a critical study of an unconventional memsahib

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Flora Annie Steel, 1904.
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For my beloved daughters,
Poorna and Prerna

It is extraordinary how quickly the European recognises the difference in a thermometer heat between seventy-nine degrees and eighty. The one is summer, the next hot weather. And the garden knows it too. The English flowers meet the sun's morning kiss bright and sweet as ever, but by noon are weary and worn by his caresses. Yet there were heaps and heaps of Oriental beauties ready for it; more *voyant*, perchance, in a way more material. Some of them certainly were transcendentally beautiful to my eyes; but I doubt much if the eyes of those who came every Sunday to enjoy the coolness of the garden and the opportunity of displaying their dignities noticed them much.

—Flora Annie Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity* (73)

# Contents

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SUSMITA ROYE

# Introduction

> "[F]emale Rudyard Kipling"—The description is neither elegant nor correct, for Mrs. Steel's resemblance to Mr. Kipling begins and ends in the fact that both write about India from intimate personal knowledge.
> —*Academy*[1]

## THE "FEMALE RUDYARD KIPLING"

Anybody who has delved into the scholarly field of memsahibs' writings of British India has come across the works by a famous "unconventional" memsahib, Flora Annie Steel (1847–1929). Steel is today best known as a memsahib writer who has left behind her a rich treasure trove of writings about the British Raj. She was the wife of an Indian Civil Service (ICS) officer who lived in India for twenty-two years. During her stay in India, she proved her exceptional mettle in trying to befriend the natives, learn their languages, accompany her husband on his important tours, establish girls' schools, serve as the school inspectress, and leave her mark on India in numerous other ways. What is a more lasting legacy are her writings about British India. Her works range from novels (like *On the Face of the Waters*), short fiction (like "In the Permanent Way"), a collection of Indian folk tales (*Tales of the Punjab*), to guides for other memsahibs in colonial India (*The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*).

Flora Annie Steel was called the "female Rudyard Kipling"—"an epithet she probably would not have welcomed" (Pal-Lapinski 65)—and was frequently compared to him in her times mainly because of the fact that she wrote about British India. However, as the above extract makes it clear, the comparison was done more to downplay her claim to fame than otherwise. It is noteworthy that the extract is from a review of the novel, *On the Face of the Waters*, which is the cornerstone of her reputation as an author. Even after the impressive success of this novel, she is clearly considered by this reviewer to be lagging behind Rudyard Kipling and highlights the "contemporaneous understanding of Steel as a belated, imperfect Kipling" (Mukherjee 168). Most of her contemporaries, therefore, dismissed her as an inadequate imitation of the grand writer who is hailed as the mouthpiece of the British Raj.

Yet, even as the above reviewer lashes Steel for her "resemblance to Mr. Kipling"—claiming that calling her the "female Rudyard Kipling" is both inelegant and incorrect—he is compelled to admit that she writes about India from "intimate personal knowledge." It is precisely this knowledge that aided her to rival Kipling's popularity on his own ground. Her writings about India, and more particularly her "Mutiny" novel, enjoyed as large a readership as Kipling's, so much so that one of her severest critics, Benita Parry, concedes that she had indeed won "a large and eager readership and enthusiastic acclaim in the British press" (104). Even as unflattering comments about Steel's ambitious trespassing into Kipling's territories went around at the end of nineteenth century, there were others who acknowledged her unique impact on their understanding of Anglo-Indian life and challenges: "A reviewer for the *Pall Mall Gazette* writes [in 1896]...that 'Mrs. Steel has beaten Mr. Kipling on his own ground, India'" (qtd. in Richardson, "*On the Face of the Waters*" 119). Indeed, competing with the negative intonations of her rising reputation as the "female Rudyard Kipling," there were other labels like "Star of India" or "Novelist of India" given to her to accredit her phenomenal contribution to the Raj.

It is quite evident, then, that Steel was a much-talked-about author in her times and, in fact, she rivalled Kipling's popularity as a Raj writer in her times, but the gender-biased politics of canonization made her gradually fade away. Nonetheless, scholars and historians have

dug her name out of oblivion to salute her efforts and achievements. Daya Patwardhan, in the preface to her 1963 book on Steel, writes: "This is a tribute, long overdue, to the memory of a simple, charming and colorful British author who through her novels, short stories and miscellaneous writings reveals India with love and understanding." Decades later, in 2006, LeeAnne Richardson comments:

> While Kipling has become virtually synonymous with literary representations of British colonial rule, Flora Annie Steel… has all but disappeared from the canon of writers on empire. And yet no writer—not even Mr. Kipling—can tell us as much about the ideological work of competing fin de siècle literary genres, the intersection of colonial and patriarchal discourses, or the conflicted role of white women in the imperial project. ("'Aboriginal' Interventions" 78)

In other words, the same epithet that was meant to diminish her stature and place her secondary to Kipling in her times has often been tacitly used by recent critics to hail her achievements. Steel, by adding her unique vision of the female side of the Raj experience, actually happens to complement the contribution of her male counterpart. Critics like Jenny Sharpe often point out how Steel addresses the gaps that Kipling has left; for instance, Kipling was expected to write "the great Mutiny novel," but "as it turns out, Kipling never did write the epic work expected of him" (85). The "female Kipling" ends up filling up that blank by writing the "most popular Mutiny novel of them all" (87). Indeed, Sharpe draws our attention to the fact that, in order to write her novel, Steel roamed the streets of Delhi, and this idiosyncrasy of hers almost implicitly reminds us of Kipling's known habit of wandering the streets of Lahore in disguises to collect material for his writings. On a different note, Richardson claims that Steel's kind of imperialism that "emphasize[s] cooperation over colonization" is a "useful counter-point—or even corrective—to the understanding of nineteenth-century imperialism proffered by novels of Rudyard Kipling" ("*On the Face of the Waters*" 120). Therefore, both contribute to present a *complete* picture of Anglo-Indian life and ethos of the British Raj.

Evidently, the epithet "female Rudyard Kipling" was meant to belittle her stature as an author, but that she alone, among a cohort of other female authors of that time, was chosen to be compared to Kipling also demonstrates her prominence and significance in the literary landscape of British India. This becomes noteworthy when we keep in mind that she was not the sole memsahib writer of the Raj. Many other contemporaneous women writers like Alice Perrin, Bithia Mary Croker, Maud Diver, and Sara Jeanette Duncan had also published widely. Croker and Perrin often hold a mirror to a memsahib's routine life, her feelings, fears, hardships, and challenges. They offer their readers a faithful representation of Anglo-Indian existence out in the "heat and dust" of the tropical subcontinent.[2] However, critics like Hsu-Ming Teo complain the "romantic Raj [as represented by these lady novelists] was generally *an Indian-less India*" (4, emphasis added). It is particularly in this score that Steel fares better because she talks of natives and portrays native life beyond the limited sphere of ayahs, gardeners, and servants that memsahibs usually came in contact with in their everyday household life.[3] Maud Diver often stands out among the group of white female authors for drawing attention to native women and the dynamics of their relationships with white women. Steel, too, has made a major contribution in representing a mem's views of her native counterparts. Her gaze on the Indian woman ranges from a peasant woman in "Uma Himāvutee" to purdahnashin like Fakr-un-nissa in "Glory-of-Woman," from reiterating stereotypical figures like Kirpo in "Mussumât Kirpo's Doll" to throwing light on the virtues of Indian women like Newasi Begum in *On the Face of the Waters*. Compared to Diver's portrayal of Lilamani or Aruna,[4] Steel's surprisingly in-depth knowledge of native girls and women is revealed in the rich variety of female characters that she depicts in her fiction. Thus, Steel stands tall and prominent in the group of memsahib writers and deserves far more attention than she has garnered so far. In the following section, let us briefly focus on the life of this exceptional memsahib.

## FLORA ANNIE STEEL, AN UNCONVENTIONAL MEMSAHIB

Born at Sudbury Priory, in Harrow, in 1847 to George and Isabella Webster, Steel grew up in Forfarshire, Scotland. At the age of twenty, she married Henry William Steel, who, after completing his studies at Cambridge, had joined the ICS. On January 1, 1868, the newlywed couple left for India, and, in her autobiography, she presents the event as life-changing for a girl "who at twenty, accustomed to the varied life of a large family, went out to the solitudes and the distractions of India" (Steel 27).

Upon their arrival in India, although the Steels first encountered the life in Madras in the south of the subcontinent, she and her husband had to travel up north because, for the next twenty-two years, they would mainly be living in different regions of Punjab and its vicinity. Early on, besides the trying experiences of the severely hot weather and enervating fevers, Steel met with her first major shock when her first pregnancy resulted in the birth of a stillborn daughter. She later gave birth to her only surviving child, a second daughter, in 1870.

To counter the boredom and challenges of her life out in the colony, Steel kept herself busy with station life, gardening, practising her singing, playing music, drawing and painting, and making her own clothes. She paid a lot of attention to improving her cooking skills and noted in her autobiography that cooking was "a science for which in after years I became noted in India" (Steel 52). After all, in 1888, she published *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, which she co-authored with Grace Gardiner, and this manual on housekeeping and cookery established her reputation as a memsahib with first-hand knowledge of the Anglo-Indian lifestyle and its needs.

By this time, however, Steel started getting involved in activities that would mark her out from the other ordinary memsahibs. Stepping beyond the traditional round of partying, flirting, indolence, and racist exclusiveness that most of the memsahibs were notorious for, she was instead "every day acquiring knowledge of India and its people, and learning more or less how to manage them" (Steel 52). During her stay at the isolated station of Kasur, where the Steels found themselves to be the only Europeans, she devoted her time to learning native

languages and learning more about the villagers' ways. As she claims, "I was…the only woman in the Punjab, outside the ranks of mission ladies, who could read and write the vernaculars" (Steel 161). She focused her attention on saving the tradition of Indian lace making, embroidery, and local handicrafts. She also got closely involved with native women around her and started dispensing medical support to them as and when needed. Based on the information she gathered during such close contact, she eventually published *Wide-Awake Stories: A Collection of Tales Told by Little Children between Sunset and Sunrise in the Punjab and Kashmir* in 1884.

Besides doctoring and learning languages, Steel endeavoured to improve women's education. On being invited, she opened the first girls' school in the district of Kasur. By 1884, she had earned such a widespread reputation as an educationist that she was appointed the first female inspectress of schools in India. Eventually, she was appointed to the Provincial Education Board, on which she served from 1885 to 1888, and was also made the vice-president of the Victoria Female Orphan Asylum in Punjab. In her capacity as the inspectress of schools, she proved to be strict and handled opposition firmly. She introduced quite a few reforms because "I found," she writes later, "endless things to alter in the conduct of the schools and had to go warily so as not to arouse antagonism" (Steel 169). For example, against all general outcry, she decided to refuse a grant to any school that paid its pupils for attendance. She also made it clear that, on the prize distribution day of the schools, prizes would not be indiscriminately handed out to all students in the school; instead, she made it a rule that only deserving pupils would be rewarded. Similarly, with regard to the need for chaperonage, she declared that female students would be permitted escorts, but if their families insisted on the requirement for *dhoolies* (covered conveyances for purdah ladies), the school was not under the obligation to pay for them. Of course, such steps were unpopular to begin with, but, she proudly asserts, the results in the improvement in the level of pupils and their attention to education finally justified her actions. As an educationist, she rewrote the educational primers that were illustrated by Rudyard Kipling's father, Mr. John Lockwood Kipling. In her usual confident and opinionated

tone, she declares: "[Her primers] were a success, at any rate more so than the old ones, which were hardly decent" (Steel 164).

In May 1889, Henry retired from the ICS and returned with his wife to settle down in Scotland. However, the return home could not dampen her interest in and involvement with India. She started contributing short stories about India and Indians to magazines; later, most of these stories would be collected to publish anthologies like *The Flower of Forgiveness and Other Stories* (1894) and *In the Permanent Way and Other Stories* (1897). In fact, she travelled back to India in 1894, alone this time, to do her research in order to write her novel on the Mutiny of 1857. The outcome is her most famous novel, *On the Face of the Waters*, which was published in 1896. She would travel again to India to gather information for her novel, *Voices in the Night: A Chromatic Fantasia* (1900). Other novels that heavily draw from her experience of India include *The Potter's Thumb* (1894), *The Gift of the Gods* (1897), and *The Hosts of the Lord* (1900). She also focused on writing historical novels, mostly on Mughal history, like *A Prince of Dreamers* (1908), *King-Errant* (1912), *Mistress of Men* (1917), and *The Builder* (1928). Besides writing about Indian history in works like *India through the Ages: A Popular and Picturesque History of Hindustan* (1908), she also tried her hand at playwriting in *Dramatic History of India: Twenty Playlets* (1917). Evidently, she was a prolific writer who left a prominent mark on the colonial literature of British India.

## EXTANT CRITICAL LITERATURE ON STEEL

In recent decades, critics are increasingly focusing on the contribution of this unconventional memsahib to Raj literature. Her novel on the Indian Mutiny of 1857, *On the Face of the Waters*, has attracted widespread attention from critics like Jenny Sharpe, Nancy Paxton, Sangeeta Ray, Alan Johnson, Jennifer Otuski, Danielle Nielsen, and Helen Pike Bauer. More recently, scholars like Anna Johnston, Ralph Crane, Shampa Roy, Gráinne Goodwin, and I have gone beyond that famous mutiny novel to delve into her other works: short stories, a cookbook, and journalistic contributions. Such increasing attention on such an important, exceptional memsahib is significant and attests to her vital stature.

Given the multifaceted nature of Steel's writings, ranging from fiction to journalism to housekeeping advising and letters, as well as the multidimensionality of her keen interest in India and Indians, it is not a surprise that there is such a wide diversity of angles of critical focus on her. Violet Powell calls her the "Novelist of India" and Daya Patwardhan hails her as the "Star of India." While scholars like Roy and Sen focus on how Steel depicts native women in her fiction, others are more interested in how she, being an unconventional memsahib herself, decides to portray another group of white women that is frowned upon by colonial authorities, namely the missionary ladies. Bauer and Sara Suleri speak of how she represents "colonial maternity" (Suleri 80) to highlight the fact that there is indeed a sad solemnity about the motherhood experience of white women in British India, but that underneath that cover of so-called dignified melancholy, the deeper emotional damage is often greater than is openly acknowledged. On the other hand, Piya Pal-Lapinski takes a look at Steel's engagement with "some of the central dilemmas of colonial medicine and its attempts to control the exotic female subject" (66). Looking at an altogether different topic—that of interracial relationships—Kapila shows how Steel, following the pattern of her times, demonstrates both the narrative and social implausibility of such an affair. While critics like Ray and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan often throw light on the fact that in her most famous novel Steel does try to create a semblance of an interracial sisterhood, others find it only fleeting and illusory. In fact, Paxton notes Steel's problematic understanding of purdah as observed by native women, which undermines any real possibility of such sisterly ties: "her analysis of *purdah*…apparently held up a mirror reflecting her own gynephobia and fear of female sexuality" (164).

What is interesting, consequently, is that Steel emerges as a highly controversial figure in all this extant critical literature. In Pat Barr's and Mary Ann Lind's works, she surfaces as a compassionate memsahib who has beneficially impacted the lives of natives around her during her stay in India. On the other hand, critics like Parry and Allen Greenberger detect strong racism in her writings, as well as in her world view. Greenberger notes there is a vast gulf between the English and the Indians in her stories because, according to him, "When she…writes about Indians

there are no Englishmen in the story and when she writes about Englishmen there are virtually no Indians present" (56). Parry observes that Steel's writings are permeated with a "confident and opinionated voice" (102) and that Steel's claim to having close contact with native India reflects the typical pattern of encounter between Britain and India, which is "the deference of the weak and the insolence of the powerful" (101). Paxton, too, notes "racism, elitism, and authoritarianism" in Steel's feminism, which "constantly compromised her efforts to improve the lives of Indian women" (163). Other scholars like Richardson instead try to refute the largely racist image that has been created of Steel. For instance, she highlights in particular how Parry has misread Steel's use of free, indirect discourse in her terms "Men/Murderers" (in *On the Face of the Waters*) and mistakenly interprets it to be her racism (Parry 131). Richardson does admit that Steel "oscillates between racial pride and racial understanding" ("*On the Face of the Waters*" 121), but she would refrain from considering Steel a downright racist like many of her contemporaries. Clearly, then, critics are quite divided on how to categorize her but are united in admitting that Steel stood apart from the stereotypical indolent, insolent, high-handed, uninterested memsahib.

## SCOPE OF THE PRESENT VOLUME

So far, there are only two books on Steel, published way back in 1963 and 1981, respectively: one deals with her literary works in general (written by Daya Patwardhan) and the other is her biography (written by Violet Powell). Hence, this current volume featuring essays on diverse aspects of her writings will be the first of its kind to focus entirely on critical analyses of Steel's Raj oeuvre. In light of the prominence of Steel in Raj literature, and her contribution to imperialist feminism, such a book-length study of Steel's opus is long overdue.

This edited collection goes beyond Steel's most famous and widely discussed work, *On the Face of the Waters*. It sheds light on her lesser-known novels like *The Potter's Thumb* and *Voices in the Night: A Chromatic Fantasia*, as well as draws readers' attention to her rich array of short fiction. In fact, many of the stories covered here have never been brought under the lens of literary criticism before. In

addition, this collection goes further by including different genres of her writing: housekeeping advice, journalism, and letters to editors. Thus, the chapters here bring in original, as well as refreshing, analyses of her fiction and nonfiction.

The first chapter highlights Steel's reference to the Mutiny of 1857, but instead of focusing on her "Mutiny" novel, *On the Face of the Waters*, it throws light on her largely ignored 1900 novel, *Voices in the Night: A Chromatic Fantasia*. Throughout this novel, Danielle Nielsen notes there are numerous allusions to, as well as direct mentions of, the uprising, including reminiscences of those tumultuous times and recreation of the fashion trends of that bygone era at a fancy dress ball. Steel appears to continue her potent argument that she boldly placed in her more renowned 1896 novel, namely that women are not to be solely blamed for the weaknesses of an arrogant, overconfident, male-chauvinist Empire that overlooks women's courage, sacrifices, and contributions. Instead, she presents in this novel how women and children like Grace, Lesley, and the little boy Jerry are responsible for the continued safety and stability of the Empire. Invested with imperial responsibilities, they perform their duties well and prove to be more efficient in safeguarding the Raj than Lieutenant-Governor George Arbuthnot and his soldiers. Thereby, Nielsen argues, "As a self-proclaimed feminist who believed in the power of Anglo-Indian women to maintain the colony, Steel revises the uprising narrative, creating women who protect and serve rather than hinder the Empire and its men when she provides these fictional women with the most important responsibilities in *Voices in the Night*" (28).

Amrita Banerjee, in the second chapter, presents Steel's nonconforming portrayal of "fallen" women. To do so, she chooses to discuss courtesans like Dilarâm, Sobrai, or Chandni from novels like *The Potter's Thumb* (1894) and *The Voices in the Night: A Chromatic Fantasia*. These women, deemed fallen and disrespectable, find themselves asserting their independent agency outside the precincts of social acceptability. In so doing, they not only violate limits prescribed by patriarchy but also formulate their own devices of resistance to the overreaching imperial hegemony. Thus, Banerjee avers, although Steel seems to follow the stereotypical depiction of native males, she gives

a much more balanced treatment to these fallen women in her fiction, and one can even detect a semblance of (almost grudging) admiration for them. And Banerjee maintains that such a gendered reading of Steel's character opens up the possibilities of exploring a female version of the colonial interface, thereby complementing the one-sided masculinist ethos exhibited by Kipling and other male authors.

Chapter three shifts focus from Steel's novels to her short fiction. LeeAnne Richardson critically studies her anthology, *In the Permanent Way and Other Stories*. She notes there are largely two types of stories: one where the main character is Indian, and the other with an English main character. In the second category, we mostly see Steel's famous character, James Nathaniel Craddock, narrating his tales, and these "Craddock stories" are more popular. "In the Permanent Way" is one of those better-known Craddock stories of the volume, and, yet, it is not the first story the book begins with. Instead, the opening story is "Shub'rat," which Richardson describes as difficult in every way, with a Muslim man at the centre of the narrative and featuring religious fanaticism, racial violence, and a strange kind of selfless love. Yet what is noteworthy is the series of (often incongruous) binaries that the first two paragraphs of the story present, and Richardson proposes that the narrative strategy of these two opening paragraphs of the first story, and incidentally of the entire anthology, offers a hermeneutic for reading the volume as colonial theory. Richardson's special focus on the first and last stories in Steel's 1897 volume—"Shub'rat" and "Music Hath Charms"— demonstrates the power of this hermeneutic to make meaning out of stories that are otherwise inscrutable, to recognize irony in the narrative voice, and to give insight into Steel's understanding of character and identity.

In the fourth chapter, Helen Pike Bauer concentrates on Steel's short stories, such as "In a Citron Garden," "Young Lochinvar," "At a Girls' School," "The Wings of a Dove," and "Suttu," to evaluate her illustration of Indian girls and girlhood. In so doing, Bauer underscores the manner in which Steel both invokes as well as challenges stereotypes. While on the one hand she places her Indian girls in their local environment, whereby the image of a misogynist and oppressive native society is reinforced, on the other hand, even amid all the repressive mores, the

dynamism and verve of these growing girls are given full play in Steel's creative imagination. In Bauer's words, "she shows their youth, energy, drive, wit, and hope, all before the full pressure of adulthood settles on them" (122). The portrayal of girl characters like Kirpo, Pertâbi, and Fâtma reveals both the author's sympathy and her deep knowledge of the Indian girls she had garnered in her capacity as an inspectress of girls' schools. By closely reading her short fiction and analyzing her depiction of Indian girlhood, this chapter widens our understanding of, and gives us a new perspective on, Steel's narrative creativity.

Flora Annie Steel's reputation as the "female Rudyard Kipling" makes the comparison of her literary works with that of Kipling's both tempting and exciting. Therefore, in chapter five, I focus on the subject of gender and gender-based performance that is inseparably intertwined with the functioning of the machinery of colonialism. In light of this odd but inevitable equation between gender and imperialism, I maintain that it is fascinating to study how Kipling, as well as the "female Kipling," represent a space engendered by gender rules: zenana, that is, the purdah space. Zenana means the women's quarters where women of respectable Indian families spend their lives in seclusion from the outer world. This chapter focuses on two short stories—"Beyond the Pale" by Kipling and "Faizullah" by Steel—to observe and analyze each story's style of portraying the purdah space and the purdah woman (purdahnashin). In both the short stories, it emerges in her reading that the purdahnashin figure serves as the contact zone between colonizers and colonized.

In chapter six, Alan Johnson presents to us what he terms "wild civility." While home is the space recommended for women, the space outside home, such as the jungle and the frontier, is considered to be the masculine realm. Johnson sets out to find what happens when Anglo-Indian women interact with nondomestic territories, either physically or imaginatively. With Steel's interest lying beyond the tame space of the bungalow, her stance on and representation of that space that symbolizes the oxymoronic "wild civility" becomes more arresting. By focusing on her bestselling novel, *On the Face of the Waters*, and her memsahib guidebook, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (1890), Johnson shows how Steel frequently inverts these images,

with the bungalow and the city signifying wildness and mobility, even as her depictions of jungle and countryside yield to confinement and orderliness. Through her imaginative geographies, Steel challenges the masculine ethos of the Empire and provides us with an alternative to the traditional narrative of rule.

The seventh chapter goes beyond Steel's fiction to deliberate on her household manual that the previous chapter has already touched upon, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*. Ralph Crane and Anna Johnston affirm, "Such a text dramatized current debates about domestic politics and family values, and they often tied these to ideas of the nation, and, overseas, of Empire" (218). With this book, where Steel and her co-author Grace Gardiner strongly express their belief that "the proper administration of even a small household needs both brain and heart" (16), they appear to draw parallels between the management of the kitchen and the governance of the Raj. When encumbered with the grand responsibility of ruling a colony with a civilizing mission, the Anglo-Indian community needed to maintain the very highest standards of performance even in as commonplace and routine an activity as taking meals. In the charged atmosphere, living among the "inferior" races, it was important to "dine," and not merely "eat." Therefore, the distinctive quality of Steel's maternal imperialism, as expressed in such avowals of conservatism, must not be ignored.

The final chapter of this volume aims to redress a lack of scholarly attention on an entirely different (and often overlooked) aspect of Steel's writings: her newspaper correspondence. Gráinne Goodwin analyzes a selection of Steel's letters to the *Times* between 1897 and 1910. These letters to the editor were on Indian policy, especially on three issues: the Contagious Diseases Acts, Indian participation in the South African War, and the influence of press propaganda on Indian politics and growing nationalist unrest in the metropole. Goodwin asserts that Steel's newspaper correspondence was "an attempt to find a discursive space where she could exhibit her colonial and political competency, intervene in and ignite debate, and sustain her identification with the Raj" (246). These letters written after her repatriation, hence, create for her a textual space to buttress her ability and competence to get involved in and comment on Indian

political issues, thereby emphasizing her knowledge and experience in British India.

Therefore, the chapters in this present volume have covered a wide range of topics. In addition to critical analyses of Steel's short fiction, novels, and writings in other genres, there is analyses of Steel's overall contribution to memsahib's literature, her stature as the "female Rudyard Kipling," her relationship with and literary contribution to British India, and her position as a "maternal imperialist." In detecting the intraracial tensions in the gaze of a memsahib writer like Steel, and studying how she, a colonizer woman, sees and shows the colonized women, this volume not only scrutinizes the types of femininity and/or feminism in Steel's oeuvre but also underscores the immense significance of the contributions made by an "unconventional" memsahib of British India.

**Notes**

1. Extract from the review of *On the Face of the Waters* in *Academy* in the year 1896, p. 488.
2. See, for example, Croker's *The Company's Servant* (1907) and *In Old Madras* (1913), and Perrin's *East of Suez* (1901) and *The Anglo-Indians* (1912).
3. For examples of stories where Steel focuses on natives, see "Lal," "Ramchunderji," "Heera Nund," "Feroza," "The Village Legacy," and other such tales in her anthology, *The Flower of Forgiveness* (1894).
4. Maud Diver's *Lilamani: A Study in Possibilities* (1911) is the tale of an interracial marriage between an Englishman and an Indian woman. Diver sketches the eponymous protagonist in great detail and in a highly positive light; Aruna is Lilamani's niece who falls in love with her son, Roy.

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