish mother busy reading books or teaching her children instead of talking or arguing with her maids.

It was an uncommon sight to see girls receiving education at schools; however, there were some girls of well-of families who had private tutoring at home:

“Osmanli maiden of high degree was taught to read and write her own language to compose verses, sing, dance and play upon the lute or guitar, and committed to memory chapters of the Quran, and passages from the poets.

“When a Turkish girl of rank had acquired the degree of knowledge considered necessary to her position, she was subjected to a public examination, which was attended with great festivities and display ... every question put by the examining hodjas having been readily and fully answered, and the recitations from the Koran and the poets have been given in the most approved style, she was pronounced by the presiding Hodja Kadın to have passed out of the grade of the jdahil, and attained that of kamil. ...”⁴⁴

The girls with rich families who had the opportunity to be educated at home also benefited from their families who were influenced greatly by Western culture:

“Nowadays, the education of girls belonging to wealthy families of the capital is almost entirely in the hands of foreign governesses, English, French and German, pianoforte playing,

⁴² Lady Hornby, *Constantinople During the Crimean War*, p. 396.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 467-469.

drawing, painting are the great desiderata of Osmanli mothers, for which the native language and literature are entirely neglected. ..."⁴⁵

Though she mentioned the rich in such a manner, she did not neglect relating the case with the children from middle class or low income families. They did sure enough receive education; however, it was altogether different from the above—mentioned examples:

"For girls of the middle classes there are day schools in the capital, and the larger provincial towns. One has developed into a training college for teachers but owing to the national prejudice in favor of early marriages, their numbers are as yet but small.

"... Little girls of poorer classes are sent to the Mahalle mektebs or parish schools, where they sit side by side with the boys. ..."⁴⁶

Both Lucy Garnett and Mrs. Müller were for women's receiving education and expressed this great desire of theirs in their works. However, they argued that this education should not completely be an imitation of the Western system of education but had to be a national one too, because, otherwise it would lead to chaos and end up having negative effects. Mrs. Müller wrote down in her book what steps should be taken in order to benefit correctly from such an education system:

"Till the happier days dawn when Turkish women can share the lives of their fathers and husbands, it seems to me that their better education only makes them restless and unhappy, and that those women are the best of who, like the women of the Sultan's Harem, have little interest beyond dress and sweetmeats, and remain children—and spoilt children—all their lives."⁴⁷

Lucy Garnett, on the other hand, feared that the customs and traditions of the Turkish people would not let Turkish women be like European women:

"I much doubt whether the present fashion for Western education will have any result beyond rendering irksome the re-

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 470 and 471.

⁴⁷ Mrs. Max Müller, *Letters from Constantinople*, p. 187.

straints imposed by Moslem religion and customs, and which no women can with impunity disregard.”⁴⁸

These travelers observed the Turks as very hospitable toward foreigners, ready to share and even give whatever they had. However, the folk beliefs and magical powers which they trusted in also attracted the attention of these travelers. It is possible to find such references in the works of Ramsay and Garnett.

Mrs. Ramsay claimed that not only the Moslems but the Christians and the Jews also believed in the evil eye. She expressed her feelings about the blue bead put on children against the evil eye in her book as quoted below:

“The power of the Blue bead, like the quality of mercy, is not strained. It is far reaching and universal, a very present safeguard against the power of the Evil Eye, which is the cause of most ills flesh is heir to in Turkey. The mothers have a very simple and easy plan for protecting their babies from accident, sickness, etc. It is to sew a few blue beads onto some part of the infant’s scanty clothing. Little shells also seem to have a similar effect, and although the child’s whole attire may consist of a single ragged jacket, or even of a tiny fez, it is invariably ornamented in this way.”⁴⁹

The Turkish people believed that the blue bead will protect especially small children from the evil eye. They also had some folk beliefs about certain animals. Some of these had religious importance, claimed Lucy Garnett. One such case was their belief in the stork’s being considered as a sacred creature:

“According to one of these (beliefs) a stork goes every autumn on a pilgrimage to the Holy Kabe at Mecca, and hence it is called by Moslems Haji Baba, when it returns women and children look anxiously to see what it bears in his back. If it happens to be a bit of glass, it is a sign that the year will be free from war, plague and famine, and that everyone will be happy; if a rag, that it will be a year of sickness; if an ear of corn, that cereals will be abundant. If

⁴⁸ Lucy Garnett, *Women of Turkey and their Folklore*, p. 469.

⁴⁹ Mrs. Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, pp. 60-61.

the stork arrives with his beak raised to the sky, it is a bad sign, for the Pilgrim Father is dissatisfied with man and will not deign to look at them; if, on the contrary, his beak is pointed earthwards, and towards the town, they say that he murmurs "Peace be with you!" and the pious Moslem reply, "On thee be peace! Welcome Father Pilgrim! Welcome!"⁵⁰

Occult science, a kind of hidden power, occupied a rather significant place in all cultures. Turkish people also believed that magic and charm occupied a special place in their daily lives. They used these powers to cure diseases of the body and the mind, to relieve people from the influence of evil powers, to foretell the future events awaiting people, to interpret dreams and even to bring back lost or stolen goods:

"... Whatever the success of these remedies may be in individual cases, nothing shakes the belief in them of the meek-minded. If they fail, it has been from a want of faith on the part of the recipient, so that by accusing their clients of neglecting to fulfill this condition the Dervishes are able to screen themselves from the reproaches their disappointed patients might feel disposed to utter against them ... if a speedy recovery is the result of his ministrations, his reward will be large in proportion. ..."

"The word used as counterspells and exorcism; are as a rule, taken from the two chapters of the Kur'an which relate to malevolence and witchcraft."⁵¹

Finally, it is possible to say that all these women travelers observed various aspects of Turkish cultural life, Turkish women, and wrote down their impressions as they travelled throughout the Ottoman territories. All these works are at times serious as a historical work, adventurous as a novel, requiring second thoughts as a sociological work, and at times comical as a satirical work of art. These works, in short, not only convey personal impressions but describe places visited as well.

⁵⁰ Lucy Garnett, *Women of Turkey and their Folklore*, pp. 507-508.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 509-510.

