

Chapter IV

EMILY EDEN'S MEMOIRS FROM A STRANGE LAND

Emily Eden's Up the Country is a remarkable literary landscape of sunny humour, wit, irony and repartee that adds a typically feminine perspective to the Indo-British encounter of the pre-mutiny era. It should be conceded at the outset that both the author and her work are equally charming and engaging. Miss Eden, by birth and upbringing, was a true whig and "she possessed all the prejudices of her class, the convinced belief that the few great families to whom she was drawn or related were a race apart and that every other family or class in the state belonged to a lower order of animal creation" (Gore VII). Her Indian connection began when her brother George was appointed Governor General of India. It was almost a family calamity to her and to Fanny, her younger sister. They were happy and contented managing the domestic affairs of their brother. The trio, all unmarried, had a limited world of their own and the ladies were afraid of breaking away from their familiar moorings to seek new experiences in the East. The Edens finally reached Calcutta on 3rd March, 1836, precisely on Miss Eden's thirty-ninth birthday. In October, 1837, Lord Auckland set out from Calcutta to visit the Northern Provinces. It turned out

to be a two and a half year odyssey, the longest any Governor General ever undertook. His entourage included an awesome twelve thousand persons, eight hundred and fifty camels, at least sixty horses and one hundred and forty elephants. With the Viceroy marched or rode his two sisters, Emily and Fanny. After reading Miss Eden's account of this journey a reviewer concluded that the elder of the two sisters, "if she was but half as charming in the flesh as she shows herself to be in her letters to her sisters she must have been a delightful companion on a pilgrimage" (The Times, 4th Dec, 1930). Indeed she was an excellent companion and guide to Lord Auckland not only during this journey but his entire career in India.

The experiences they shared during their momentous journey across north India constitute the main theme of Miss Eden's 'Up the Country'. For the two whig ladies the journey opened a window to a new and strange world. Janet Dunbar's biography of the Edens, 'The Golden Interlude' offers this summary of their manifold experiences of India :

To these two witty, highly cultivated women, it was like stepping into the Arabian Nights. Here was primitive India, a fabulous land of jewelled magnificence, where princes decked themselves with diamonds and caparisoned their horses with emeralds. They saw the Kohinoor on the arm of Ranjeet Singh, the lion of North; they sat in his glittering court and watched his amazons dance among such scenes as they had never

imagined could exist. They also found themselves in a barbaric world, where men killed their wives for a whim, where women sold their children for a handful of rice, where superstitious rites demanded human sacrifice at seed time (cover flap)

The brilliant colours of this splendour left many new comers especially women dazed and a large number of them were determined to have nothing to do with it. Ignorance or prejudice shut them off from the real India and in the course of time transformed them into typical memsahibs. Miss Eden had all their class characteristics and even some of the prejudices but she did not however fit into the mould of the typical memsahib handed down to us by Rudyard Kipling and Co; as "a frivolous, snobbish and selfish creature, who flitted from bridge to Tennis parties in the hills" (qtd. in Barr 1).

With her keen sensibility, aristocratic background and more than average education she did not fit the stereotype. She did not wish to conform to the Victorian ideal of respectable upper class lady who "too often had nothing in the world to do but to be paid for and approved by man and to realize the type of female perfection which the bread winner of the family expected to find in his wife and daughters" (Trevelyan 488). Basically it was a man's world and the woman had her assigned roles to play in a patriarchal set up; daughter, sister, mother; goddess, wife or whore. The Victorian "lady" was yet another transformation effected by

an affluent male-oriented society. This artificiality is well brought out by Toyne in 'An English Reader's History of England' :

The ladies were pretty in their bonnets and 'crinoline' skirts which were wide and padded and made of silk or satin. ... They carried sunshade called 'parasols' to protect their white skins from the summer sun. They wore little white gloves to protect their hands. But their greatest protection was marriage, and the safety of their solid homes. Girls were married as soon as possible, sometimes as young as seventeen. ... The only proper joy for a good woman, people thought, was the joy of marriage and having many children. The only real pleasure for her was to care for her husband and her home. The husband cared for his wife as though she were a child. (278)

Miss Eden naturally could not be tied down to this artificial society. She chose to remain single and thus rejected the Victorian woman's ideal of happiness. Failure in love, fear of childbirth, boredom of rearing children, whatever might have been her reason, she was prepared to face life alone. This in itself was against the norms of being a complete woman in those days.

Judging from the quick silver quality of her wit and humour and her joyful attitude to life, one is tempted to say that Miss Eden in her memoirs does not reveal any sign of the social oppression and psychological anxiety that feminist critics like Gilbert and Gubar ('The Mad Woman in the Attic') speak of with regard to the Victorian women.

Her novels Semi-attached Couple and Semi-detached House do reflect the feminine ethos since they are primarily located in her view of social life. Their author, however, keeps a non committal and ambivalent attitude. Similarly she seems to be unaware of the Victorian androcentric views regarding women's body and intelligence. She in fact went about with supreme self-confidence and more than average intelligence and wit. Again her innerlife was not crippled like that of the average Victorian female nor her social life monotonous. The aristocratic group she belonged to, namely, her sisters Fanny and Eleanor, her friends, Theresa Villiers and Pamela Fitzgerald, shared "the same kind of humour, a sense of the ridiculous, the same zest in the everyday happenings of life" (Dunbar 4). To the last Miss Eden remained a woman of taste and refinement; critical, well informed, a friend of the great men of her day such as Melbourne, Monkton and Milnes. Her taste was catholic extending all the way from women's fashions to art and literature. Even while in India she managed to keep abreast of the latest publications in England notably the works of Dickens, Scott and Lamb. The only direct note of protest that one hears from her in Up the Country against the lot of Victorian women is her longing for changes in fashions that would give a little more freedom to the female body from outfits designed by puritan consciousness. These

dresses were worn in India too with almost religious conformity. So she wrote to her sister, "we rather want more letters about fashions. I am quite certain, from the unmitigated hatred I feel to the tight bit at the top of my sleeves that you have all got rid of it and are swaggering about in the fullest sleeves again" (Up the Country 156). Such complaints are seldom heard again in her letters. Probably once she came to realize the dismal and pathetic state of the Indian women she seems to have concluded that the Victorian women in India had nothing to complain about. Added to it was the self-realisation that her role in India was decorative, social and ceremonial, quite a feminine assignment. She was not to play any constructive role either in the political or social sphere. So neither missionary zeal nor orientalist fervour mark her writings but rather the response of a refined and witty mind silently assessing the whole scenario.

'UP THE COUNTRY'

As stated earlier Miss Eden came to India neither to study the East nor to teach the "heathens". At first she seldom left the viceregal residence, in her own words "a colony of gibbering apes". Gradually the glamour of the

East began to conquer her. Then "as the East came her way, she accepted it and described it with kindly rather cynical insight and with high spirits which however severe the trials of the road, never flagged. So unconsciously she draws a wonderful picture of the old dominion, with its wealth and squalor, its unceasing gaiety and its tragic desolation" ('The Times' 4th Dec. 1930). Here was an exceptional circumstance characterized by extravagances and deprivations. As the sister of a Governor General she had the vantage point from which to observe the 19th century India. From October 1837 to early 1840 she was constantly on the move across the vast plains and hills of North India. Calcutta to Simla via Benaras; Simla to Lahore; Lahore to Simla and back to Calcutta, it was indeed a formidable itinerary for those days. Moreover her brother's term of office as the Governor General was fraught with difficulties. The Sind wars, the Afghan debacle, and the Indo-Sikh wars as well as a terrible famine plagued Lord Auckland. Judging from Up the Country Emily Eden and the entourage seem to have come out unscathed from all these misadventures.

Neither her elevated status nor the excitement of constant travels nor the whole gamut of her Indian experience could shake off her sense of exile. She had the characteristic Anglo-Indian concern with place and displacement.

For example she describes the uniqueness of the Indian landscape, climate and tribes but the absence of European landscape, climate and culture colours all her normative judgements. She always privileges the centre over the margin. She could not identify herself with India the way Taylor did or James Tod did. So her letters to the near and dear ones were an emotional outlet. The freedom to talk about one's impressions, joys and miseries without reserve or inhibition enabled her to survive. In this context Ms. Dyson's observations are particularly relevant :

The dishabile of moods characteristic of the diary compels us, readers, to become involved not only with the writers' moments of discovery and exhilaration but also with their weariness, heart sickness and dejection. We follow them in their difficult tracks, wishing no accident to overtake them; we wait for English letters with anxiety. ... ; we feel a pang when much awaited parcels are lost or when their precious contents are devoured by the relentless termites. This is a literature of greetings and farewells, of tears and embraces, of continuous day dreams about future re-unions. We read of the initial parting from Britain and also of the genuine regret which many felt at the final parting from India, from houses and gardens which had become homes, from servants who had become attached to their masters and mistresses, from friends who would never be greeted again. (115)

Thus oscillating between regret and anticipation, sorrow and joy this genre (the diary) registers the genuine heart throbs of the writers which other genres ignore. Incidentally the memsahibs were partial to the diary, the travelogue, the novel and occasionally the short story. They seem to have

been more concerned with the here and now, the ebb tide of their feelings unlike their menfolk who were devoted to history, ancient literature, philosophy and such pursuits of cold reasoning. Miss Eden followed the feminine tradition of writing memoirs and sketching.

However, it is a fallacy to conclude that Miss Eden's epistles are merely a literature of emotional release. They strike us almost as the giggles of a mischievous spinster peering over the shoulders of the Victorian male. To this sensitive woman the Raj positively seemed a gigantic theatre, "more like a constant theatrical representation going on, everything so picturesque and utterly un-English" (qtd. in Barr 20). There was a studied move to impress the natives. Miss Eden is quite forthright when she says in her Up the Country, "our first and best energies are devoted towards making a clinquant figure of His Excellency in order that he may shine in the eyes of the native princes" (qtd. in Barr 11). Though she was a part of the system she was not blind to its hollowness and futility. The sahibs of the time and their women, on the other hand, generally played with gusto the roles assigned to them by the colonial power. They could not see the ludicrousness of the whole situation being a party to the show. Emily Eden however, as an impartial observer could see through the pomp and bravado of the colonialists. Her observations are terse, pithy and

occasionally quite acerbic. In her satirical attacks on the male dominated and male-oriented system of the Raj, Miss. Eden seems to echo certain attitudes which Elaine Showalter categorizes as characteristic of the "feminine" phase of feminist discourse, a phase mainly attributed to the female writers of the Victorian period. Though Miss Eden reveals some of the ideas that appear in modern feminist writings their formulation in her works is non-programmatic. As such she cannot be termed a feminist in the modern sense. Yet it needs to be noted that her attitude too is "typically oblique, displaced, ironic, subversive; one has to read it between the lines, in the missed possibilities of the text" (qtd. in Simmons 253). Viewed from this perspective Up the Country reveals a sub-textual agitation that has gone largely unnoticed. Besides being a literature of sentiment it offers a genuinely feminine view of the colonizer and the colonized. While most other memsahibs identified themselves with the Raj, extolled the British and despised the natives, Emily Eden proved to be an exception. She did not identify herself with the Raj or its machinery. So she could offer an impartial, often ironic view of both the alien and the indigen. The responses of such an individualistic and sensitive woman have a freshness about them. So it would be worthwhile to look closely at her reactions to India, the Indians and the Britishers in India.

In one of her letters she sums up her impressions about India in the following terms; "In short what people say of India, you know it all, but it is pretty to see and I mean the 'moral' of my Indian experience to be, that it is the most picturesque population with the ugliest scenery that ever was put together" (Up the Country 12). It is quite an inconoclastic view considering the praises that foreigners have showered on Indian scenes but quite typical of Emily Eden. Though a child of the romantic age her temperament was realistic and ironic in the main. She seldom flew into ecstasy while enjoying natural scenery or beauty. In fact, Emily Eden could not appreciate the beauty of Indian scenery since her mind was all the time pre-occupied with the scenes and sights of her home county. She could appreciate only those places and scenes which were replicas of the scenes in her mind. Simla reminded her of her home county and the Himalayas of the Alps. For the rest of India hideous is a recurrent adjective in her journal. According to Ms. Dyson her attitude reflected, "a psychology of insecurity and loneliness, developed into a full-fledged philosophy of the inevitable melancholy of the exile, with a somewhat infantile nostalgia for the country of origin" (113). Miss Eden certainly shared in the then prevalent notion that India is a field of operation, the whiteman's exile and Indian service, a sort of martyrdom leading to a premature death. After visiting a cemetery she

characteristically concluded that the Edens were too old to die in India. She was however "no nervous spinster of delicate health (114) as Ms. Dyson concludes in her inimitable book. Emily Eden suffered from the heat of the Indian plains, agues and spasms but she always had the will to take them in a spirit of cheerfulness and survive them. Only in her early forebodings about the Indian sojourn she appears apprehensive about her fate in India.

In her travels she saw every facet of India but on the whole what she saw was a famished land. The famine of 1837-38 took a toll of 8,00,000 lives. The march of the Governor General did not in any way help to alleviate the suffering of the famished millions though it helped him to see things at first hand. Miss Eden was kind to all those skeletons who managed to reach the precincts of the Viceregal camp. According to Dunbar, "Every evening all who came to the tents were fed with rice. Some scarcely looked human : it was difficult to prevent them from tearing the rice from each other. The children in particular were dreadful sights, with the bones showing through their skins. The women looked as if they had been buried together with their infants" (123). She was too sensitive to close her eyes to such scenes of misery. As Dunbar says, "she could have been happy, if she had been able to close her mind entirely on this strange land of emeralds and misery" (160).

The sight of so great a suffering particularly that of starving women and suckling infants moved Miss Eden to note in her diary, "I am sure there is no sort of violent atrocity I should not commit for food, with a starving baby. I should not stop to think about the rights or wrongs of the case" (65). The origin of this reaction could be traced to a sensitive feminine heart, to the primary maternal instinct that every woman, married or unmarried, is heir to. The sight of a starving woman alone would not have affected Miss Eden to this extent but the sight of the starving mother-child dyad moved her to righteous indignation. Such pictures of misery got registered in her memory and nothing could erase them.

If the living India was miserable the dead India, her past, was attractive enough. To most of the nineteenth century travellers including Miss Eden, the India of the past, her monuments and her ruins held out an escape from the misery of the present. Moreover as an accomplished Victorian lady she was skilled in the art of drawing and sketching which she put to fine use. She was attracted by the monuments of India both ancient and modern. Way side temples, mosques and the natives in colourful costumes were beautiful enough to find a place in her sketch book. Her aesthetic sensibility revolted against the crass commercialism of the British in India. Her entry on Delhi bears testimony to this fact.

"In short Delhi is a very suggestive and moralizing place -such stupendous remains of power and wealth passed and passing away- and somehow I feel that we horrid English have just gone and done it, merchandised it, revenued it and spoiled it all" (98). Similarly her inherent romanticism which was seldom exhibited, feared the inroads of a mercantile civilization into this exotic land. In later years an ill and retired Miss Eden sent a copy of her letters to her nephew Lord Godolphine Osborne with a letter which contained her most scathing attack on the commercial offensive on India :

Now that India has fallen under the curse of railroads and that life and property will soon become as insecure there as here, the splendour of the Governor General's progress is at an end. The Kootub will probably become a railway station ; The Taj under the sway of an Agra company (limited except for destruction) be bought up for a monster hotel ; and the Governor General will dwindle into a first class passenger with a carpet bag. (Up the Country XV - XVI)

As an old timer Emily Eden wanted the splendour and strangeness of Britain's dominion in the East to remain.

Historically and aesthetically the most interesting descriptions that she has left are of Indian princelings and the sights and scenes along her progress through the north. Here again one can discern a difference, a feminine angle of vision or the memsahibs "subculture" -- to use Shawalter's term with its own preoccupations, values, conventions and treasured experiences. Unlike the male traveller of the time

Miss Eden was not interested in local politics, native wealth, power or the size of the army. She had her homely interests such as harems, nautch girls, child wives and so on. She had a teenager's desire to see and handle eastern jewellery and a spinster's curiosity to know about the marital customs of the much married Indian kings. So it was but natural that she was anxious to see Raja Ranjit Singh and to have a peep into his harem. Her diary records the meeting in an anticlimactic tone: "Exactly like an old mouse, with grey whiskers, and one eye. ... no jewels whatever, nothing but the commonest red silk dress. He had two stockings on at first which was considered an unusual circumstance but he very soon contrived to slip one off, that he might sit with one foot in the hand, comfortably" (108-109). Miss Eden does not see the romantic halo which later Indian historians cast around this despotic old man. She continues her portrait of the then most powerful Indian king :

The lion was a conscientious drinker. He understood that there were books which contained objections to drunkenness and he thought it better that there should be no books at all than that they should contain such foolish notions. And yet he made himself a great king; he is remarkably just in his government, he hardly ever takes away life which is wonderful in a despot; and he is excessively followed by his people. (208-209)

If the lion of Punjab was a mouse, the infant ranee of Gwalior was a pussy cat. "The little ranee, something like

a little transformed cat in a fairy tale; covered with gold tissue and clanking with diamonds" (374). Certainly Miss Eden had her own vision of eastern royalty but on the whole she was well disposed towards Indian naivete, amused by India's meaningless pomp and ridiculous excesses and saddened by the sight of her abysmal poverty.

She appears to have been less tolerant towards the Raj and its officialdom in India than towards the natives and their social set up. Her reactions against the Raj may be viewed as an instance of empathy between two underprivileged groups; the repressed Victorian women and the suppressed nineteenth century Indians. There is an added reason to think so since some feminist critics view women's literature as a veiled protest against dominance in general and male dominance in particular. Christiane Rochefort, for instance, boldly adheres to this view when she states, "I consider women's literature as a specific category not because of biology but because it is in a sense a literature of the colonized" (qtd. in Shewalter 197). Though one cannot categorize Up the Country as literature of protest or of the colonized, its author's leanings towards the underprivileged are distinct enough. From this angle, Miss Eden's often ironic and at times angry protests against the prejudices of Anglo-Indian officials and their memsahibs could be defined

with certain qualifications as a reaction whose systemic origin was located in the Victorian female psyche itself. However this cannot be proved beyond doubt since the same feelings are echoed by Tod, Taylor and Bishop Heber in stronger and more articulate terms. Miss Eden never got to know the natives as closely as Taylor or Tod did but she identified herself with the natives whenever she felt that injustice was done to them, be they Rajput princes or the common populace. She did not blindly believe in the East India company's professed objectives of civilizing and uplifting the natives of India. Nor did she believe in the "rule of law" which the British supposed to be ushering into a land plagued by strife and anarchy. She was shocked by the treatment meted out to Indians by some of the covenanted servants of the company. So she wrote to her sister, Eleanor : "It is horrible to think how this class of Europeans oppresses the natives; the great object of the government being to teach them reliance on English justice, and the poor natives cannot readily understand that they are no longer under their despotic chiefs. They will be a long time understanding it" (306). There are also a number of instances in her memoir when she raised her voice against the harsh treatment of Indian domestic servants, instances enough to show that she was clearly on the side of the oppressed.

As shown above, she was generous to the natives but not so generous to her own tribe, the memsahibs. Probably she did not fully comprehend their sacrifices, the numbing effects of deaths, partings and separation, above all the sense of alienation and insecurity felt in an alien land, enigmatic in its ethical values and cultural mores. To quote Pat Barr, "However amiably Emily Eden might have contrived to fix her official smile, she nurtured fairly low opinions of Anglo-Indians. So parochial and out of date she found their conversation that she usually commanded the band to play at dinners, in order to fill in awkward pauses and drown what chat there was" (23). To her, Anglo-Indian women scattered in camps and hill stations were ill-clad or ill-bred or both. Like most women of her times she was harsh in her opinion about the memsahibs and made scathing and snobbish remarks about them without understanding their limitations. For example she could not understand why a Mrs T. "wore thick thread mittens with black velvet bracelets over" and hence found it impossible to discover any good qualities "under those mittens" (qtd. in Barr 29). It was the same with one Mrs V. . . . who "appeared in turban made, I think, of stamped tin moulded into two fans from which descended a long pleurese feather floating over some very full sleeves" (qtd. in Barr 28-29). It was but natural that a highly refined blueblood like Miss Eden would find

the camp ladies, widows, grass widows and even "the fair cargo" quite behind the times and quite out of fashion.

Similarly if judged solely by her impressions, the average Englishman in India during Lord Auckland's regime was invariably an eccentric. She had of course a fascination for strange personalities and made them vivid with a few bold strokes of her pen. Up the Country has a medley of such personalities. Such was, for example, colonel James Skinner, a half-caste who had a private army of his own. When sick and weak he vowed to build a Protestant church should he recover; and not to be undone by other gods, he also vowed a mosque and a temple. He recovered and built all three, "because he said that one way or other he should go to heaven" (96). The Skinners had keen sense of honour. The Colonel's brother major Robert was also a melodramatic character. He suspected one of his wives (he had several) of a slight e'cart from the path of propriety - very unjustly it is said - but he called her and all his servants together, cut off the heads of every individual in his household and shot himself. "This beau-geste was highly approved by the soldiery who bought up the major's effects at ten times their values as relics of a gallant man" (97). Then there is the picture of the fire-eating lieutenant Snooks who challenged three gentlemen who carelessly addressed him as Snooks.

Many of her sex including Fanny were suitably awed by the daredevilry associated with tiger hunting, a sport indulged in by the gallant among the British. But Emily was not much impressed by this sort of male bravado. So in her diary she laughs at professional tiger hunters and amateurish enthusiasts, in her own inimitable style. She seems to have been amused by all "macho" activities, a reaction that points to an ironic attitude suggestive of the inherent sex antagonism generated by the dominance of one group over the other. Here is a typical case from her diary. One Mr. W.O. a chronic tiger hunter takes one Mr. P, an engineer with him for company, and gives him an elephant and two guns. The first time Mr. P sees a tiger half a mile away he fires both the guns. The next time he reaches the spot after Mr. W.O. has shot the tiger dead :

About five minutes after he was dead, up comes Mr. P in an awful state of excitement, with a small umbrella neatly folded up in his hands and carried like a gun. 'Am I late? Is he dead?' 'Yes but where are your guns?' 'Good heavens! I thought this was them. I must have thrown them away in my excitement and taken this instead' (281).

For sure, such a lady would not spare even pious clerics on a Sunday and in the holy of holies. She was quite an imp among the pews than a straight-laced worshipper as is clear from the following description of a sermon she heard at Simla :

We had such a dreadful sermon at church yesterday from a strange clergyman. ... this sick gentleman took into his head he was well enough to preach. He is rather cracked. I should think. ... I never will go again when he is to preach. He quoted quantities of poetry and when he thought any of it particularly pretty, he said it twice over with the most ludicrous actions possible. Then he imitated the voice with which he supposed Lazarus was called to come forth and which he said must have been very loud or Lazarus would not have heard it, and so he hallooed till half Simla must have heard. Then he described an angel appearing, a fine trumpeter; and he held out his black gown at its full extent to show how the angel's wing fluttered. All round the church people's shoulders were shaking and their faces hid; and there was one moment when I was nearly going out, for fear of giving a scream(135-36).

In such passages what we notice is an expanse of the spirit, a free play of humour. Here Miss Eden is not the prim aristocratic lady walking along the narrow lanes of Victorian propriety and decorum. Free from the censoring gaze of her peers at home she exercised a new freedom of expression. In India she noticed oddities, eccentricities and absurdities verging on the burlesque and treated them with Pickwickian humour. Incidentally 'Pickwick Papers' was one of her favourites..It is because of such humorous portraits and personal touches that Up the Country has become so interesting a memoir.

Before attempting a literary evaluation of Miss Eden's memoirs, it will be rewarding to consider the influence that Jane Austen, her literary peer, had on her. In his introduction

^{7Ac}
 to Semi-attached Couple John Gore qualifies Emily Eden as
 "the forgotten rival" to Jane Austen. Jane Austen as the
 daughter of a country rector probably knew much less, from
 experience at any rate, about life than Miss Eden. But
 Austen had genius and by genius is meant the power of
 guessing right. In John Gore's words, "Miss Eden was not a
 genius but knew from her experience considerably more about
 life, men and women, than did Miss Austen. Eden's lack of
 genius was made up by a power of selecting judiciously from
 her own wide experience. She was sometimes able to accomplish
 what the genius of Miss Austen accomplished" (XI). There is
 evidence enough to establish that the same literary influences
 and environment nurtured both these novelists. Both read
 and admired Sir Walter Scott, Charles Lamb, Mrs. Maria
 Edgeworth and Hannah More. There were also other affinities
 between Austen and Eden. No two English women writers were
 so alike. Jane Austen was the elder of the two and no doubt,
 the greater artist. Emily Eden admired and imitated her.
 Critics have, for example, identified curious literary
 parallels in Pride and Prejudice and ^{7Ac}Semi-attached Couple.
 Both Austen and Eden refused the marriage bond out of
 personal choice and cultivated almost an identical vision
 of life. Their attitude towards love and marriage was
 neither cynical nor prejudicial. Although their women
 lead restricted lives their novels are not primarily about
 restriction. Each of Austen's novels ends in a marriage

affirming her belief in the felicity of marriage provided it is based on mutual understanding and acceptance. Eden's novels begin with marriage and for her the nuptial vows are only a gateway to the discovery of true love.

Belonging to different social classes, these women had almost the same response to events and situations. They were representative of the emergent Victorian female, that "much love, much feared, much lied about creature. ..." (Auerbach 281). A refined sensibility, a sense of humour, an ironic vision of everyday reality, a certain distrust of emotions and calmness of observation, these were their common assets. Throughout their lives they remained witty and aloof. Austen invests her characters with some of her own qualities. In the opinion of Goonertne, "her characters feel deeply, and their greatest efforts go towards controlling their emotions and regulating their outward behaviour. The calm composure, the fortitude, and the resolution that her heroine show under stress" (20) are a reflection of her own character. Eden could not impart that much of her own self to her characters. The self-respect, sensitivity, breadth of vision and the quaint dignity which we find in Austen's heroines are not found in those of Eden's. They play traditional roles with traditional sensitivity. Similarly the quiet revolt we notice in Austen's heroines is not found in the heroines of The Semi-attached Couple or The Semi-detached House. Eden's novels were products of her pre-Indian

days. They are free from sensationalism and melodrama. Eden focuses her attention on delineating the thoughts, feelings, motives and prejudices of men and women she knew. Finally, Miss Eden along with other women writers of the time, Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, Hannah More and a few others reveals the refined, sensitive and critically self-aware Victorian female consciousness. So one might apply to Eden Julia Brown's pertinent observation on Jane Austen. She too "was fully aware of the price that women paid for joining in the particular, selective consciousness of femininity ; just as she knew the unutterable vacancy of feminine life without that consciousness" (164).

In view of her intrinsic merits it appears to be an irony of fate that Miss Eden's name is not found in any literary history. She deserves more than passing mention in the histories of the Raj. She is an artist in her own right. Though an heir to the twin tendencies of the Romantic and Victorian ages, her conception of art was mainly that of the Augustans. She had the cultivated sense of order, decorum and urbane wit so characteristic of the Augustan era. As an artist she was endowed with a comic and ironic vision; a gift for subtle observation and an eye for the ridiculous in personages and things. The hard realities of the world around her which for example engaged Dickens had no use for her. In India she came into direct contact with poverty

and famine. She merely records these briefly and passes on. Similarly in her letters we read of the early British victories in Afghanistan; of the ladies who refused to dance until their husbands returned and the storming of Ghazni. The terrible facts of the Afghan debacle are simply left out probably to protect her brother who was responsible for it. It is more the idiosyncracies of people and situations that catch her eye rather than the agonies of life. The eternal passions of man, the struggle for existence and the psychological conflicts interest her less. The most vivid memory one retains of her writing is her irrespressible humour.

This is the experience of any one who reads either her novels or her memoir. They seem to affirm her implicit belief that life with all its trials and tribulations is nevertheless a splendid process. This philosophic as well as artistic vision radiates through all her works investing them with her characteristic "wit, vivacity, skill in phrase and description and eye for personal foibles" (Thompson IX). Her comic ironic vision operates best when it is focused on a social ethos familiar to her. This is true of her Indian as well as of her British phase. The world of The Semi-attached Couple for example, is Miss Eden's own familiar world of the west of London and so she can very well portray the upper-class gentry and their ethos in that age of security and certainty.

The Semi-detached House is already a break with the familiar. It depicts as Jan Stephen observes, "an unexpected corner of England to which businessmen return from the city and sea captains from their voyages and where suburban societies indulge in monstrous snobberies" (2). This middle class suburbia lies on the periphery of Miss Eden's known social milieu.

Up the Country is located in an exotic land congenial to romance of action and character. However, since to her the East remains largely a marginal world, her Indian experience does not reach deep enough to affect either her style or attitude to life. The strange and the exotic East is only the frame of her memoir whereas the sensibility within is decidedly the Victorian feminine world preoccupied with social foibles and pastimes with accent on dances, parties, picnics, dinners, visits marriages, partings, reunions dresses and books. Besides, they are, to use Chapman's comment on Jane Austen's collected letters, "full of her brothers, their wives and children" (IX), in short full of the Edens. Thus the inner world of Up the Country is undoubtedly "a feminine script" conforming to the female perspectives of fluidity and interiority (Gardiner). India emerges as a track mostly dull and hideous and occasionally enchanting, across which her typically English female consciousness traverses. If this land take any life at

all as it passes through her prismatic mind, the colours are always English.

A similar attitude is noticed towards the characters of her novels and her journal. The characters of The Semi-attached Couple belong to her familiar whig aristocracy, modelled on personalities whom Miss Eden had met one time or another. The characters of the second novel belong to the marginal society of the suburbs. Whether she sketched familiar or unfamiliar characters, Miss Eden could not equal Jane Austen in the art of drawing people. She knew aristocratic gentlemen from close quarters. Still Lord Veviot, the hero of The Semi-attached Couple does not have the complexities of a Darcy. Similarly Eliza Douglas from the same novel resembles Miss Austen's earlier heroine Catherine Moreland with none of the wit of Elizabeth Bennet. Eden's fully drawn characters do not register themselves deeply on the mind; whereas some of the roughly sketched characters hovering half way between life and art as in Up the Country tend to be unforgettable. They are sketched with bold strokes and in vivid colours emphasizing the comic and eccentric aspects of every character she happened to meet. Since Miss Eden had no insight into their inner and emotional lives she drew them as caricatures rather than characters. They seem to be actors from a comic opera or a melodrama. In fact, the East as a whole appeared to this witty Victorian woman as a comic opera

on a gigantic scale and the natives were fit characters for such a show. This is evident from one of her entries in Up the Country :

We have had a beautiful subject for drawing for the last two days. A troop of irregular horse joined us at Futtehghur. The officer, a Russaldar - a sort of sergent. I believe, wears a most picturesque dress and has an air of Timour the Tartar, with a touch of Alexander the great and he comes and sits for his picture with great patience. All these irregular troops are like parts of a melodrama. They go about curveting and spearing and dress themselves fancifully and they are most courteous mannered natives. (71)

Her treatment of the Anglo-Indians was not substantially different. She cast the whole lot in her typical comic-ironic mode. It is surprising that all through her wanderings in India Miss Eden did not chance upon a single character, either Indian or British, who was normal and not an eccentric.

Miss Eden was not what we call today an "avant garde" writer. She could tell a story straight in an easy and graceful style. But she could not weave a plot like Charlotte Bronte, nor draw a character like Dickens nor polish a passage like Jane Austen. But she could be always interesting. The vivid, racy and colloquial idiom of Up the Country testifies not only to her mastery over this kind of autobiographical writing but also to her impeccable taste. She was certainly different from the other travellers who flocked to India in the nineteenth century. In her

diary we rarely come across ecstatic musings like those of Heber or exhaustive details of natural phenomena like those of Taylor. She could however draw beautiful pictures occasionally. In India she liked only two places where she could be stationary, Calcutta and Simla. The commercial centre, Calcutta did not appeal to her English soul as Simla did which was a home away from home. In her descriptions this queen of hill stations appears almost like a transplanted patch of England. Her diary records the very first view of Simla in endearing terms : "we have our first view of the mountain today; so lovely - a nice dark blue hard line above the horizon, and then a second series of snowy peaks, looking quite pink when the sun rises" (79). Then there is this picture of the hills in day light : "I never saw anything so beautiful as it was, the ground so green with all sorts of ferns, and covered with iris and mountain geraniums and such an amphitheatre of mountains all around, with great white clouds in the valleys, just as if the mountains had let their gowns slip off their shoulders" (311). The vision of Simla at night is equally sublime : "The hills were really beautiful tonight, a sea of pinkish white clouds rolling over them and some of their purple heads peering through like Ireland's. It was a pleasure to look at anything so beautiful and so changeable" (152). She was not able to sustain the quality of writing beyond brief telling descriptions.

What suited her most was the deft use of humour which was her natural element. She was almost Shakespearian in her range of humour. She could be subtle. For instance once during her wanderings she was very pleased with the scenery at Nahum which she called the nicest residence in India. She would have liked to remain there. Of course Miss Eden would not say anything so straight and puts it in her own style; "and if the Rajah fancied an English ranee, I know somebody who would be very happy to listen to his proposal" (119). Most of the time she is playfully humorous while writing to her sisters and friends. Miss Eden liked Indian babies and so she wrote to her elder sister who had a large Victorian family; "I wish you would have a little brown baby for a change ; they are so much prettier than white children" (11). She is also capable of boisterous humour which is often found in the pages of Up the Country. Here is a humorous picture of an Englishman who tried to be very expressive in Hindustani. "J, always throws out more legs and arms when he talks Hindustani than any other human being and he looked like an enraged contipede, and finally jumped out of his howdah and began laying about him with one of the dispoiled branches" (273). This sort of eccentricity was noticed among English riders too. "W.O. His horse had run away with him for three miles; and he ran away with it for six more; and now he hopes they will do better" (80).

Wit in fact was a family tradition with the Edens. Miss Eden's father, Baron Auckland had to travel to distant lands during his diplomatic career and his children were born in different nations. This prompted him to write, "we have now as many nations in our nursery as were assembled at the town of Babel" (Dunbar 1). According to Janet Dunbar, the Edens' biographer, all shared this family trait. As an example she singles out one of Miss Eden's early letters to George, later Lord Auckland, who was in Paris at that time. She wrote, "we are duller than a hundred posts about astronomy and if you can find any planet in Paris we shall be obliged to you, as we cannot find one on the globe, and Madden only laughs at us" (2). As she grew up this gift did not desert her, instead it became subtler. Journey to India was an event that necessitated several rounds of shopping. The event provoked Emily to write to her good friend Pamela Campbell, "You cannot think what a whirl and entanglement buying and measuring and trying on makes in one's brain. Poor Goliath himself would have been obliged to lie down and rest if he had tried on six pairs of stays consecutively" (Dunbar 11). On reaching India one of her earliest comments on the Indians entered in her memoir runs as follows : "I must do the Hindus the justice to say that they make as many holidays out of one year as most people do out of ten" (11).

One thing Miss Eden could not stand was hypocrisy which she discerned in every rank of Indian society. During Eden's

visit to the court of Raja Ranjit Singh, to which several pages of Up the Country are devoted, she noticed that the Sikh soldiers who were lascivious would not even talk to an English woman. Her response to this is an example of her devastating wit. "The poor ignorant creatures are perfectly unconscious what a superior article an English woman is" (133). Even the dreaded Gugga fever could not suppress her witty soul. She wrote from Noodean on January 30, 1839, "I think the Gugga fever is remarkably unpleasant as I did not know one head and one set of bones could hold so much pain as mine did for forty eight hours. But one ought to be allowed a change of bones in India ; it ought to be part of the outfit" (254). Not only her correspondence from India but also her novels testify to Miss Eden's command over wit. For example in The Semi-attached Couple she shows what the worshippers exactly think in the pews amidst their ostentatious devotion :

Some thought him (Lord Teviot) too attentive to Lady Helen for a man in church. Some thought him too attentive to his prayers for a man in love! but eventually the two factions joined and thought him simply attentive. They all saw that Lady Helen was very fond of him and nobody could be surprised at that. ... then there was the news that it was not Lord Teviot but an architect. (41)

Wit and irony go hand in hand as literary embellishments. Eden's irony springs directly from her own ironic vision of life. It does not however sting like that of Swift or Pope and is subtly effective. A few of her mild diatribes deserve mention. While in India she was vaguely aware of the

lasciviousness and laxity of the Indian princes behind the facade of puritan morality. In one of her letters she exposes this duplicity. "They (the Maharajas) think the ladies who dance are utterly good for nothing but seemed rather pleased to see so much vice." (16) Nonetheless a little hypocrisy and a little immorality were not as bad as eastern bombast and hyperbole and the pretended friendship between rival powers. As Governor General, Lord Auckland had to be at the centre of ceremonial parades and meaningless rituals. His sister however, could hardly stand ceremonies and ceremonial language. At Raja Ranjit Singh's palace when subjected to unendurable ceremony she retaliated with the following :

And before this circle G. has to talk and listen to the most flowery nonsense imaginable, to hear it translated and re-translated, and vary it to each individual. It took a quarter of an hour to satisfy him about the Maharaja's health, and to ascertain that the roses had bloomed in the garden of friendship and the nightingales had sung in the bowers of affection sweeter than ever, since the two powers had approached each other. Then he supposed that the deputation had not suffered from the rain; and they said the canopy of friendship had interposed such a thick cloud that their tents had remained quite dry, which was touching. (131)

Still however, it is obvious that the Edens were fascinated with Ranjit Singh and his Punjab. On 27th June 1839 the Lion of Punjab died leaving the whole state in confusion and turmoil. Miss Eden being apolitical as far as the Indian affairs were concerned was intrigued by Ranjit Singh's young queens' resolve

to die on his funeral pyre. So she wrote probably with a quizzical smile on her face : "I begin to think that the hundred wife system is better than the mere one wife rule; they are more attached and faithful" (309). The Anglo-Indians and the "half-castes" (ethnic Anglo-Indians) gave ample opportunities for Eden's ironic comments. Several instances of these have been already noted in this chapter. Miss Eden was an enthusiastic supporter of the Anglo-Indian amateur theatre as well as its unsparing critic. In Simla amateur performances by the soldiers gave her a golden chance to comment upon the incongruity of such performances. A typical entry in her memoir runs thus : "One of them (the clerks), a very black half-caste stood presenting his enormous flat back to the audience and the lover observed with great pathos, 'upon my soul! that is a most interesting looking little girl' (152).

It is such fine touches of humour, wit and irony that transform a personal journal into a delightful piece of writing. A number of memsahibs both before and after Miss Eden travelled through India and noted, their impressions about this strange and exotic land. Such memoirs and journals, in fact, form the bulk of Anglo-Indian literature. Many of them, however, have been already forgotten since they are essentially a literature of self-revelation, or emotional release or prejudiced portraiture of nineteenth century India. Miss Eden's

memoir still remains an unforgettable and unique document because apart from being something very personal and individualistic, it brings an altogether new perspective, a highly cultured critical Victorian female perspective, to the vision of nineteenth century Anglo-India. Unlike Tod, Miss Eden is not attracted to the chivalry of the East and unlike Taylor she is not allured by its romance. Similarly she is not taken in by the theatre and pretence of the Raj and is one of the first to notice the absurdity of it all. The record of her reactions to the nineteenth century colonial situation thus becomes for us the oblique light of the comic muse on the human comedy behind the facade of the Raj.

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Chapter IV

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