PREPARING FOR A PILGRIMAGE;
RICHARD F. BURTON, DISGUISE, AND INDIA

by

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ABSTRACT

Richard F. Burton's *Pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in Disguise* explores a process of achievement. In 1853, by using a disguise, Burton successfully completed the Haj, a Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. This thesis uses Burton's own writings on India, as well as books and material written about Burton and research materials retrieved from the British and Huntington Libraries, to reveal certain challenges that Burton faced in the unknown land as one of the locals. To dress, speak, act, look, and perform all the religious and social customs can be a very difficult task. Therefore, this thesis examines all of these aspects one at a time, gradually building a complete picture of Burton's experiences in India and his pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

The goal of this thesis is to uncover Burton's disguise. In order to reach this goal, first the thesis examines Burton's ability to master different languages. We are informed by Burton himself that he was fluent in twenty-nine different languages. This makes Burton an extraordinary individual, and it certainly makes him stand out in the East India Company. We have a vast amount of Burton's writings, translated literature, and poetry all of which demonstrate his ability to understand and use languages. Secondly, the thesis will focus on Burton's conversion to Islam as well as the process of his learning every social custom of this religion. This required Burton to study Koran and do many Sufi exercises. How after such a short time did Burton adjust his lifestyle and live like a Muslim. What were his religious antics? How were they performed? Why were
these social manners important? The thesis aims to answer all these questions in its examination of Burton’s life in the Orient. Thirdly, since India was Burton’s stage on which he acted out different characters, the thesis will examine Burton’s disguises. Burtons spent months and years getting comfortable with his disguises of a Dervish, a Pathan, and Mirza Abdullah. These incarnations presented a great challenge, but they eventually became easy for Burton, as his knowledge of religion, customs, culture, and languages increased. This thesis will show how all of these elements come together and enabled Burton to undertake his epic pilgrimage.
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CHAPTER ONE: PERSONAL ADVENTURE

1.1 The Haj

The two-week voyage from London to Alexandria on April 3rd 1853 was uneventful for Richard F. Burton, who used the time to grow his beard and get into his disguise of Mirza Abdullah. It was a few years since Burton had lived publicly as Mirza Abdullah. Burton could never have undertaken this exploit without the experience and knowledge he had gained in India from 1842 to 1849 when he spent a great deal of time studying the life of a Muslim. He had been preparing and qualifying himself both physically and mentally for this adventure for many years. Burton used disguise often in India in order to perfect his every action, from a grunt on drinking a glass of water to the personal hygiene of a devout Muslim. During this journey, we see Burton bringing together all the elements of disguise that he had learned in India. Even his own people are unable to recognize him. If they had, it would have involved a great deal of danger for Burton:

I was left kicking my heels at the Great Man’s Gate for a long time, and heard somebody say, “Let the dirty nigger wait.” Long inured to patience, however, I did wait, and when the Consul consented to see me I presented him with a bit of paper, as if were a money order. On it was written, “Don’t recognize me; I am Dick Burton, but I am not safe yet. Give me some money, which will be returned from London, and don’t take any notice of me.” He, however, frequently afterwards, when it was dark, sent for me, and once safe in his private room, showed me abundance of hospitality.¹
In this journey, Burton had a clear objective in mind of what he wished to accomplish. He wished to visit the two most sacred places of Islam, Mecca and Medina, as a Muslim. What was Burton hoping to gain as a result of such a journey, apart from sheer adventure, sense of achievement, and achieving what others failed to achieve? Burton felt that only by travelling in a disguise of a Muslim could he experience the inner peace of these sacred locations. Burton knew, from his experience in India as Abdullah, the difference between the way an insider was treated by the natives and the veneer of acceptance offered to those who were the outsiders. Burton wanted to know how a genuine pilgrim felt reaching the heart of Islam, so he chose the path of a true believer.

Once Burton reached Alexandria, he stayed with a friend for a number of weeks and made the final preparations for his pilgrimage. While waiting for some papers necessary on his journey, Burton reviewed the Koran and perfected his Muslim prayers. At the same time, Burton began to feel that Mirza Abdullah was too grand a character for a rootless traveller. He changed his disguise accordingly and transformed himself into a wandering dervish equipped with the knowledge of magic, horoscopes, and some doctoring:

No character in the Moslem world is so proper for disguise as that of darwaysh. It is assumed by all ranks, ages and creeds; by the nobleman who had been disgraced at court, and by the peasant who is too idle to till the ground; ...He may pray or not, marry or remain single, as he pleases, be respectable in cloth of frieze as in cloth of gold, and no one asks him—the characterized vagabond—Why he comes here? or Wherefore he goes there? He may wend his way on foot alone, or ride his Arab mare followed by a dozen servants; he is equally feared without weapons, as
swaggering through the streets armed to the teeth. The more haughty and offensive he is to people, the more they respect him; a decided advantage to the traveller of choleric temperament.2

Once these elements were perfected, the stage was set for Burton’s pilgrimage to the Muslim holy city of Mecca, which would last nine months. While Burton was in Alexandria, he also organized some equipment. Some of these items were personal, such as clothes, soap, and comb. Others were more exotic, such as a goatskin water bag, a Persian rug and a wooden box containing doctor’s tools. Also hidden away in the pockets of his clothing were surveying instruments, a dagger, a pen, a pocket book, and some money.

The journey from Alexandria to Cairo took three scorching days. Here Burton’s disguise was changed again. It was vital for Burton to ensure that his disguise was suitable and perfect for every environment and every situation. Now, Burton’s new disguise was to that of a Pathan, an Indian born of Afghan parents, educated in Rangoon. This certainly would also make his cover story possible, since he knew all the necessary languages, Hindustani, Persian, and Arabic. It was important to make sure that Burton responded correctly to the first greetings from other men whether he was in the bazaar, on a camel, or in a mosque: “What is thy name? What news? Whence comst thou?”3 Burton seems to have had no difficulty switching characters, since he had played them all so well in India.

The journey to the holy cities through the desert was very difficult: “Diseases such as cholera and typhoid kill some pilgrims. Also exhaustion, sun
and heatstroke took inevitable toll on travellers and there was always the threat of attack by the Bedawin tribe." Upon reaching the city of Mecca, "we all went to barbers’ booths, where we were shaved, had our beards trimmed and our nails cut, saying prayers all the while. At last the moment that I was sent for."

Burton's first impressions of Mecca are vivid. He recalls that in the middle of the massive colonnaded plaza stood the famed Kaabah, towards which every Muslim turned for his daily prayer. The Black Stone, kissed by all pilgrims, was fixed on the wall. Burton recollects his first encounter with it in the following way:

The scene is one of the wildest excitement...men prostrate themselves on the pavement...shedding floods of tears and pouring forth frenzied ejaculations...the most careless...never contemplate it for the first time without fear and awe.

There was only one entrance to the Kaabah through a narrow door, seven feet off the ground, into which few pilgrims were allowed a few at a time. An official, the keeper of the silver padlock of the Kaabah, sat with Burton and enquired about his nation and other particulars:

A blunder, a hasty action, a misjudged word, a prayer or a bow, not strictly the right sibboleth, and, my bones would have whitened the desert sand. This did not, however, prevent my carefully observing the scene during our long prayers and making a rough plan with a pencil upon my white ihram.

Following his nerve-wreaking but enlightening and unique experience, Burton was finally entitled to call himself Hajji and don the green turban.
1.2  *Non-Muslims and Temporary Converts*

Burton had achieved his personal goal of becoming a *Hajji* and gaining the right to wear a green turban where many others had failed. Burton was fascinated with the accounts he had read of the five other Europeans who had made it to the Haj but failed to reach the Black Stone. In the appendices of his volumes of *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage of Al-Madinah to Meccah*, Burton summarizes the voyages of others in some details. It all started first in 1503, when an Italian traveller named Ludovico de Varthema made the journey. He, just like all the others who followed him, did not go to Mecca as born believer. Varthema temporarily embraced the religion of Islam, so that he could dispel the widespread myth that Mohammed’s coffin was suspended in mid-air by giant magnets. Joseph Pitt, an Englishman, was captured at sea by Muslim pirates early in the eighteenth century. He was forcibly converted to Islam and taken on the pilgrimage by his Algerian master. In private, Pitts ate pork, counted the Prophet “a bloody imposter,” and eventually escaped and made his way back to England. Giovanni Fanati was a deserter from an Italian army who became a convert to Islam in Albania in order to escape a prison sentence. He seduced Fatimah, the favourite wife of a Turkish general, and was forced to run away. Fanati went to Egypt and then to Mecca, writing a memoir of his betrayals and plundering with what Burton described as “not candour but sheer insensibility.”

In 1807, Domingo Badia Leblich, a Spanish botanist and geologist, travelled to
Mecca. He was a wealthy Muslim scholar, who had little knowledge of the Arabic language. For this reason he found it very difficult to communicate with others and to get into the inner circle of the Kaabah shrine. The last visit was made in 1814 by a famous Swiss ethnologist, Johann Ludwig Burckhardt. Burckhardt discovered Petra and explored the source of Niger, but even this great man eventually revealed himself as a European. He confessed that when he reached Mecca he was very sick and did not have the energy to visit all the holy sites. When he finally died in Cairo, someone discovered that he had the formula of Islam rituals written out on the soles of his feet.

Burton’s case is very different from that of the other European pilgrims. For one, he had had a great deal of practice disguising himself in India. Burton also knew local languages as well as the local rules, regulations, and culture. He had also practiced and learned every aspect of Islam. Burton also had major advantages over others, because he had mingled with Muslims of every variety in India and had learned many subtleties of the Muslim society.

Richard Burton’s *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage of Al-Madinah to Meccah* has “all the characteristics of high adventure—an exotic location, deliberate preparation, disguise, setbacks, hardships, and danger.” In this book, Burton describes and sketches Mecca’s central shrine, the Kaaba, and his participation in all the rituals associated with the pilgrimage. Burton feels the same excitement as any other genuine pilgrim because he has a genuine interest in Islamic practices
and beliefs, which enables him to enjoy the experiences of his pilgrimage and makes him “the only European who had beheld the inner and religious life of the Muslim as one of themselves.” However, Burton could not enjoy his experiences without a disguise. After all, the journey was perilous even for a true Muslim, as transportation problems, unfavourable weather, looting, and murder were only some of the problems faced by pilgrims. In difficult circumstances, Burton survived by making his body and mind one:

The mind is influenced through the body. Though your mouth glows, and your skin is parched, yet you feel no languor,—the effect of humid heat; your lungs are lighted, your sight brightens, your memory recovers its tone, and your spirits become exuberant. Your fancy and imagination are powerfully aroused, and the wildness and sublimity of the scenes around you, stir up all the energies of your soul, whether for exertion, danger, or strife Your morale improves; you become frank and cordial, hospitable and single-minded.”

Burton’s focus on the body and its relation to mind can well be seen in his evolving disguises—his effort to make outward appearance consonant with the state of mind required for his pilgrimage. And there were to be many difficult moments during this journey. Transportation, weather, looting and killing by other tribes were major problems faced by many pilgrims.

Burton’s disguise as Mirza Abdullah, a Darwaysh (dervish) hakim (doctor) of colourful reputation and a Pathan (Afghan from India), proved remarkably successful. This identity was built up carefully and modified frequently, often by fits and starts, in response to the difficulties that his disguise created during his
passage towards Mecca. Burton started in Alexandria as Mirza Abdullah; later, he became Shaykh, thus effecting the transition from Shiah to Sunni. His initial mistake of assuming Persian, and therefore Shiah identity could not be easily forgotten by those around him, who it seems looked upon him as a Shiah posing as Sunni:

Throughout my journey, even in Arabia, though I drew my knife every time an offensive hint (of actually being Persian) was thrown out, the ill-fame clung to me like the shirt of Nessus.13

First in Alexandria and then in Cairo, Burton began to appear publicly as a Pathan educated at Rangoon, in order to explain his linguistic and other errors. He also assumed the professional status of a hakim and a Darwaysh. In both cases, the change was to ensure his own safety as well as help him blend in with the rest of the pilgrims. Both of these disguises allowed Burton an unscripted, subjective perspective from the vantage point of which he could thrive as an adventurer and a disguise artist, as well as live as a model, if idiosyncratic, Muslim. In a poem from his journal, Burton expresses his feelings about his wandering in different lands and assuming different identities:

All the world over. I wander, in lands that I never have trod, 
Are the people eternally seeking for the signs and steps of a God? 
Westward towards the ocean, and Northward ayont the snow, 
Do they all stand gazing, as ever? And what do the wisest know? 

Is life, then, a dream and delusion? And where shall the dreamer awake? 
Is the world seen like shadows on water? And what if the mirror break? 
Shall it pass, as a camp that is struck, as a tent that is gathered and gone, 
From the sands that were lamp-lit at eve, and at morning are level and lone?14
Burton thus seems to have given a lot of thought to his life, his choices, and his disguises.

Rice advances the idea that Burton’s pilgrimage was not a transgressive act, when considered from a theological standpoint. He claims that Burton actually embraced Islam, “albeit of an unorthodox variety (he apparently became a Sufi-influenced Ismaili), and that his pilgrimage to Mecca was no more than his right as a Muslim.” Rice bases the evidence of Burton’s “conversion” on Burton’s descriptions of his initiation into the Sufi brotherhood in Sindh and the Races That Inhabit the Valley of the Indus. He also points to the fact that Burton’s comments on Islam and Islamic culture are almost invariably sympathetic and respectful:

The world is the Muslim’s prison, the tomb his stronghold, and Paradise His journey’s end...To the Muslim, time is but a point in illimitable eternity, life is but a step from the womb to the tomb...He has no great secret to learn. The Valley of Death has no shadow for him; no darkness of uncertainty and doubt horrifies his fancy...As in Christianity as in El Islam, eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, nor hath fancy conceived the spiritual joy of those who in mundane life have qualified themselves for heavenly futurity.

Some of his other biographers see Burton as merely investigating Islam, as he did with several different forms of the Christian religions. These same biographers also suggest that Burton’s observance of Islam was a means to an end rather than a statement of true faith. Burton spent his life discovering different religions and cultures with an open mind. Burton especially enjoyed
Islam, because it was not just a religion but a lifestyle lived according to certain rules. In the case of Sufism, the most attractive feature for Burton was its elaborate symbolism, which created a

religion of beauty, whose leading principle is that of earthly the perfect type of heavenly love. Its high priests are Anacreonite poets, its rites wine, music, and dancing, spiritually considered, and its place of worship meadow and gardens, where the perfume of the rose and the song of the nightingale, by charming the heart, are supposed to improve the mind of the listener. This is through Epicurism in the midst of one of the most gloomy of faiths: the contrast is striking.17

Such elaborate symbolism was a favourite device of Arabic and Persian poets, which had an important effect on Burton’s life, as he developed a great appreciation for it.

Burton investigated and saw no difficulty in embracing Islam and the creed of Sufism as part of his search for understanding. He learned the prayers and memorized about a quarter of the Koran. He conscientiously fasted and did spiritual exercises to gain knowledge and experience. Islam provided Burton with enjoyment and peace, while allowing him to enjoy complex ritual worship that this religion had to offer.

Burton was drawn to the magnetism of Islam, in which for him lay the diverse cultures of Islamic people. By accepting the Islamic faith, he gained the ability to move between the Muslim cultural world and the Western culture as an observer and a participant with intimate understanding of each culture. In fact, Burton was the first European to make a successful complete pilgrimage to
Mecca. His predecessors (among them G. Finati and Joseph Pitts) had compromised their standing by not embracing Islam, and as the result they failed to provide full and accurate details of the city and the shrine, the Kaaba. Instead, Burton makes the pilgrimage to Mecca after a formal declaration of his conversion to Islam. As a new convert (and a European), he would run the risk of being unpopular with the locals; certainly he would be the subject of native scrutiny. Therefore, Burton had to be a “real” Muslim, which also meant a “real” native:

My spirit could not bend to own myself a Burma, a renegade—to be pointed at and shunned and catechized, an object of suspicion to the many and of contempt to all.¹⁸

Burton was thus in a paradoxical position that allowed him to be free of obvious scrutiny (and free to observe, document, and categorize all that came his way) while enforcing on himself an unrelenting vigilance in order to avoid this scrutiny.

1.3 The Writer and Identity

For Burton, assuming the Oriental identity was the only way to learn about the daily routine of Muslim life. He makes a reference to a “personal narrative” in the title of his account of the Haj, suggesting that he is aware that the individuality and daring of his enterprise will appeal to his readers. In his Discovery of the Source of the Nile, John Hanning Speke wrote that Burton urged...
him to adopt Arab dress in order to attract less attention. Speke, however, refused to lower himself:

"I was more comfortable and better off in my flannel shirt, long togs and wide awake than I should have been, both mentally and physically, had I degraded myself." Burton has underlined the latter part of this sentence [in his copy of Speke's book] and scribbled in the margin: "Rot"\(^{19}\)

Certainly, Speke positions himself as an inassimilable subject in relation to his metropolitan audience: such was Burton's view of his traveling partner. Burton, on the other hand, saw himself as an insider who had penetrated and participated in every exotic and forbidden mystery.

Many critics certainly applaud Burton. Edward Said's view of Burton, for example, is very positive. He gives Burton credit for learning about different cultures, religions, and languages:

No man who did not know Arabic and Islam as well as Burton could have gone as far as he did in actually becoming a pilgrim to Mecca and Medina. So what we read in his prose is the history of a consciousness negotiating its way through an alien culture by virtue of having successfully absorbed its system of information and behavior. Burton's freedom was in having shaken himself loose of his European origins enough to be able to live as an Oriental.\(^{20}\)

Said's view is that most Westerners wrote about the Eastern world as outsiders, seeing the "Orientals" as "the others," whereas Burton had lived in their culture seeking to transcend the subject/object dichotomy.

Burton's *Personal Narrative* is more a story about Shaykh Abdullah than a story about the Muslims or the Haj. The narrator has to be both a voyeur and an exhibitionist, enacting an even more embellished and legitimate Muslim identity
than those of "real" Muslims around him. Burton takes great pains to observe true Muslims' behaviour without exposing himself. Yet Burton, hoping to pass for a "native" Muslim on a pilgrimage to Mecca, is never content just to blend in, to be inconspicuous, to be one of the crowd. In a situation that would appear to call for self-effacement more than anything else, he stages his identity in the most flamboyant of ways, constantly drawing the attention of his Muslim companions to his learning, his linguistic facility, his skill with medicine, his sexual charm, and his unusual courage. He corrects Muslim divines on Koranic law, performs "miracles" when his ship to Mecca is mired in mud, calls ostentatiously for food in the midst of an attack by the Bedouins, and flirts conspicuously with the wives of his patients, noting with delight his companions' comments about "the Afghan Haji's obstinacy and recklessness." His moment of great tension—and triumph—occurs when he meets a "real" Pathan, who he fears might unmask him. Instead, the Pathan, asked to guess Burton's nationality, identifies him as a fellow Pathan. Burton is also triumphant—though less so—during those moments when other Englishmen take him to be a native:

One evening a party of officers were lounging outside Shepherd's Hotel, at Cairo. As they sat talking and smoking, there passed repeatedly in front of them an Arab in his loose flowing robes, with head proudly erect, and the peculiar swinging stride of those sons of the desert. As he strode backwards and forwards he drew nearer to the little knot of officers, till at last, as he swept by, the flying folds of his burnous brushed against one of the officers. 'Damn that nigger's impudence!' said the officer; 'if he does that again I'll kick him.' To his surprise the dignified Arab suddenly halted, wheeled round, and exclaimed, 'Well, damn it, Hawkins, that's a nice way to welcome a fellow. 'By G—d, it's Ruffian Dick,' cried Hawkins. And
Ruffian Dick it was, utterly transformed out of all resemblance to a European.\textsuperscript{22}

Burton desired not simply to pass for a native in the East, but also to be (half) suspected in England that he had actually gone native and that he had put a dangerous distance between himself and the cultural appurtenances of the West, particularly "civilization" and Christianity.

In the \textit{Personal Narrative} there is more at work than just a sensational display of Burton's manipulations of identity through his proficiency in Eastern languages and his vast knowledge of the Muslim culture. Burton had worked hard to get to build up his new identity. His desire was not only to blend in, but to stand out; not only to see, but to be seen, and to be seen as one wishes to be seen. Burton sought to create a model of native behaviour for other Muslims to admire and imitate. Hence, Burton enacts representations that establish him as both an actor and creator of a native identity. In later years, Burton spoke of this desire to exist in a constant flux of identities as of a somewhat embarrassing mental requirement:

I can scarcely persuade myself that great events are brought about by mere imposture, whose very nature is feebleness: zeal, enthusiasm, fanaticism, which are of their nature strong and aggressive, better explain the abnormal action of man on man. On the other hand, it is impossible to ignore the dear delights of fraud and deception, the hourly pleasure taken by some minds in finessing through life, and in playing a part till by habit it becomes nature.\textsuperscript{23}
The delight of his disguise, the playacting, and the deception of others are inevitably bound up with reminders that this is more than a game. After all, if Burton is playing a game, it is a kind of “Great Game” that is played in Kim, where the penalty for failure is no less than death. Besides, in the *Personal Narrative* there is always the fear that the natives might be observing Burton, rather than he them. His attendant, Mohammed al-Basyuni (“the boy Mohammed”), identifies Burton unerringly as a European upon a chance discovery of his sextant, and he has to be argued out of this belief by the other pilgrims. On the road to Medina, Burton feels himself watched during his (ritual) ablutions and prayers; at other moments, he has to evade inquisitive and observant companions.

Moreover, while Burton (and his companions) may be convinced of the effectiveness of his performance as a native, there is always the fear that he may be the “wrong” kind of native. The various extended descriptions of the stratagems Burton had to employ in order to secretly make notes and sketches also register this equivocal sense of mastery and threat. Arabs are represented as suspicious of activities such as note-taking, measurement-taking, mapmaking, and surveying. This is an attitude that Burton attributes to ignorance and superstition:

*He [the traveler] must, however beware of sketching before the Badawin, who would certainly proceed to extreme measure, suspecting him to be a spy or a sorcerer. Nothing so effectually puzzles these people as the*
Frankish habit of putting everything on paper; their imaginations are set to work, and then the worst may be expected from them. Yet Burton seems fully capable of eluding the putative paranoia of the Arabs. When he actually does gain entrance, through the intercession of “the boy Mohammed,” to the Kaaba itself (not by any means, a routine part of an ordinary Muslim’s pilgrimage, as he is careful to inform his readers), he acknowledges his fear openly: “My feelings were of the trapped-rat description.” However, he is still collected enough to continue with his mission:

This did not, however, prevent my carefully observing the scene during our long prayers, and making a rough plan with pencil upon my white Ihram [pilgrim’s robe]. At last, when Burton is face-to-face with the Kaaba, he is not overcome by a sense of religious awe as are other pilgrims (though he does hint that his emotional response to the sight of the shrine is deeper and richer than theirs.) He is filled, instead, with a sense of mastery and a sense of his difference from all his companions:

There at last lay, the bourn of my long and weary pilgrimage, realizing the plans and hopes of many and many a year...how few have looked upon the celebrated shrine! I may truly say that, of all the worshippers who clung weeping to the curtains, or who pressed their beating hearts to the stone, none felt for moment a deeper emotion than did the Hajj from the far north. It was as if the poetical legends of the Arab spoke truth, and that the waving wings of angles, not the sweet breeze of morning, were agitating and swelling the black covering of the shrine. But, to confess humbling truth, theirs was the high feeling of religious enthusiasm, mine was the ecstasy of gratified pride.
When Burton assumes his disguises, he seems to do so with the fullest faith in his ability to and conquer what his contemporises saw as the insuperable divide of East and West. Thus, perhaps for him, training as a Muslim in preparation for his pilgrimage involves making an inventory of certain elaborately ritualized behaviours and "unnatural acts":

Look, for instance, at the Indian Muslim drinking a glass of water. With us the operation is simple enough, but his performance includes no fewer than five novelties. In the first place he clutches his tumbler as though it was the throat of a foe; secondly, he ejaculates, "In the name of Allah the Compassionate, the Merciful!" before wetting his lips; thirdly, he imbibes the content, swallowing them, not sipping them as he ought to do, and ending with a satisfied grunt: fourthly, before setting down the cup, he sighs forth, "Praise be to Allah!"—of which you understand the full meaning in the Desert; and, fifthly, he replies, "May Allah make it pleasant to thee!" In answer to his friend's polite, "Pleasurably and health!" Also he is careful to avoid the irreligious action of drinking the pure element in a standing position.

Such details in Burton’s writings were a novel change for mid-nineteenth century readers. Burton is determined to show his readers that he, unlike other writers, truly understood the intimate particulars of Eastern cultures.

Burton establishes his international reputation as a writer on the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, and, in a religious sense, he becomes a life-long pilgrim. Burton is of particular interest to scholars, because this pilgrimage was done in a disguise. Unlike in other cases of attempted disguise by Europeans, Burton’s disguise and pilgrimage did not begin with the Haj. Rather, this was the culmination of a lifetime of study. This pilgrimage began with Burton’s early life
and career in India, which is the main subject of this thesis. Isabel Burton, in a biography of her late husband, recognized the pivotal role of India, and especially of Burton’s time in Sindh, in preparing him for his life of a pilgrim:

His career as a dervish in Scinde greatly helped him. His mind was both practical and imaginative; he set himself to imagine and note down every contingency that might arise, and one by one he studied each separate thing until he was master of it.  

Therefore, Burton’s pilgrimage must not be looked at as a flirtation with the Orient, but as a life-long love affair with “the other.”

1.4 The Sources

The major source for this thesis is Sir Richard F. Burton himself. His works are amazing in their range, detail, insight, erudition, complexity, and caustic humour. He wrote four books on India in less than two years. His first work, *Goa and the Blue Mountain or Six Months of Sick Leave*, is an account of the varied inhabitants of Goa, the Hindus of Malabar, and the mountain-dwelling Todas. His *Scinde; or, The Unhappy Valley* is an account of his journey through Sindh, and its narrative is addressed to the archetypical Mr. John Bull. This book is filled with information about Indian life, religions, and customs as well as biographical information buried in unexpected places and often disguised in anecdotes or dialogues. Take, for example, some of the rules (on the subject of politeness and sociability), as explained by Burton’s munshi, on how to act and speak in public:
Whenever any thing is said to you, you will be pleased to stroke your beard gravely. With the right hand for goodness' sake! Frown a little, roll your head much with a heavy ferocious roll, and ejaculate syllable by syllable...by moving your head much and slowly, by looking duly wise, seldom smiling, and above all things by strictly following the Bishop of Bristol's "First Rule of Conversation"—Silence—you will do remarkably well for a stranger.\textsuperscript{30}

In these conversations, Burton gives the reader information about himself or reveals states of mind or attitude, telling stories about men who in the end are no other than Lieutenant Burton himself.

Burton's third book, \textit{Sindh and the Races that Inhabit the Valley of the Indus}, is an ethnological study. This book is very detailed on many subjects, including local legends and languages, state of society and government, Muslim and Hindu education, castes and local tribes, marriage and funerals, and religion. There are five useful appendixes containing Sindhi grammar, word pronunciation and similar helpful information.

Burton's \textit{Falconry in the Valley of the Indus} is a short hunting book on training hawks and flying them in an attractive manner. This book is valuable to Burton scholars because in the appendix he includes a somewhat elaborate "Postscript," which is Burton's autobiographical material on his time in India. In this postscript, Burton offers important details and confessions about himself: "What scenes he saw! What adventures he went through! But who would believe, even if he ventured to detail them."\textsuperscript{31}

Burton's fifth book on India, called \textit{Scinde Revisited}, came about twenty-five years later. It was published in 1877, after Burton had visited India with his
wife Isabel, and it can be viewed as an addition of the *Scinde; or, the Unhappy Valley*. This book is also written in the form of a monologue addressed to Mr. John Bull, to whom Burton describes various scenes as he and his wife travel through Sindh. Sindh is still, Burton tells us, an unhappy valley, a compound of stone, sand and silt, with a climate dangerous and unpleasant. Once again, many interesting insights are gained during this personal adventure of Sindhian life, culture, customs, traditions, religions, and romance.

Among Burton's many great translations are the ten volumes of *The Book of Thousand Nights and a Night*. The tenth volume contains a "Terminal Essay," which is filled with details about Burton's life and times in India. It is divided into different section headings such as "Women," "Pornography," and "Pederasty." Not surprisingly for Victorian times, it was the section on homosexuality that caused deepest offence in England. Burton elaborated in this section and included observation and theories on sexual lore from his own experiences and research.

Isabel Burton's biography of her husband, *The Life of Captain Sir Richard F. Burton*, was published in 1893. It is in two very long, detailed volumes, with each volume being over 600 pages. Mrs. Burton has included extracts from Richard Burton's own private journals and correspondence. These are very important, because Isabel burned all of Burton's personal papers after his death. She also includes a great deal of his poetry, his travel notes, and a small autobiographical fragment entitled "Richard Burton's Little Autobiography," written in 1852. It is
only seven pages long and gives details on Burton’s childhood and youth, up to his departure for India. It was written for a purpose, namely if the Haj did not go as planned, Burton felt the need to supply his readers with the insight into his own thoughts and opinions “in case all may not have seen it, and many may not remember it.”33 Burton knew there were dangerous aspects to his pilgrimage and that he could lose his life.

Norman Penzer’s *An Annotated Bibliography of Sir Richard Francis Burton, K.C.M.G. (1921)* contains descriptions and details of Burton’s published work. Penzer’s comments, opinions, and facts are drawn from the memories of people who knew Burton in his later years. One such person was Dr. Fredrick G. Baker, Richard Burton’s personal physician. He spent a great deal of time with Burton at his house. According to Penzer, these two men strolled about the gardens, ate their meals together, and discussed everything. Most of their discussion was related to Burton’s writings as well as his personal life.

Fawn Brodie has a number of different views on Richard Burton in her biography, *The Devil Drives*. One of them is on his sexuality. She suggests that Burton was homosexual or bisexual because he kept the company of younger men and because of his detailed writings on the subject of sex. She also makes the suggestion that some correspondence between Miles and Swinburne shows that there may have been an occasional homosexual encounter even after Burton’s marriage:
His close association with sexually marginal characters like Swinburne, or with deviants like Hankey, as well as his explicit and detailed writings on the subject, his translation of such poetry as that of Catullus, served to keep the suspicion alive.

She suggests that Burton spent a great deal of time searching out information on sexual issues, because he was in some way trying to resolve his unfulfilled sexuality:

One should not forget that he was fascinated also with all forms of heterosexual— which most male homosexuals find utterly repugnant—His skill on the symbolically rich sport of fencing, and especially his scholarship on the history of the sword tend to suggest latent [bisexual] rather than active homosexuality, for active homosexuals do not content themselves with the symbol of the phallus, but seek out the real thing.

Using similar psychoanalytical techniques, she speculates upon Burton's sexual motives in every aspect of his behaviour and issues that interested him during and after his time in India. Is it possible that Brodie misunderstands this man, who was so complex in every aspect? Perhaps Burton had disguised himself as so many different people that it is difficult to see the real him, causing some biographers to rely on simplistic theories to explain his life.

Edward Rice's biography, Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton, The Secret Agent Who made the Pilgrimage to Mecca, Discovered the Kama Sutra, and Brought the Arabian Nights to the West, as title suggests, takes the view that Burton was a spy for the British Government while in India, and especially under the orders of Sir
Charles Napier when in Sindh. Rice suggests that since Burton knew many languages, customs and religions of this region and since Burton spent a great deal of his time with local people, this certainly made him a very good candidate for the job of spying:

Shortly he was able to get away from the post and, during the years of 1844 and early 1845, go out on series of missions for Napier, all the while keeping an eye on the Ismailis. He made numerous trips into the other parts of Sind, into the Indus delta, up the river itself, north to the edges of the Punjab and through the Baluchi hills.\textsuperscript{36}

In Rice's view, Burton was one of the agents who helped to put the Indian provinces of Sindh, Baluchistan, and Punjab (in present day Pakistan) firmly under British control.

The Huntington Library in San Marino, California contains Burton's library books (numbering about 2,700), pamphlets, periodicals, press cuttings, catalogues, manuscripts, maps, letters, and other sundry papers relating to Burton. The majority of the books are Burton's own copies of his works and the works of others. The margins of Burton's own copies contain annotations in his handwriting, some of which are very extensive. Burton's handwriting is very difficult to read, which makes deciphering his notes a time-consuming task. Some of the manuscripts have water damage, which occurred while they were housed in the Royal Anthropological Society in Britain. A recent addition to this collection is the Edward Metcalf collection of Burton's books, which was still in
boxes and uncatalogued at the time of writing. However, the Huntington Library officials were kind enough to let me go through a few of them for my research.

Two theses on Burton are also used in this study. Robert Davies' "The Warriors and Gentlemen Occidental Content of the Arabian Travel Narrative of Burton, Blunt and Lawrence" is a doctoral thesis presented at the Loughborough University of Technology, London. It is a comparative study of three British travelers and their views on the cultures they encountered. All three have influenced the development and understanding of societies other than their own. The relationship and cultural understanding between the East and West that Burton helped bring about were popular literature for ordinary people at the time. What made these men decide to undertake these arduous and dangerous trips? Davies suggests that Burton's motivation might have been a simple personal desire to travel, achieve, write, and explore.

The "Selected Correspondence of Sir Richard F. Burton 1841-1890" by Donald Young is a 1979 doctoral thesis from the University of Nebraska. This correspondence, 143 letters chosen out of 300, covers a period of some forty years of Richard Burton's life. For example the first letter from Karachi in this selection is by Burton to his cousin Sara dated November 1848.

I lose no time in replying to your note which conveyed to me the mournful tidings of our mutual loss. The letter took me quite by surprise. I was aware of my poor aunt's health having suffered but never imagined
that it was her last illness. You may be certain that I join with you in lamenting the event. Your mother had always my best relations and kindest friends; indeed she was the only one with whom I kept up a constant correspondence during the last six years.

At the distance of some 1500 miles all we can do is to resign ourselves to calamities, and I confess to you that judging from the number of losses that our family has sustained during the last six years, I feel that when able to return home I shall find no place capable of bearing that name. I hope, however, my dear cousin, that you or your dear sister will occasionally send me a line, informing me of your plan and movements.

Edward is still in Ceylon and war has ceased there. I keep this letter open for ten or twelve days longer, as that time will decide my fate. A furious affair has broken out in Mooltan and the Punjab and I have applied to the General commanding to go with him on his personal staff.

P.S. dated 25 November, 1848

I am not going to the siege of Mooltan, as the General with whom I had expected to be sent is recalled. Pray be kind enough to send on the enclosed to my father. I was afraid to direct it to him, in Italy, as it contains papers of some importance.

Letter signed as R.Burton.

These letters contain invaluable personal details of Burton’s everyday life and a chronicle of his myriad roles and moods. The letters are diverse in nature and range from Burton’s descriptions of his duties in military service, and personal letters to friends and family, to business correspondence with his publishers.

1.5 The Role of the Thesis

This thesis has many roles to play, just like Richard Burton himself. The aim here is to examine the problem of disguise. My particular interest in the subject is in the way disguise is used to describe the “other’s” culture and society. The first step towards assuming a disguise for Burton was the process of learning different languages. He is said to have mastered twenty nine different languages:
During his seven years in India, Richard passed in Hindostani, Guzaratee, Perisan, Maharatttee, Sindhee, Punjaubee, Arabic, Telugu, Pushtu (Afghan tongue), with Turkish and Armenian. 

Burton applied certain skills and methods to quickly master any language. Once Burton had a good command of a particular language, he would write a test in order to be considered fluent.

After mastering different languages, the second dimension was added to Burton’s learning process, namely the manners, customs, religions, and sociability. All of these Burton believed could only be learned successfully by living with local people and following their customs. All of this learning, either languages or Indian culture, was done through Burton’s Indian teachers, friends, lovers, and servants. These same people were also used by Burton to practice his newly learned skills and make sure that no mistakes were made.

Finally, Burton started to combine all of his learning into various disguises for himself. For Burton, to transform himself into any disguise was to change his identity completely and assume the identity of the other, which was the outcome of many years of hard work, learning, testing, risk-taking, and a desire to pass as a native. By using a disguise to build an individual identity Burton became that person.

After becoming successful at creating an interior disguise, Burton added the exterior dimension, the narrative of the body, to his identity with such items
as clothing, food, and cultural activities. Once all of these elements came together and Burton became more comfortable with his disguise, it became natural for Burton to remain in character. However, Burton did not sit on his laurels. Instead, he incessantly tested and altered his disguises. It was in Sindh that Burton first practiced his disguise by wandering around the countryside and the bazaars dressed as a Dervish. Once Burton became comfortable in his Dervish disguise, he moved on to the character of a Pathan. Burton enjoyed this character for a while, simply because it combined foreign and native ideas. His third and last disguise was that of Mirza Abdullah, which was used most often by Burton while he was in India. He perfected this character in every possible way. At last, when Burton is comfortable with his latest creation, Mirza Abdullah, modified with elements of the Dervish and Pathan, he makes his journey to Mecca and Medina with great success. The point here is that he was able to modify Mirza as the situation of the pilgrimage demanded, drawing upon his various disguises perfected in Sindh. After all, Mirza had waited for a long time to play this role.

Burton’s journeys examined by this study are mapped out in three chapters. This chapter has shown how Richard F. Burton accomplished his desired goal of the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. The remaining chapters will explore Burton’s early Indian career to show how he prepared himself for his epic pilgrimage. The second chapter will focus on Burton’s career as an officer of the East India Company. It will emphasize certain aspects of British life and
society during Burton’s time in India, especially the difficulties and opportunities Burton experienced as a junior British officer. It also touches on Richard Burton’s transformations into his early disguises and gives details on Burton’s Asian education. Finally, this chapter closely examines the process of Burton’s perfecting every aspect of becoming Mirza Abdullah. In Chapter Three, the newly created Mirza Abdullah is seen exploring previously forbidden realms of Sindh’s society and religion. Every aspect of disguise, learned and practiced, comes into focus on this real journey of Burton’s life. This builds the tension—the only thing between Burton, discovery, and possible death lay in his ability to deceive the native people with his disguise—that would be at the heart of his later great pilgrimage to Mecca.
Notes to Chapter One


4. Ibid. 175-7.

5. Ibid. 177.


12. Ibid. 172.


15. Rice, 153-5.


17. Ibid. 201.


25. Ibid. 239-40.

26. Ibid. 207.

27. Ibid. 179.

28. Ibid. 6.


34. Brodie, 336.

35. Ibid. 336.

36. Rice, 4.


CHAPTER TWO: YEARS OF SERVICE

2.1 Introduction

Most people have at one time or another felt a need to escape their reality, to withdraw into anonymity, or perhaps assume a disguise. Indeed, when mundane daily existence of most people is weighed against romanticized fantasies of escape into exotic lands, civilized life seems a chore rather than a privilege. Escapism and romantic fantasies were certainly important factors in Burton’s life. This chapter follows Burton to India and Sindh as a British officer in search of adventure. Burton’s writings provide a rich source of information about his daily life there, as they brim with details both about his impressions and his daily activities, and they were consulted extensively in the writing of this chapter. We will learn in great detail as Burton explains his Indian army days.

Two aspects of Burton’s life in India and Sindh are particularly striking. First, Burton’s ability to absorb languages is truly remarkable. He shares his strategies for building vocabulary and perfecting his language skills, but even the sheer extent of his achievement is difficult to grasp: Burton has mastered twenty-nine different languages. His readers are thus not surprised when Burton informs them that every minute of his free time was devoted to studying Indian languages and culture aided by two munshis (private tutors). Second, from Burton we learn a great deal about Islam, the dominant religion of the area. Burton had and showed great desire to learn about that ‘other.’ In his books on
India, Burton focuses on every aspect of Islamic lifestyle. Such is Burton’s desire to learn about Islamic culture that he becomes submerged in the traditional lifestyle and religious rites of the Orient. Burton’s writing, as this chapter aims to show, is contagious in its energy to learn about the Islamic religion and become indistinguishable from its true practitioners.

2.2 India - Bombay

Burton’s lifelong affair with the Orient started at the famous offices of the Honourable East India Company in Leadenhall Street, London, where he was sworn in together with a group of other excited young men. However, the situation was far from romantic - the British army, having recently been crushed in Afghanistan, needed fresh bodies to carry on their exploits. On 18 June, 1842, Ensign Burton sailed from Gravesend on the barque John Knox bound for India, carrying with him a book of army regulations, Mill’s History of India, several Indian language dictionaries and grammar books, a box-headed, pink-faced bull terrier, and a kit consisting of dozens of white jackets and trousers, guns, a sword and a saddle. He also brought with him an item that was not generally considered standard equipment - a wig. Burton justified this extravagant item by claiming that he would need it for social occasions, since he shaved his head anticipating the heat of the Orient. With his long drooping moustache, the bald twenty-one-year-old Englishman must have presented an odd picture indeed.
During the first four months of the voyage around the cape, Burton amused himself by boxing, shooting sea birds, and attempting to teach the other army officers on board to use their swords. This is also the first time readers hear about Burton’s interest in learning languages:

I, however, utilized my time by making the three native servants who were on board, talk with me, and by reading Hindostani stories from old Shakespeare’s text-book. I made a final attempt to keep up musical notation, and used the flageolet to the despair of all on board; but the chief part of my time was passed in working at Hindostani, reading all the Eastern books on board, gymnastics and teaching my brother youngsters the sword.

At dusk on the evening of 28 October, 1842 the long voyage was finally over, and John Knox came into Bombay’s harbour. Burton is instantly taken with Bombay and compares it to his childhood memories of the breathtaking Bay of Naples when he says, “Thy towers, Bombay! gleam bright, they say, against the dark blue sky.” It seems that Burton was over-excited, however, as the only tower he could see was the spire of Bombay’s Anglican cathedral.

Upon reaching Bombay, all of the young soldiers on board were eager for news and excited by the prospect of almost immediate battle. They were ready for their duty and finally living their romantic fantasy. When a government pilot came aboard the ship, the soldiers crowded around him for information. However, they were soon disappointed, as “Lord Ellenborough had succeeded Lord Auckland,” “the campaign was finished...and there was no chance of becoming Commander-in-Chief within a year.” In other words, India was at
peace, and there seemed to be no hope for a shortcut to fame through military
gallantry for Richard Burton, who was crushed by the news.

Bombay did not disappoint Burton, however. As Burton was new to the
subcontinent, everything made a lasting first impression on him. In 1842,
Bombay was a highly cosmopolitan city, and it provided Burton with plenty of
opportunities to practice Hindustani and improve his language skills. The Bhendi
Bazaar in the heart of Bombay assaulted Burton’s senses with crowds, bright
colors, spices, and new sounds. It was a place where, as Burton soon discovered,
anything could be had for a price. Burton’s writings are a clear indication that
since the very first moment of his arrival at Bombay, he was fascinated by its
diversity, richness, and culture.

Some of Burton’s preconceptions about India changed as well. For
example, Burton was appalled at his first sight of a sepoy in a shabby regimental
uniform, “with dingy face, greasy hair and arms like broomsticks, and a body
like a mummy.” As time went on Burton became exposed to every part of the
culture, and his opinion of these soldiers changed. As to their character, he
discovers that “still they are stout hearts, and true, these fellows; they have
fought for your cotton and pepper many years, and you may still rely upon their
faith and loyalty.”

British newcomers to India at that time became part of its very particular
society. Burton found this society dull, tiresome, and ridiculous. Everyone knew
everyone else’s business, and gossip played a major part in people’s everyday lives. Gossip was usually exchanged over lengthy and substantial dinners.

Another occupation for married men at these unpleasant social gatherings was trying to pick up young women of the so-called “fishing fleet.” Burton does not have many kind things to say about Bombay’s British society:

Essentially a middle-class society suddenly elevated to the top of the tree, and lost its head accordingly. Men whose parents in England were small tradesmen, bailiffs in Scotland, found themselves ruling districts and commanding regiments, riding in carriages, and owing more pounds a month than their parents had pounds a year.

There was not much hope for the future either, as English children had neither respect for their elders nor any manners. According to Burton, “the children were hideously brought up, and, under the age of five, used language that would make a porter’s hair stand on end.” Luckily for Burton, there were other pleasures that could be had in Bombay. Some of his soldier friends introduced Burton to the girls of the local brothels in the Bhendi Bazaar. As Burton described it in his translation of the Kama Sutra:

A courtesan, well dressed and wearing her ornaments, should sit or stand at the door of her house, and, without exposing herself too much, should look on the public road so as to be seen by passers-by, she being like an object for sale.

While these women’s behaviour could not be considered moral by Western standards, it seemed to fit with other aspects of life in India encountered by
Burton. It was not fake or contrived, like the lascivious dinnertime pursuits of the British. Thus, angry as Burton was with his fellow English and their mock society, he quickly found a distraction in Indian culture and Indian society.

Burton realized that the best way to learn about the culture of India was through perfecting his knowledge of local languages. He started learning Hindustani in London, as soon as he learned that his position with the East Indian Company was secure. Burton was helped in his pursuit by a family friend and faculty member at the Kings College in London, Duncan Forbes. Within days of arriving in Bombay, Burton found himself a “munchi,” a language teacher. His name was Dosabhati Sohrabji, and he was a Parsee priest. This old man was considered to be one of the best Hindustani and Gujarati teachers in Bombay. He also hired a “mubid,” a priest, to help him out with his language studies. Aided by these two mentors, Burton threw himself into learning the Hindustani language with passion and enthusiasm. When one tutor got tired, the second one took over. Even these seasoned educators were impressed by Burton’s drive and natural ability, when they described him as “a man who could learn a language running.”

Burton attempts to explain to his readers this extraordinary ability to absorb languages. His extraordinary memory was definitely an asset. Burton also developed a system for teaching himself languages and boasted that he could learn to speak any language within two months:
I got a simple grammar and vocabulary, marked out the forms and words which I knew were absolutely necessary, and learnt them by heart by carrying them in my pocket and looking over them at spare moment during the day. I never worked more than a quarter of an hour at a time, for after that the brain lost its freshness. After learning some three hundred words, easily done in a week...The neck of the language was now broken, and progress was rapid.\textsuperscript{11}

He was also very good at putting his knowledge to work. Burton perfected his oral skills relentlessly. He would listen to others speaking and then repeat words out loud to himself many times until the sound was correct. Burton went through hours of this very aggressive exercise each time he started learning a new language. Even this early on his journey, Burton realized that in order to penetrate the culture of India he must be disguised as a local and speak like a local.

2.3 \textit{India - Baroda}

After some time in Bombay, Burton was at last commanded to move to Baroda, a city in Gujarat, for service. Burton was happy to leave Bombay, which had been dominated by Europeans for over a century, and viewed this move as his chance to see the real India. The trip itself was an adventure, as the company accompanied by numerous servants such as valets, grooms, and munshis made their way to Baroda by boat. The head of Burton's household was a Goan named Salvador Soares, and he travelled with Burton, assisting him with his daily needs along the way. Burton also bought a horse, a necessity for the army service, which travelled with him on the boat. His Indian horse, a Kattywar, was in many ways a symbol of Burton's life in India. He describes it as "a bright dun, with
black stripes and stockings, a very vicious brute, addicted to all the sins of horseflesh, but full of spirits as a thoroughbred.”

Once this two-masted sailing ship, a Pattymar, landed at Baroda, Burton and company rode to their regiment head quarters, a few days away. Burton was impressed by the tranquil beauty of the lush green countryside of Gujarat, and he was charmed by the little villages of thatched huts that surrounded the town. Burton made notes of the sounds and smells which accompanied villagers as they returned to their houses and prepared their suppers. Burton wrote, “how lovely are these oriental nights,” referring to his experiences camping with his company on the way to regiment camp. He was clearly impressed with the Indian countryside and satisfied with his experience. In this small town of Baroda, for the first time Burton found himself truly immersed in the Indian society. Burton realized that his knowledge of languages and culture was limited, and he used this chance to learn, acquire, absorb, and understand the culture of India. This was his new life in the true Orient, and Burton was enjoying his new liberty and relishing the first taste of what India has to offer.

Unlike his wonderful first impressions of Baroda’s Indian society, Burton’s relationship with his fellow officers was not smooth. There was no established British society in Baroda, just army regimental quarters. The locals provided the officers with their every need, so army life was very comfortable:
The regimental mess, with its large cool hall and punkahs (fans), its clean napery and bright silver, its servants each standing behind his master's chair, and the cheroots and hookahs which appeared with the disappearance of the table-cloth, was a pleasant surprise, the first sight of comfortable home-life he had seen since landing in Bombay.  

Yet, the entire regiment in Baroda had only seven or eight English officers. For better of worse, these few men were Burton's constant companions. However, although Burton largely avoided his fellow soldiers, they proved a rich source for his writings. For example, it was in Baroda that Burton first met Dr. Frederick Arnott, the source of his many stories. It is difficult to judge Burton's feelings towards the way in which his fellow officers behaved in Baroda. He does mention some details that allow his readers to make assumptions about his relationship with the other men. For example, he mentions that the men of his regiment were heavy beer drinkers. Yet, Burton comments that "the old hands observed that I drank no beer." Burton was a port drinker, which "was exceptional in those days," and this set him even further apart from the other officers. 

Burton did not let these little setbacks affect his settlement in Baroda. He quickly installed himself and a small household of servants in his shabby thatched cottage located among the buildings kept for unmarried officers. His daily routine began at sunrise with bathing and a light breakfast. Burton then spent some time studying with his 'munshi.' After a formal breakfast in the mess, Burton did drilling exercises with his regiment. After lunch Burton had free
time, which he spent studying languages with great enthusiasm. Finally, just before sunset came horse riding, followed by mess dinner and a game of whist.

Burton’s description of his typical day paints a rather austere picture and leaves his readers wondering about whether he was satisfied with his routine in Baroda:

The first proceeding was a wash in cold water and a cup of tea. After that the horse was brought round saddled, and carried the rider to the drill ground. Work usually began as soon as it was light, and lasted till shortly after sunrise.16

Burton might have been yearning for real action. Afghanistan was still a frequent topic of conversation in the mess, although the unstable situation in Sindh often replaced it as a subject of speculation.

While waiting for his assignment, Burton spent many relaxing evening meals entertained with his regiment. At dinnertime, a long table in the mess bungalow would be set with the regimental plates and punkahs (fans) to keep the officers comfortable. The dinner consisted of soup, a joint of roast mutton and boiled mutton or boiled fowls with vegetables in the side dishes. The dinner always concluded with curry, accompanied by dry fish, Bombay ducks and papris. After this followed desert, which was pudding and tarts. These were heavy dinners by Baroda’s standards. On special occasions, after dinner, during hookah time, exotic dances were performed by courtesans from the city. Before starting their performance, the dancers drank something which looked like water, but which made them drunk:
Mahtab floats forward so softly that any trace of exertion is imperceptible. Slowly waving her white arms, she unexpectedly stands close to you, then turning with a pirouette—it had no other name—, but its nature is widely different from the whirligig rotation of a Taglione—she sinks back, retires and stands motionless as a wax-work, and again al dacapo. The guitar [sitar] is in the seventh heaven of ecstasy, the pipe [flute] is dying away with delights, and the kettledrums threaten to annihilate their instruments. The lady’s sisters or rather sisterhood are too completely under the spell to feel envious. 17

This type of entertainment was greatly enjoyed by the officers of all ages. Burton certainly describes these experiences in great detail. He was obviously fascinated by these women and regarded their appearances in the regiment as short voyages into the Indian culture.

Burton’s experience with Indian culture and women did not stop there. Sometimes he and his fellow officers rode into Baroda in search of new sights and experiences. One of their favourite destinations was the red light district, where Muslim courtesans sat on their balconies singing and reciting poetry. The interiors of their houses were beautifully furnished:

The floors of the apartments were spread with rich carpets and covered with clean sheets: the balcony tiles were sprinkled with fresh water and the parapets lined with fragrant clay water pots smelling of new earth. Then there were flowers. Flowers garland everything, the doorways and rafters, the cots and piles of cushions, and the women wore them in their hair and draped their lovers especially with the mogra, the flower known as rath-ki-rani, ‘Queen of the Night,’ which would be spread on beds where the couple united, to be crushed in moments of passion. Over all wafted the sweet smell of the hookahs, and incense, opium and hemp. 18
In many ways, the brothels were a gateway into the Indian culture and the Orient for Burton. He relished his experiences and describes them with passion.

Burton took his fascination with Indian women even further by keeping a mistress. She provided Burton with the means to learn about the inner workings of Indian society. From Burton’s own writing the readers learn some facts about his bibi, mistress, but he does not divulge her name and simply calls her his “walking dictionary”:

She teaches him not only Hindostani Grammar, but the syntaxes of native life. She keeps house for him, never allowing him to save money, or, if possible, to waste it. She keeps the servants in order. She had an infallible recipe to prevent maternity, especially if her tenure depends on such compact. She looks after him in sickness, and is one of the best nurses, and, as it is not good for man to live alone, she makes him a manner of a home.19

Thus, his mistress is Burton’s lover, housekeeper, companion, and, most importantly, a gateway into the Indian culture. She proves indispensable to Burton in his pursuit of language learning and cultural awareness, which eventually allow him to achieve his goal of disguise.

In his interactions with the locals and his teachers Burton also learned much about Indian religions. In Baroda, Burton added another teacher to his team of instructors, a Hindu. Under his guidance, Burton became very knowledgeable about Hinduism. He was even given the highest honour of Hinduism:
I carefully read...the publications of the Asiatic Society, questioning my teachers, and committing to writing page after page of notes, and eventually my Hindu teacher officially allowed me to wear the Janeo (Brahminical thread).

Burton must have worked very hard to achieve this reward. It would have taken weeks of preparation, involving periods of fasting, prayer, and purification.

After getting his Janeo, Burton was bound to perform certain prayers or mantras known only to a select few:

Let us meditate on the supreme splendour of that divine ruler who may illuminate our understandings. Venerable men, guided by intelligence, salute the divine sun with oblations and praise.

This was indeed a significant achievement, since Burton’s initiation into the Brahmanic lifestyle later helped him with his disguises and spurred him on to learn more about Indian religions.

In addition to his Brahmanic initiation, Burton was also gaining knowledge of Islam. This was important for his search for self-improvement and desire to unlock the ‘secrets’ of India. Most importantly, Islam also plays a major role in his goal of disguise. Under the guidance of his teachers, Burton started to familiarize himself with the beliefs of Islam and the teachings of the Koran. It was in Baroda that Burton first started to read and recite the Koran. Burton learned that “the Koranic idea of the human soul or spirit, for instance, is similar to that of his fellow Europeans.” Burton is taken with Islam and considers it
To be the religion of beauty, whose leading principle is that of earthly, the imperfect type of heavenly love. Its high priests are Anacreontic poets, its rites wine, music and dancing, spiritually considered, and its places of worship meadows and gardens, where the perfume of the rose and the song of the nightingale, by charming the heart, are supposed to improve the mind of the listener.\textsuperscript{23}

Burton thus regarded his study and practice of Islam as a statement of faith rather than merely a means to an end. Just like Hinduism, Islam has many rituals and stages through which one had to pass before he or she could be considered a true believer, and the exercise was too difficult and time consuming to be merely a game.

Burton was dedicated to going through the process of becoming an initiated member of the Islamic society. At his regiment camp, he devoted all of his free time to fasting and complying with Islamic rules:

In addition to prayers and fasting, the Jemali Sufi recommended penance and seclusion; silence; meditation in dark and gloomy spots; perpetual devotion; abstinence from food, sleep and carnal enjoyments; perfect love and obedience to his Shaykh, or religion superior; abnegation of self and all worldly ties, and, finally, the strictest attention to the rules and regulation of his order.\textsuperscript{24}

Besides undergoing various exercises and fasting, a student of Islam had to reach a higher level of consciousness called ecstasy. In order to achieve it, students had to recite these lines referring to Allah and the Prophet.

\begin{verbatim}
Hasbi Rabbi jai' Allah!
Ma fi kalbi ghair' Allah!
Nur Muhammad sall' Allah!
La ilaha ill' Allah! \textsuperscript{25}
\end{verbatim}
Burton followed all these rules, and soon he found that his goal was within reach. His knowledge of Islam permeates his writings on India just as Islam permeated India’s daily life. He describes how remarkable it was to see so many “Tasawwuf, or Sufism” (holy men) in the streets, teaching Islam to their students:

Islam, the religion promulgated by Mohammed, was, in his day, sufficiently pure deism; the Eternal Being is as little anthropomorphized as could be expected, taking into consideration the difficulty of making the idea of one intelligible to a barbarous race. The faith conceived, born, and bred amongst the rugged hills.  

Burton took heed of these religious teachings as well as those of his tutors. Within a few months of being in India, Burton had learned much about its languages, religions and cultural values.

2.4 Sindh

Burton’s five years in Sindh prove a culmination of his learning and development. However, it is impossible to discuss Burton’s advances in Indian languages and religions without first getting an idea of the political situation in the area. When this is done, Sindh emerges as perhaps the most appropriate place for Burton to seek the anonymity of a disguise.

“Enemies threatened Sindh from all sides.” Afghanistan and Sindh had become a part of the global expansionist strategy pursued by the imperial powers. The British considered Afghanistan to be the first line of defence of their empire in India. Therefore, the rulers of Sindh were strongly encouraged to

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support the British enterprise in Afghanistan. The Sindh rulers co-operated and allowed the British to move through their province to reach Afghanistan. For British rule it was essential to their plan to have control of the river Indus. Also, beyond all the Asian powers lurked the Russians, who might, it was assumed, at last attain their long-cherished dream of moving down to India. British control of Sindh and the Indus was now imperative. In 1838, Sindh became ever more involved in the affairs of the British when the latter demanded that the Indus must aid the British military forces contrary to previous agreements and to the outrage of the rulers of the province. Thus, at the time Burton’s Regiment was moved to Sindh, Britain was preparing for their invasion of Afghanistan, while at the same time fighting for their control of the Indus.

When the order to re-locate came in January 1844, Burton was happy to leave Baroda, perhaps because he sensed that Sindh would be the place where his newly acquired knowledge is put to good use. Together with the other officers, Burton traveled to Bombay on land and there boarded the steamship named *Semiramis* for Karachi. Aboard the *Semiramis*, Burton met a man who would become one of his closest friends in India, Captain Walter Scott, who was making his way to Karachi to survey the canal system on the instruction of Sir Charles Napier. In addition to being an able engineer, Scott was also a poet, a writer and a devotee of the books on history and romance. Scott also had a keen
interest in Italy. Burton was delighted to meet someone who not only knew Italy, but who was as well read in his favourite subjects as himself.

However, not all of Burton’s Sindh experiences were as pleasant. As their boat approached Karachi, Burton was shocked to see the landscape in front of him. He describes it as a hot desert wasteland:

No one, man, woman, or child, ever saw the face of Young Egypt for the first time, without some such exclamation. “A regular desert!—a mere line of low coast, sandy as a Scotchamn’s whiskers—a glaring waste, with visible as well as palpable heat playing over its dirty yellow surface!”

When after four days at sea the *Semiramis* arrived in Karachi, Burton quickly found out that the capital of Sindh was a little more than a village:

A mass of low mud hovels, and tall mud houses with flat mud roofs, windowless mud walls, and numerous mud ventilators, surrounded by the tumble-down parapet of mud, built upon a low platform of mud-covered rock. Kurrachee, three of the senses receive “fresh impression,”—three organs are affected, far more powerfully, however, than pleasantly, viz., the ear, the nose, and the eye.

Burton’s unit made a home for themselves a few miles outside of Karachi, and Burton slowly began to settle into his new existence.

Since this was a newly acquired region for the British, there was no permanent housing for Burton’s regiment. They set up a tent city and, as this was the summer season and there were no demanding duties to perform, they spent most of their time in their tents. Burton jumped on this chance to practice his language skills, and he also did some small translation jobs to earn money. These court assignments involved interpreting documents and appearing at the
courthouse for translating cases. These hearings involved the native people and required good knowledge of Hindustani, Gujarati, and Marathi. Once again, Burton was learning and immersing himself in the very heart of the Indian society, thus preparing himself for his disguise roles.

At the same time, Burton also started studying other languages such as Sindhi, Punjabi, and Persian. He preferred Persian, having already gained a lot of knowledge and understanding of it while in Bombay learning under his old munshi. For Burton, Persian was the most elegant language of all the Orient. He also knew that Persian would provide him access to some of the richest sources of Oriental manuscripts and culture. In his regimental headquarters, Burton became very immersed in a Persian milieu. A very short time after his arrival in Sindh Burton writes, “I gained some knowledge of the dialect, and proved myself duly qualified in it [Persian] at Bombay.”

His closest associates, Scott and Steinhauser, a German surgeon, scholar and linguist, also had some knowledge of Persian language and culture. In every aspect of his life Burton surrounded himself with individuals from whom he could learn. Living and working everyday in this cultural milieu influenced Burton and extended his thoughts and knowledge of the Indian culture.

It was finally time to take advantage of all this knowledge and assume a disguise. Burton could pass himself off as a Dervish, a Pathan, or a Mirza Abdullah. Whenever Burton felt the desire to escape, he transformed himself
into one of the characters and wandered into local village markets to experience native life:

He let down a curtain between himself and civilization, and a tattered, dirty-looking dervish would wander on foot, lodge in mosques, where he was venerated as a saintly man, mix with the strangest company, join the Beloch and Brahui tribes...about whom there was nothing then known. Sometimes he appeared in the towns; as a merchant he opened a shop, sold stuffs or sweetmeats in the bazaar.\textsuperscript{31}

In addition, as Burton’s survey work involved interaction with Sindhi people called Jats, he often found it comfortable to wear their native dress.

Burton was now acting out a role of a Muslim not only externally, but internally as well, as it is around this time when he seems to have converted to Islam. For Burton, being fluent in most of these native languages was the first step towards his goal of disguise. In addition to his linguistic abilities, Burton got fully involved in the religion of Islam in order to be part of this culture. In Bombay and Baroda, he learned everything he could about Islam. He then learned about Sufism, and went through all of the various stages of this demanding and complicated religious discipline. According to his writings, Burton got such a good grounding in Sufism that he could make the most outrageous claim and not be challenged:

I conscientiously went through the \textit{chilla}, or quarantine of fasting and other exercises, which, by-the-by, proved rather over-exciting to the brain. At times, when over-strung, I relieved my nerves with a course of Sikh religion and literature...as I had already been invested by a strict
Hindu with the Janeo or 'Brahminical thread' my experience of Eastern faiths became phenomenal, and I become a Master-Sufi.  

In Sufism, Burton explains, the human soul is a particle of the Eternal Spirit, and it must enjoy the illusions of mundane existence, devote itself to the earthly, and experience the imperfect type of heavenly love. All of these rituals and habits involve an understanding of Islam infused with daily personal devotion. Burton also translates Sufi poetry and includes it in his account of life in Sindh:

They deem the world a lovely dream,  
That floats before man’s wakeful eyes,  
A dream of phantom weal and woe,  
Unreal smiles, illusive sighs.

They question not His will, or why  
He placed them in this passing scene,  
That brings them from those blessed lands,  
Thro Memory’s mist still dimly seen.  

To live and work on a day-to-day basis alongside Muslims, Burton had to become a Muslim in the true form. However, it would have been impossible for him to pass himself off as a native in a Muslim country if he did not have the distinguishing mark of a Muslim, circumcision. Among Muslims, circumcision is crucial, often deciding upon life or death, as even urinating in public was to make a religious statement. Upon the subject of Burton’s circumcision, his friend A. B. Richards writes that Burton

Reveal[ed] in 1864 the fact that part of his preparations for the Haj involved circumcision. Were Richard to be discovered to be an uncircumcised man, and therefore not what he purported to be, his chances of survival among fanatics in Mecca were small.
Burton does not mention his own circumcision in any of his own writings, but he
does broach the general subject in his *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-
Madinah and Meccah*: "I look upon the safety of their journey as almost
impossible, unless they have previously submitted to the rite."35 This advice was
correct, as Burton mentions that "the danger is doubled by non-compliance with
custom."36 Yet, the readers are not informed where this operation was
performed. It is probable that the operation took place in Sindh while Burton
was very involved in his Islamic studies. Burton was sharing a bungalow with
Dr. Stock, the assistant surgeon to the garrison and a botanist. Dr Stock could
have performed the circumcision without anyone knowing, or it might have
been done ritually as part of an initiation ceremony. For whatever reason,
Burton chooses to keep the details of this important rite a mystery.

After working a few months in Sindh as a translator, Burton was given the
Sindh Survey Assistant job. This appointment was under his friend Sir Walter
Scott, who specifically requested Burton for the job because of his fluency in
Italian. Scott needed Burton to translate an Italian book on the canal systems.
Ideas from this book would be used to rebuild the Indus irrigation system.
Burton threw himself into his work and very quickly learned how to use
surveying instruments. In his book *The Unhappy Valley*, Burton describes the
sorry conditions of the canals before the British took over. Sindh was ruled by
three brothers, each of whom had his own poorly made irrigation system:
The rise and fall of the ground was calculated by the practised eye—spirit-levels being things unknown—consequently the line of direction was, in one case out of ten, chosen for the best. The banks instead of being disposed at a convenient angle, were made either perpendicular or to lean the wrong way, so as to be undermined by the current.37

This greatly affected the very under usage of this land and the poor production of crops in this region of India. Burton describes the type of work that he had to do on the canals in *The Falconry in the Valley of the Indus*:

My new duties compelled me to spend the cold season in wandering over the districts, levelling the beds of canals, and making preparatory sketches for a grand survey. I was thrown so entirely amongst the people as to depend on them for society, and the "dignity."38

There was also a lot of office work such as planning and mapping surveys to be carried out in the cold season and practising latitudes and longitudes until his right eye started to give him problems. By late summer, the heat became unbearable. "The stagnation at atmosphere," wrote Burton, "was peculiarly distressing."39 This led Burton to conclude that Sindh "was cursed by its climate."40 After all, the summer in Central Sindh lasted eight or nine months, with only an occasional cloudiness or a passing shower. The temperature was usually between 35-45 degrees. In addition, desert winds and dust storms gradually increased in frequency and violence. Thus, only joining these lands with canals would offer a chance of life to the area. Indus was thus the life force of Sindh, and everything depended on its whims and vagaries. Thus, Burton was
happy to be contributing to Scott’s important work that would breathe life into the area.

As Burton quickly discovered, the desert surrounding the Indus valley and the great delta were steeped in history. Alexander the Great was not the only conqueror to use this passage in 326 B.C.E. thought there have been many others through the area, but evidence of even earlier peoples, known and unknown, was everywhere. This Sindh region was enriched with many rituals, myths and stories. This delighted Burton and brought him closer to his goal of full knowledge of the Indian culture. He was told of “djinns and spirits, the seven headless prophets, corpses that rise and speak prophetic words of warning, emperors and Mogul warlords, saints, and holy men and women.”

By Burton’s time, the city of Tattah was reduced from a bustling metropolis of half a million people to a village of a few thousand, numerous beggars wandering among the squalid tenements surrounding the once great mosque of the Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb. Yet, it proved a rich cultural ground for Burton. In Tattah, Burton usually dined at the Travellers Bungalow, which was specially reserved for officers on missions. The Bungalow was huge, but extremely dilapidated. Burton found the roof to be the ideal place to escape the heat and to observe the locals, from young prostitutes in short loose chemises looking for clients, to housewives working away in their dwellings, to groups of
youths saying their prayers and learning how to “chant the Koran” from an old man. As Burton watched the young Koran chanters, he mused:

Not one of the party understands more than a parrot would of what is being thus gravely presented – but that is part of their education. Some will learn; others will merely repeat by rote, no worse than the practitioners of any faith from Tokyo and Benares to Plymouth Rock. And there is a Hindu Scindee performing his ablutions, stark naked.

In this relaxed atmosphere, Burton fell completely and hopelessly in love with the East.

Burton also formed his own firm views about the Indian society. He very much liked the Baluchis and the hill tribes, but had a considerably different opinion of the Scindians. He believed that “they deceive because they fear to trust, they lie because truth is not to be told with impunity or without an object.” Burton’s negative opinion of the Sindhi men, Hindu and Muslim, was that “they were obsequious, overbearing and dishonest” But he had a different positive view of the Sindhi women. He liked women in general, whatever their race or colour. He especially loved Sindhi women; everything about them appealed to him, from their skin colour to their ability to pick up objects with their toes:

Her eyes are large and full of fire, black and white as an onyx-stone, of almond shape, with long drooping lashes, undeniably beautiful… The nose is straight and the nostrils are delicately turned.
He had great praise for Indian cosmetics and the beneficial effects they had upon the woman’s skin. In fact, he used the same cosmetics to create his disguises. His love for the women of Sindh might have been the reason why Burton was so interested in the love tales and Ghazals told in Sindh at the time. He read romantic epics such as Tales of Sasui and Punhu, Marui and Umrah the Sumrah in Belochi, Jataki, Persian, and Sindhi. All of these tales are love stories with tragic ending; one lover always being left to grieve for the other. In the tale of Punhu, for example, a woman kills herself and her lover goes to her grave and hears her voice from below:

Enter boldly, my Punhu; think not to find a narrow bed.  
Here gardens bloom, and flowers shed sweetest savour;  
Here are fruits, and shades, and cooling streams,  
And the Prophet’s light pours through our abode,  
Banishing from its limits death and decay.  

By learning these tales of love and passion, Burton became much more aware of one eastern culture. These myths and stories were an essential part of the society, and Burton learned as many of them as possible while he was in Sindh. He also got a great deal of understanding about the affairs of the heart in this way:

Burton was also very fond of Ghazals. During the hot months of the summer, Burton spent a lot of time reciting and listening to Ghazals. Burton even translated some of them. This particular one is about the Great King of Persia, who ruled through love and fear:
Place not thy trust—
Great king—in rampart, fosse, or height of town,
Which are as dust
In the fierce whirlwind’s grasp, before the might
Of man’s strong mind!
The monarch throned upon the willing hearts
Of human kind,
The prince whose sceptre and whose sword command
Man’s love and fear,
May he not spurn the cunning craven arts
To despots dear? 48

Through Ghazals, Burton gained an invaluable insight into the Indian culture.
This insight is obvious in all of the books Burton wrote on India.

During his summer in Sindh, Burton experienced several disasters. First, he lost his house in a violent monsoon storm. In June, an epidemic of cholera broke out in town, and it quickly spread to the cantonment, affecting first the British and then the India troops. By the time the epidemic was over, eight hundred soldiers and some thousand civilians had died. Even the rugged Burton was affected, and he went into sick quarters in early July, after the epidemic had supposedly abated. The recovery from illness was not as quick for Burton as he would have wished. By early September, ill, tired, and depressed, Burton left Karachi, said goodbye to his Sindhi friends, and embarked on a trip back to Bombay. He spent five comfortable months in Bombay, about which he does not give many details in his writings. However, he does mention that he received two years of sick leave, which delighted him, as he was now free to assume whatever disguises he desired.
By this time, Burton was very experienced with India and had attained a good understanding of the minds of its people. So, though he was still "sick and seedy, tired and tested," as he was recovering from his Sindh illness and from an eye infection called rheumatic ophthalmia, Burton could not resist wandering around the region in disguise. Burton fell back on his detailed notes and wrote *Goa, and the Blue Mountains; or Six Months of Sick Leave*. Burton also took some time to study South Indian languages, Telegu and Toda, as well as to perfect his Persian and Arabic. As if these activities were not enough, Burton began worked on a translation from Portuguese of *Os Lusiadas*. By writing, translating, and learning languages, Burton kept himself busy in Goa. It was here too that he conceived and planned his pilgrimage to El-Medina and Mecca as a true and practising Muslim, and not as a curious foreigner.

For Burton, his years spent in India brought many adventures, hardships, and dangers. Burton learned much during his seven years of service, and he was ready to move on and challenge himself further. He also began planning dangerous expeditions into places where no white man had ever ventured before. Burton viewed his impending pilgrimage not as a dangerous and physically demanding exercise, but as a challenge and a culmination of all his work in India.
Notes to Chapter Two


2. Ibid. 99.

3. Ibid. 99.

4. Ibid. 100.


6. The term “fishing fleet” came to be used in the 1800s, when a boat full of British women sailed to India in search of husbands.


8. Ibid. 104.


11. Ibid. 88.

12. Ibid. 105.


15. Ibid. 107.

16. Ibid. 108.


20. Ibid. 123.

21. Rice, 63.

23. Ibid. 201.
24. Ibid. 212.
27. Rice, 73.
28. Burton, *Scinde,* vol.1, 21. The term “young Egypt” was applied by Burton to Sindh, because its landscape, climate and culture were similar to those of Egypt.
29. Ibid. 28 - 29.
32. Ibid. 150.
36. Ibid. 392.
40. Rice, 82.
41. Ibid. 110.
42. Burton, *Scinde,* vol.2, 125.
45. Rice, 112.


CHAPTER THREE: MIRZA ABDULLAH

3.1 Disguise at Work

When figures such as Burton assume a disguise, they do so with the fullest faith in their own unfragmented subjectivity and their ability to disguise and achieve. In Burton, this is typically accomplished by portraying a native identity as the literal narrative of the body. Having made himself Muslim, Burton lived, prayed and practiced like one. This was a lifestyle decision on Richard Burton’s part. Were the pain and the hardship of initiation worthwhile for a man who merely wanted to disguise himself as a native in order to mix with the locals, or was there some other deeper personal goal at work? It was both the intimate knowledge of the other and Burton’s personal aim of completing a pilgrimage in disguise that motivated him. Like an actor in a play, Burton tried many different disguises, one after the other, before he was ready to perform on his stage, India, in front of his audience, the Indians. Yet, for Burton this was no act. He had been living the lifestyle of a practicing Muslim, and he considered himself to be one. In fact, he was one. His three different disguise personalities were merely incarnations of his faith. Burton would eventually settle on one, that of Mirza Abdullah, which in his opinion best reflected his faith and knowledge of the Indian culture.

Burton’s first disguise was a combination of a dervish and a doctor/religious merchant. Burton found this to be his ideal disguise at that time, since dervishes were not questioned except for the efficacy of their cures and the
miracles they could deliver. Dervishes were known for their ability to use
eastern medicine, which consisted largely of magic nostrums, charms,
incantation, simple diets, and prescription for aphrodisiacs. To perform his role
as a dervish, Burton equipped himself with calomel, bread pills dipped in aloes,
cinnamon water, and a mirror:

The dervish is a chartered vagabond; nobody asks why he comes; where
he goes; he may go on foot, or on horseback, or alone, or with a large
retinue, and he is much respected without arms, as though he were armed
to the teeth. “I only wanted,” he said, “a little knowledge of medicine,
which I had, moderate skill in magic, a studious reputation, and enough to
keep me from starving.”

In this the role of a dervish, Burton most enjoyed the “infinitely seducing” role of
a doctor, because this was the best way to “see people face to face, and especially
the fair sex [women], of which Europeans, generally speaking, know only the
worst specimens.” In his disguise, Burton could penetrate into the mysteries of
Muslim family life. He would pay attention to goings on in Muslim houses such
as women’s clothing, their style of keeping their houses, and their private
communication with each other in their quarters.

In his second set of disguises, Burton changed his ancestry slightly by
becoming a Pathan, born in India of Afghan parents. Burton claimed that he was
educated in Burma and that he was now a wanderer from another Islamic land,
rootless and unattached. Any problems with his language ability could be
explained by his long residence in Rangoon. It was easy to pass as a Pathan in
Sindh, since many merchants passed through this region. Burton would make his
great pilgrimage to Mecca in this Pathan identity.

Burton’s favorite identity was his disguise as Mirza Abdullah (Mr. Servant
of Allah), half-Iranian and half-Arab. This was the disguise used by Burton for
the rest of his time in India. Burton felt that this character suited him the best.
Mirza Abdullah, who apparently hailed from Bushire on the Persian Gulf,
traveled in his fine linens and jewellery. He probably made his first appearance
in the early summer of 1845:

After trying several characters, the easiest to be assumed was, that of a
half Arab, half Iranian, such as may be met with in thousand along the
northern share of Persian Gulf. The Scindians would have detected in a
moment the difference between my articulation and their own, had I
attempted to speak their vernacular dialect, but they attributed the accent
to my strange country, as naturally as a home-bred English man would
account for the bad pronunciation of a foreigner calling himself partly
Portuguese. Besides, I knew the countries along the Gulf by heart from
books, I had a fair knowledge of the Shieh form of worship prevalent in
Persia.\(^3\)

In order to make himself look like Mirza Abdullah, Burton transformed his
appearance by using henna on his body and by growing his beard long:

With hair falling upon his shoulders, a long beard, face and hands, arms
and feet, stained with a thin coat of henna, Mirza Abdullah of
Bushier—your humble servant, gentle reader—set out upon many and
many a trip.\(^4\)
Mirza Abdullah needed to dress according to his character, so simple and culturally appropriate clothing was chosen to suit his native land and India’s hot climate. Moreover, these clothes had to be comfortable for riding:

A muslin pirhan, or shirt with hanging arms, and a skirts like a blouse buttoned around your neck... a pair of blue silk shalwars or drawers, wide enough, without exaggeration, for a young married couple and the baby...tight around the ankles and gathered in with plaits around the waist...coat is a long white cotton garment... then a pair of yellow leather papooshes, worked with silk flowers, a shawl by way of a girdle and in it a small Persian knife, with ivory handle and a watered blade.\(^5\)

A turban, which was twelve yards of wound muslin, was added to complete this disguise. Burton recalled that it took him many months to learn how to tie this turban properly. A colorful cloak for cold weather and a pair of soft yellow boots to the knee for riding completed the wardrobe. Burton wore a gold signet ring of an unusual snake-head design and carried a spear and a couple of pistols tucked in his belt. This was Mirza Abdullah of Bushire.

Obviously, Burton/Mirza needed a transport of some kind. Mirza of Bushire, a traveler, could not ride a horse that was clearly groomed and clipped at a military establishment. Therefore, while he could ride a borrowed native horse, he found a camel to be more appropriate for his disguise. Burton’s first riding experience on a camel was a disaster. Having confidently borrowed a likely-looking animal from the Corps, he was unaware that the animal he chose was not a riding camel, but a baggage animal. Once Burton had succeeded in mounting the “roaring and yelling beast,” a difficult process in itself, it
continuously attempted to bite Burton's boot. After several hours of truculence, with the camel alternately refusing to move and attempting to dislodge his rider by rushing under a low thorn tree, the camel bolted out of control "in a canter, which felt exactly like the pace horse taking a five-barred gate at every stride." Eventually, the animal came to a halt in a muddy swamp and fell on his side. Burton "did not mount that animal again."6 A more suitable camel was found, and before too long Burton was riding with complete confidence to and from the Fort in native dress.

The advantages of being Mirza Abdullah became immediately apparent to Burton. He found that peasants did not run away as he rode through fields, that village girls did not vanish into huts as he approached, that beggars no longer plagued him, and that even the cur dogs did not bark at him. People went about their business without paying any attention to him. Now Burton could enjoy the freedom of exploring this land, culture, and its people without attracting any attention:

Here he commenced his most adventurous and romantic life, explored from North to South, from East to West, mixed with all sorts of people and tribes without betraying himself in the manners customs, or speech, when death must often have ensued, had he created either dislike or suspicion.7

Of Burton's three disguises, this one proved to be the most perfect and the most convenient for Burton on his travels through India.
Portraits of Burton in his twenties illustrate perfectly how Burton was perceived by his contemporaries: exotic, foreign, gypsy-looking, dark, swarthy, etc. His high cheekbones, dark (almost black) eyes, hair, and moustache lent themselves perfectly to his plan of assuming a disguise. Burton used a little walnut juice or henna to darken his face and hands, and wore an appropriate national costume to effect the transformation to his adopted persona. Some khol was added around the eyes to darken his look, and sometimes Burton added a long flowing wig and false beard.

Burton's habits at home were perfectly Persian or Arab. His hair was dressed in a Persian style – long and shaved from the forehead to the top of his head. Even his eyes resembled those of a Persian or an Arab. Walter Abraham, a botanist and a friend of Burton's during his canal survey job in Sindh, suggested that even in his dress and customs Burton was thoroughly an Easterner:

He used the Turkish bath and wore a cowl; and when he went out for a ride he used a wig and goggles. His complexion was also thoroughly Persian, so that Nature evidently intended his work he afterwards so successfully performed, namely, visiting the shrine of the Prophet Mohammed—a work very few would have undertaken unless he was a complete master himself.

Thus, Burton's natural features and personal preferences greatly contributed to the success of his disguises.

Burton realized that the knowledge of the language and of the ethnic dress alone would not make him an insider in a foreign country. He had to
penetrate the social veneer if he were to glean the real day-to-day motivations of Indians. He was carefully non-judgmental, so that he might be regarded as a confidant. He rehearsed Abdullah’s mannerisms to ensure that they became second nature to him: caressing his beard with his right hand and swearing by his beard when he wished to be emphatic. He learned to work with one hand on his hip and the other grasping his spear, to sit in a Turkish fashion, and to remain still for decent space of time lest his observers should think he had no dignity. His munshis, Hari Chand and Mirza Mohammed Hosayn, had taught Burton cultural manners. For example, Burton was told that he might, if musically inclined, hum a little in a low voice, but that he must be correct in every minor detail of custom and behaviour if he were not to be discovered as a fraud.¹⁰

This was an audacious disguise, for there was nothing discreet about Mirza Abdullah. He was a well-to-do young merchant of a high profile. As he rode into villages, crowds gathered to see him and to sit and talk freely with him. He passed on the news, and the villagers told him about their concerns and hopes, their loves and hates, their fears and their foreign masters. Sometimes, when Mirza arrived in a strange town, his first step was to secure a house in or near the bazaar, for the purpose of evening conversazioni. Now and then he rented a shop, and furnished it with clammy dates, viscid molasses, ginger, rancid oil and strong-smelling sweetmeats: and wonderful tales Fame told about the establishments. Yet somehow or other, though they were more crowded than a first-rate milliner’s rooms in town, they throve not in a pecuniary point of view; the cause of which was, I believe, that the polite Mirza was in the habit of giving the heaviest possible weight for their money to all the ladies, particularly the pretty ones,— that honoured him by patronizing his concern.¹¹

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Given his charismatic confidence and youthful good looks, Burton probably presented a dashing figure. So it is perhaps not surprising that he found himself welcomed into harems by fast and fashionable women to display his stock of muslins, linens, and calicos. A number of women were physically attracted to him, and he even received proposals from the fathers of some. Burton relished this attention, and if a husband appeared full of outraged indignation that a strange young man had gained admittance to the heart of his home, Mirza Abdullah would swiftly untie his canvas roll of jewellery, knowing that the women of the house would insist for him to remain. Thus, Burton the man relished in the unique opportunities and experiences offered to him by his disguise.

3.2 Social Life

Social gatherings were favourite occupation for many Sindhian men. Burton enjoyed this aspect of Sindh life. He often spent evenings playing chess with the elders and, as he became bolder, Mirza Abdullah sometimes joined students in the Mosque during the evenings to debate tenets of faith with the Mullah under the dim light of an oil lamp. He also patronized an inn where hemp and opium were sold, and he freely admits to the consumption of both. However, Burton’s engagement in the social life of Sindh was not purely motivated by pleasure seeking—it was part of his research.
Burton's writings on "drunkenness" (i.e. drug intoxication) points to his view of natives' social habits and his social life in this land of the other. Social gatherings would start around late afternoon and go on well into the evening. He describes how such gatherings began and proceeded:

After drinking or smoking the drug, the revellers fasten on the hookahs placed upon the floor, and between the puff either eat little squares of sweet-meat, to increase the intoxication, or chew parched grain to moderate its effects. In about half an hour the action of the drug commences: each man is affected by it in a somewhat different way... sit quietly looking on, occasionally chatting, and now and then entertaining one another with lies the most improbable, incoherent, and grotesque, that ever shifted from mortal lips to mortal ears.¹²

He further details the effects that the drugs had on him:

The first result is a contraction of the nerves of the throat, which is anything but agreeable. Presently the brain becomes affected; you feel an extraordinary lightness of head as it were; your sight settles upon one object, obstinately refusing to abandon it; your other senses become unusually acute—uncomfortably sensible—and you feel a tingling which shoots like an electric shock down your limbs till it voids itself through the extremities. You stand in the burning sunshine without being conscious of the heat.¹³

Burton also made notes on his experiences with drugs such as hashish to gauge their enhancement of sexual pleasure and physical endurance. "And of course the more habituated a man becomes to the use of drugs," says Burton, "the more pleasurable he finds the excitement it produces."¹⁴ In order to make bhang, Burton suggests blending cannabis together with "a mixture of milk, sugar, pounded black pepper, and few spices." This potion makes "your thoughts become wild and incoherent, your fancy runs frantic; if you are a poet, you will
acknowledge an admirable frame of mind for writing such 'nonsense verse',"

such as he found written on the wall:

The teeth of the mountains were set on edge by the eating of betal, which
caused the sea to grin at the beard of the sky.15

Burton notes, however, that every individual who uses these types of
drugs will have a different experience. In fact, no two drug experiences are
exactly the same, as "almost every bhangi...feels something that differs from the
sensations of his neighbor." Burton's justification for taking these drugs is not
only experience, but also boredom. Drugs create a place "in the region of
imagination, in the world of authorism- a strange place where men are
generous, women constant."16 Of course, the use of any drug will have a
negative effect on one's body. Burton certainly felt their effects, such as, for
example, "fearfulness during the fit, and indigestion after it" induced by
cannabis, as well as "the unnatural hunger which it produces excites you to eat a
supper sufficient for two days with ordinary circumstances."17

Besides sharing these social meeting of drugs and pleasure with the other
men, Burton expanded his social milieu. He visited the local marriage
matchmakers to gather gossip of local domestic scandals, which he enjoyed. He
even crashed private parties, secure in the conviction that a clean turban and
good manners were a universal passport. In this manner, Burton learned a great
deal about his environment and greatly improved both his knowledge of the Muslim culture and his disguises.

During the initial period of his stay in India, Burton clearly learned a great deal from his mistresses. In his early writings, Burton was far more conversant with the intimate details of an Indian woman’s underclothes than one would expect a young bachelor to be. He described each item with obvious first-hand knowledge. After all, fastening and properly folding wide sutthan (pantaloons) to fit tightly around the ankles could take a woman up to twenty minutes. Here is a detailed description of Burton’s paramour taken from his *Sindh and the Races that Inhabit the Valley of the Indus*:

Her long fine hair, perfumed with jessamine [is banded over a well-arched forehead]. Behind the [hair] is collected into one large tail, which...hangs down below the waist, and --chief of many charms...never belonged to any other person; it is plaited with lines of red silk...and when the head is well shaped, no coiffure can be prettier than this. Her eyes are large and full of fire, black and white as an onyx stone, of almond shape, with long drooping lashes, undeniably beautiful. I do not know exactly whether to approve the Kajal which encircles the gems...However I dare not condemn it...The nose is straight and the thin nostrils are delicately turned. You, perhaps, do not, as I do, admire their burden...a gold flower...the mouth is well formed and...sensual.18

Brown and black-skinned women were a favorite of Burton during his years in India. The Indian women with whom Burton lived during his seven years in the subcontinent furnished him with a lot of material which he later worked into his books. In Burton’s own words, the women gave him a fine opportunity to study the intimate aspects of native life:
The walking dictionary is all but indispensable to the student, and she teaches him not only Hindostani grammar, but the syntaxes of native life. She keeps house for him, never allowing him to save money, or, if possible to waste it. She keeps the servants in order...she looks after him in sickness, and is one of the best nurses, and, as it is not good for a man to live alone, she makes him a manner of home.19

These Indian women were not only his partners at home, but also his introduction to native way of life and customs. One of Burton's most serious relationships involved a Persian woman:

Is she not a charming girl, with features carved in marble, like a Greek's, the noble, thoughtful, Italian brown eyes deep and lustrous, as an Andalusian's, and the airy, graceful kind of figure with which Muhammad, according to our poets, peopled his man's paradise?20

In his own version of the story, Burton suggests that because of her liaison with Burton, the woman was rejected by her family and was eventually killed by poison. The consequences of Burton and his Persian lover defying customs were tragic, but both parties were aware of the implications of their actions and knew that they were flouting a very rigid social code. Burton's Persian lover did not fade from his memory easily. He wrote a poem about their love and her murderer:

Little I thought the hand of death
So soon would stay that fragrant breath...
Or that soft warm hand, that glorious head
Be pillowed on the grave's cold stone
Leaving my hapless self to tread
Life's weary way alone...
Adieu once more fond heart and true
My first my only love adieu
Cast the gloom of death around my soul...
Spirit of my own Shireen Fate headed my vow
Neer was a maid so fair so loved so last so 'vengeed as thou.21
The name Shireen used by Burton is still popular in many Muslim countries. Yet, while Burton is very discreet about his love interest in his travel writings, his poetry collection entitled *Stone Talk* is very revealing. In one poem called ‘Pariah’s Widow’, Burton expresses his feelings:

I loved—yes, I! Ah, let me tell
The fatal charms by which I fell!
Her form the tam’risk’s waving shoot,
Her breast the cocoa’s youngling fruit;

Her eyes were jetty, jet her hair,
O’ershadowing face like lotus fair;
Her lips were rubies, guarding flowers
Of jasmine dewed with vernal showers.22

Burton thus clearly delights in the company of women. His tales of love are many, as are his women in India. Burton’s books are full of lengthy descriptions of their beauty, temperaments, artifices, clothes, and habits; these books betray intimate observation and indicate that Burton was falling in and out of love on a regular basis. These excerpts from Burton’s love verses clearly express his feelings of love towards one of his lovers. A very long poem entitled “Tale of True Love” states:

Endue my tongue, O Allah, with truth!
My love is a pigeon, a pen-hen in gait,
A mist-cloud in lightness, in form a Peri;
And her locks are like the tendrils of the creeping shrub.
Burned for her my heart with the secret longing,
As the camel-colt, torn from his dam’s side.
At length when the taste of life was bitter on my palate,
Came the old minstrel carrying his guitar;
In his hand was a token from that lovely maid;
Then my withered heart bloomed as the tree in spring,
And smile of joy like the dawn lighted my brow
Where lives my fairest of maidens,
I opened the curtains of her abode...\(^{23}\)

Burton was only in his mid twenties during these love affairs and he worshipped the beauty and youthfulness of his lovers. However, he dissected the behaviours and the characters of his women in much the same way as he examined other subjects of interest such as “the prevalence of drunkenness.”\(^{24}\) For him, they were vehicles to the centre of the Muslim culture.

As Burton infiltrated into the native society, he learned progressively more about its sexual morals. It was at this time that Burton first began to learn more about the divergent sexual activities, which he described many years later in the controversial *Terminal Essay* to his translation of *Thousand Nights and a Night*. At that time, the town of Karachi was very small in both size and population, but it had many conventional bordellos, some of which had not only women but also boys and eunuchs for hire. Since Karachi was within a mile of the military cantonment, it was common for many British officers to spend their evenings in town. Burton was the only man in town who knew the local languages, castes, manners, customs, and religions. So, he was often asked by his superior, Sir Charles Napier, to investigate the activities at these brothels, due to the fact that Napier thought that the brothels were corrupting his troops, both British and native. The accounts of what Burton saw and recorded in these establishments are very detailed:
Karachi...supported no less than three lupanars or bordels, in which not women, but boys and eunuchs, the former demanding nearly a double price, lay for hire...Being the only officer who could speak Sindhi, I was asked indirectly to make enquiries and to report upon the subjects; and I took the task.\textsuperscript{25}

To Victorian society, the moral offences of homosexuality and pedophilia described by Burton were equally unspeakable. It is not surprising then that this information on Karachi did not sit well with some officials in the East India Company’s administration. Burton’s own sexual curiosity, his desire to examine sexual matters scientifically, combined with a natural fascination with the erotic, his knack of acute observation, and the desire to record minutely everything he observed, got the better of his judgement:

Accompanied by a Munshi, Mirza Mohammad Hosayn of Shiraz, and habited as a merchant, Mirza Abdullah the Bushire, I passed many an evening in the townlet, visited all the Porneia and obtained the fullest details.\textsuperscript{26}

Burton’s writing contains truly shocking details. For example, he writes that a boy prostitute commands double the price of a eunuch because, “the scrotum of the unmutilated boy could be used as a kind of bridle for directing [his] movements.”\textsuperscript{27} In what frame of mind Burton undertook this assignment is difficult to gage. However, while some officers reported that brothels were affecting the troops negatively, Burton provided the precise and detailed information about the goings-on which only a skilled observer could supply.
Now quite comfortable with his disguise, Burton found himself a wonderful place to study and gather information on sexual issues. The brothel favoured by Burton was run by “an elderly matron” and was located “on the banks of the Fulailee River, about a mile from the Fort of Hyderabad.” While the matron “Khanum Jan had been a beauty in her youth,”\textsuperscript{28} she was now elderly. She was a skilled entrepreneur, however, as her mud house brothel was doing very brisk trade:

Respectable matron’s peculiar vanity was to lend a helping hand in all manner of affaires du coeur. So it often happened that Mirza Abdullah [himself] was turned out of the house to pass few hours in the garden. There he sat upon his felt rug spread beneath a shadowy tamarind...of all economical studies this course was the cheapest...for hemp occasionally, for the benefit of Khanum Jan’s experience, for four months...the Mirza paid, the sum of six shillings.\textsuperscript{29}

Studying the goings-on at this house for four months provided Burton with enough knowledge, information, and experience to become comfortable with the subject of Eastern sexuality.

3.3 Conclusion

With the Empire nearing its height, its sense of confidence and security yet unchallenged, nevertheless much of the world beyond its bounds was still undiscovered by British society and was full of mystery. Until Richard F. Burton penetrated the far-off land of Mecca and Medina in disguise, the life in these lands was predominantly hidden from the eyes of the West. Why didn’t Burton travel to Mecca and Medina as an Englishman converted to Islam, like some of
his predecessors? Burton had a clear primary objective in mind. He knew exactly what he wished to achieve, namely to penetrate the two most sacred places of Islam, Mecca and Medina. Apart from a great adventure, Burton’s pilgrimage aimed to experience the Haj through the eyes of a Muslim, viewed as such by his peers.

Being identified as a native, allowed Burton to blend in, to move around freely, and to be one of the locals in this society of the other. As stated in the beginning of this thesis, Burton had spent many years in India practicing and perfecting his disguise. I have come to believe that it took a great deal of patience on Burton’s part to prepare for his perilous journey. When the time finally came for his pilgrimage, Burton was filled with pride and joy, because he was able to live, speak, pray, and perform all the religious rituals just like everyone else on this journey of a lifetime. Burton achieved his goal brilliantly, gaining the title of Haji, which provided Burton with the right to wear a green turban for rest of his life.

Obtaining the Haji title would later enable Burton to undertake another adventure, a trip to the city of Harar in Somaliland in 1854. Just like Mecca, this was another holy city to which no European had been allowed access. Even for a Muslim, the city of Harar was as difficult to enter as Mecca and Medina. Thus, for this journey, Burton added his new Haji title to his disguise. While the disguise made the trip possible, the addition of the title certainly made the journey easier.
for Burton. On the trip, Haji Abdullah, "a well-to-do merchant, told stories, read
horoscopes, and performed magic tricks to the delight of his companions," he
also, ..."talks at dreary length about Holy Places, writes a pretty hand, has read
and can recite much poetry." For Burton, it would have been impossible to
undertake these adventures as an Englishman, nor would they have produced
such an impact on Burton and on the English society.

With his pilgrimage to Mecca completed in 1853, it was time for Burton to
leave this holy land. Burton uses another fellow traveller’s words to describe his
emotions:

I have been exposed to perils, and I have escaped from them; I have
traversed the sea, and have not succumbed under the severest fatigues;
and my heart is moved with emotions of gratitude, that I have been
permitted to effect the objects I had in view.

Burton boarded the ship for Cairo and said goodbye to this wonderful land. It
was time for him to rest, write, and plan future adventures. Burton took great
pains to make sure that his experiences in India were shared with the rest of the
world. He spent several months in Cairo writing his Pilgrimage, but this project
took close to a year and was not finished until Burton reached Bombay. Burton’s
writings are a treasury of knowledge about India, Muslims, and the everyday life
of the Orient. This pilgrimage is his acknowledged masterpiece, and, as this thesis
has shown, owes much to Burton’s early India experience. Because of India, and
especially Sindh, the West had never before come in such close contact with the East, and the 'other'.
Notes to Chapter Three


4. Ibid. 97.


13. Ibid. 262.


15. Ibid. 263-4.

16. Ibid. 262.

17. Ibid. 264.


26. Ibid. 206.

27. Ibid. 205.


29. Ibid. 101.


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