English accounts of relationships with Indian women usually imagine them as tales of rescue in which benevolent Englishmen save Indian women from distressing situations such as forced marriage, inconsiderate relatives, or worst of all, the injunction to commit Sati with their dead husbands. The idea of rescuing Indian women from indigenous practices, customs, men, and oppressive families expresses nicely British benevolence and civilizational superiority. For British writers, describing these interracial relationships as “rescue” narratives keeps British respectability and civility intact and makes honor and love the motivating forces for British men. I argue here, however, that the domestic realities of negotiating a mixed household and parenting half-Indian children far exceed the rescue narrative. Instead of British benevolence, we see a class compact between an Englishman and his Indian wife in which the complex negotiations of domestic and cultural power are played out in a mixed household.

The romance of empire produces a fantasy in which the native woman becomes an ally of the colonizer and is gradually educated into becoming the perfect subject and wife. My larger argument in this book is that Indian women presented the recalcitrant element that would not be assimilated into this colonial fantasy. The domestic arrangements and mixed household of William Linnaeus Gardner (1772–1835) and his aristocratic Muslim wife, Mah Munzalool nissa Begum, show that
it is the Englishman who gets acculturated to a North Indian upper-class Muslim lifestyle. The colonial romance we get is not about the successful education, conversion, and rescue of the native woman by an Englishman. Instead, Gardner’s wife can be seen in the midst of a primarily Muslim household, active in organizing ceremonies and rituals related to the marriage of her children, and participating in decisions about their education. Her influence also extends beyond the home, and the cultural and economic capital she brings with her consolidates the social status of her husband. As Gardner represents the details of his domestic life, he comes across as a man who, while accepting some Indian acculturation, continues to assert his English identity. But two generations later, Gardner’s grandson, having adopted an aristocratic Muslim lifestyle, became a famous and prolific poet writing in Urdu and Persian under the name “Fana.”

My account of William Linneaus Gardner’s domestic life is based on the letters he wrote to his cousin, Edward Gardner, which are the only available record of his life. Between January 5, 1820 and December 23, 1821, Gardner wrote 120 letters to his cousin, who was the British Resident in Nepal. Much of the original bound collection of letters has been damaged by water, but fortunately a typed transcript from some time before 1963 is available. From this source, I have tried to construct those scenes from Gardner’s life that suggest the kind of social power Indian women could assume in an interracial household.

Letters assume a special significance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when there was “a culture of sensibility” in which private feelings and emotions could be expressed by both men and women. Connections with home and family overseas, links with other British men similarly positioned in India, and informal communication about social and political matters were carried on in letters. Kate Teltcher makes a case for the significance of the letter as a colonial document when she writes that, “mediating between periphery and the metropolis, the exotic and the domestic, the spheres of work and home, the familiar letter was central to the construction of colonial identity” (Teltcher 282). I argue in this chapter that Gardner keeps alive his sense of his English identity in his letters to his cousin. His ironic and humorous comments about his Indian life express both a level of comfort with it, but also some distance from it when his English values and ideas dominate. Because these letters were written towards the end of Gardner’s life (he died in 1835), they provide an opportunity for him to reflect on a wide range of interests and preoccupations. With Edward,
Gardner he shares gossip about peers, information about family and social events, financial worries, and reflections on his life.

I place Gardner’s life in the context of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century India by presenting parallel examples from the life of James Achilles Kirkpatrick, a contemporary of Gardner and Resident in the South Indian state of Hyderabad, whose marriage to the aristocratic Khair-un-nissa and the context in which it took place have been narrated so evocatively and comprehensively by William Dalrymple in his White Mughals. The private papers of both Gardner and Kirkpatrick provide glimpses of a mixed household, an English lifestyle grafted on to a predominantly Muslim one, and male friendship and camaraderie with English men in a world segregated from their romantic relationships with Indian women. Their sense of the superiority of British civilization combines with an uneasy recognition of the value of their Indian wives. In each case, the courtship and marriage have all the elements of a medieval tale of romance in which the glimpse of a beautiful maiden elicits the appropriately chivalrous response from the English hero while his potential as her savior makes him irresistible to the maiden. On further examination, however, we get a more complex picture of a new aristocratic elite, both British and Muslim, who share and maintain cultural and political power. More importantly, Gardner’s tale begins with a rescue narrative, but departs from it because in their long married life his wife retains the kind of cultural power not attained by the ultimately abandoned and tragic figure of Kirkpatrick’s Khair-un-nissa. Gardner’s wife, like many other eighteenth-century Indian bibis, or informal wives of British colonials, was also a critical source of information about language, culture, social structures, and power relations. Chris Bayly notes this phenomenon of late-eighteenth-century India when he writes that “women had always been central to the process of faction and alliance building in India” (Bayly 91).

Colonel William Linneaus Gardner, who is best known for training a body of distinguished military cavalry corps called “Gardner’s Horse,” arrived in India at a very young age seeking the exotic delights of the East through employment in the army. He was employed by the Maratha ruler Tukoji Holkar for whom he trained an infantry unit. After Tukoji’s death, Gardner continued working for his successor, Yashwant Rao Holkar. Gardner was stationed with his corps at Khassgunge in 1819, at Saugor in 1821, at Bareilly in 1821–23, in Arracan in 1825, and at Khassgunge again in 1826–27. After 1828, Gardner does not appear in the British or Indian army lists. As his letters show, he had decided to
retire and disperse his corps. He established himself as a zamindar (landlord) in Khasgunge in Uttar Pradesh, and lived there in a predominantly Muslim household with his wife, the Nawab Mah Munzalool nissa Begum Dheline, daughter of the Nawab of Cambay. Gardner’s letters are a record of his interests, anxieties, political concerns, and hopes for himself and his family; they also provide glimpses of the mixed Indian Muslim and English domestic life of this interracial couple.

From 1820 to the time he died, Gardner seems to have been consumed by his financial concerns and desire to leave the army. The East India Company refused to recognize him as an officer of the British army and despite his commission considered him a “Maharatta officer.” This angered Gardner, who was facing both the reduction of his corps and supersession by a junior officer. At the urging of the then Governor-General, the Marquess of Hastings, he petitioned the Prince Regent to retain his proper rank in the military. Feeling let down by the Marquis, Gardner wrote, “I am disgusted with the Service” (16 Nov. 1820), and “I feel a foolish sort of Pride that I have acted uprightly in my Command, and have founded my Claims on the Approbation of Government on my services and the fidelity with which I have served them” (5 March 1820). Like many independent English adventurers of an earlier era, he was horrified at the aggressive and hostile policies of the British rulers towards India. Dalrymple, in his account of the romance of Kirkpatrick and Khair-un-nissa, reports a similar falling out between James Kirkpatrick and Governor-General Wellesley (1797–1805) over the question of just negotiations with Indian rulers. Kirkpatrick also felt that the era of aggressive expansion inaugurated by Wellesley had led to dishonorable and unnecessarily cruel British policies. Dalrymple describes Gardner as the last survivor of a world in which “the relationship between India and Britain was a symbiotic one (Dalrymple xli). We can reasonably conclude that the political perspectives of Gardner and Kirkpatrick had been formed by their intimate Indian relationships.

Gardner had spent his early years in America and France. Colonel Lionel Gardner, his biographer and living descendant, writes that an adolescent William Linneaus, who lived in Paris with his mother, Alida, was fascinated by the lore of India brought back to France by French army officers and their Indian wives. His admiration for these wives arose from the fact that they had “shy ways and a languid grace” he had not seen in any European women (Gardner 9). His French girlfriends apparently retaliated by describing the behavior of the Indian women as “smacking of the servility of slaves” (Gardner 9). Gardner insisted that their docility showed, in fact, love and respect for their husbands,
“qualities sadly lacking in European wives” (Gardner 9). These conservative and patriarchal views of a young adolescent grew strong in the adult Gardner, who opposed the French revolution and criticized “old England and its revolutionary ladies.” Gardner’s life and career in India instantiates the eighteenth-century British vision of India as a place enabling chivalric deeds and grand gestures of honor in the manner of medieval knights and crusaders—a kind of premodern Eden untouched by the sociopolitical unrest that marked late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Europe.

In 1815, Gardner complained in a letter to his aunt that he had not heard from his family in England for seventeen years, in fact, ever since he announced his marriage to an Indian girl. Giving a brief account of his romance, he writes that in 1798, “I by accident saw the daughter, [of the Nawab of Kambay] when about fourteen years of age, and what originated in humanity and pity at my age [of 26] soon gave place to other sentiments, and I was soon after united to the lady with all the ceremonies, which by their religion were alone considered binding.”

Gardner’s marriage to an Indian woman also radically altered his relationship to his mother country, something that had always been understood as an unvarying condition of nostalgia and yearning for home. In the same letter, he wrote, “England appeared to me of all places the one in which I should be most a stranger, and the very idea of ever visiting it has now been long obliterated from my mind.” Gardner’s story is not an isolated incident. The many reports of a group of renegade army officers who lived with Indian women in the late eighteenth century captured the imagination of Victorian and Anglo-Indian writers, and until recently, these stories continued to provide the model for “Raj” stories.

Gardner’s letter to his aunt describes a well-known narrative of a helpless young native girl granted protection by the European officer culminating in a marriage between the two. In a parallel example, Dalrymple speculates on how James Kirkpatrick was granted access to Khair-un-nissa, whose family were connected to the aristocratic prime minister of the Nawab of Hyderabad. From the multiple sources available, one of the narratives that inevitably emerges is that the young Khair-un-nissa, wanting to escape from a hateful marriage arranged for her by her father, throws herself at Kirkpatrick. Describing their first meeting, Kirkpatrick writes that Khair-un-nissa expressed “a passion which I could not I confess help feeling myself something more than pity for.” Most Englishmen in such situations seem to have become benevolent saviors of hapless adolescent girls in a popular rescue narrative.
However, Gardner’s letters show a tale that begins as a rescue narrative, but develops into a story about the power and prestige that aristocratic Muslim women brought to their interracial relationships. These women ruled their households and exercised considerable autonomy in practicing their religion and perpetuating the cultural practices of upper-class Muslims.

Fanny Parkes, in her autobiographical account, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*, describes a meeting with the elderly Colonel Gardner in which he recounts for her the story of his marriage to the princess of Cambay. While in the employ of Tukoji Holkar, a young Gardner is sent to Cambay to negotiate a treaty. The young daughter of the Nawab, veiled and segregated but present at the court, out of a curiosity about the dashing young Englishman, pulls aside the corner of a curtain and looks at Gardner as he presents himself before the Nawab. Gardner sees “the most beautiful black eyes in the world” and promptly falls in love with her. He is so smitten that “it was impossible to think of the treaty; those bright and piercing glances, those beautiful dark eyes, completely bewildered me” (qtd. in Parkes 417). At the next meeting, he was anxious to see her again, and when “the parda again was gently moved, . . . my fate was decided” (qtd. in Parkes 417). He “demands” the princess’s hand in marriage, but also warns the Nawab that if any attempt is made to marry him off to someone else in place of his daughter, he would declare open war. At first, the relations of the princess were positively indignant, but according to Gardner, his position as ambassador made them reluctant to thwart him, and perhaps, they also saw the marriage as an advantageous political alliance. At the wedding ceremony, Gardner lifted her veil and recognized the princess from her eyes! They were married according to Muslim ritual and established a domestic life which seemed predominantly Muslim. Gardner’s romance with his wife is cast in the most Orientalist of terms as the repetition of the words “black eyes” shows. The erotics of the gaze, so much celebrated in cultures where there is segregation between men and women, is foregrounded in his memory of the encounter with the alluring “black eyes” of which he catches a mere glimpse.

When a report bordering on the scandalous appeared in a newspaper, Gardner wrote a rejoinder explaining how he came to be married to an Indian woman. In his letter, he denied the aura of romance that attaches to his marriage, saying that his wife was then only thirteen years old: “I fear I must divest my marriage with her highness the Begum of a great part of its romantic attraction, by confessing that the young Begum was only thirteen years of age when I first applied for
and received her mother’s consent” (qtd. in Parkes 415). Given that Gardner’s response to the young princess was entirely in accordance with traditions of romance, it is difficult to understand what he meant by “divesting” his relationship with her of any romance. He seems to have thought of it as a hot-blooded and impulsive act, which he nevertheless lived by for the rest of his life. Many years later, on a visit to the Gardner estate, a bemused Fanny Parkes, watching the games and frivolous rituals attendant upon a Muslim marriage, asked the Colonel how he could have tolerated such folly at his own wedding. He responded by pointing out that “I was young then and in love, I would have done or promised anything” (qtd. in Parkes 439).

In his letter Gardner responds to the speculation in the newspaper article “that it is difficult to say what sort of bridal contract is gone through between a Moslem beauty and a Christian gentleman, but the ceremony is supposed to be binding” (qtd. in Parkes 412) with the observation that “a Moslem lady’s marriage with a Christian, by a Cazee, is as legal in this country as if the ceremony had been performed by the Bishop of Calcutta; a point lately settled by my son’s marriage with the niece of the Emperor, the Nawab Mulka Humanee Begum” (qtd. in Parkes 415). The cultural capital that attended such a marriage ensured its respectability and also gave it social and political power. In the same letter, Gardner also emphasizes that his granddaughters were brought up Christian by a special request of their grandmother even though the marriage contract had stipulated that the girls would be raised Muslim. He mentions this with an element of pride, thereby giving the lie to the possibility that he had shed his prejudice against Muslim acculturation. Gardner’s devotion to his wife is further evident in the fact that in his will he leaves all his property and assets to her, and enjoins his son as executor to make sure that she is provided for.

Not all brewing ‘scandals’ had such a happy ending, however. Here again the comparison with Kirkpatrick is instructive. Public scandals usually created a confrontation between official British values and the private lives of European men in India. In the case of Kirkpatrick and Khair-un-nissa, the relationship began in secret, though with the support of Khair-un-nissa’s grandmother, but soon got embroiled in the ongoing political intrigues and power struggles at the court of the Nawab of Hyderabad. The hawkish Governor-General Wellesley strongly disapproved of the relationship and was alarmed at the charges of sexual coercion that had been brought against Kirkpatrick by court factions who were hostile to him. Kirkpatrick was then at pains to disprove these charges and to exonerate himself to the Governor-General,
whose aggressive political attitude and behavior had already alienated Kirkpatrick from him. James’s brother William, a high ranking official in the Company, interceded on his behalf, and though Kirkpatrick was finally able to make the case that his marriage was honorable, his career never showed the same promise as before.\textsuperscript{10} Lt.-Colonel Gardner had better luck when he offered written clarification that his marriage had been recognized by the family of the Mughal king of Delhi (though now ruling only in name). He is something of an exception to the rule that interracial relationships were covert. The high social standing of his wife could be one reason why he felt comfortable acknowledging his relationship to her. For the women’s families, contracting an alliance with a powerful ruling class could only produce positive results. This would explain not only why the immediate families of Gardner’s Begum and Khair-un-nissa did not oppose their marrying Englishmen but in fact actively supported the idea. Both controversies raise piquant questions about the relationship between public profiles and private lives, the chivalric and romantic terms in which interracial relationships were defended, the culturally mixed lives led by these men, and most significantly, the presence of these women in their lives.

The kind of cultural syncretism practiced by elite Muslim families and independent Englishmen is the defining quality of late-eighteenth-century Anglo-Indian relations. Gardner seems to have known Urdu and may well have had knowledge of Persian. But for a man who lived all his life as part of a mixed household, which included at least two religions, cultures, and languages, he held to some colonial ideas in wanting his children to marry English Christians. This could, of course, be read as a comment about the crumbling fortunes of the Mughals and Muslim aristocracy in general rather than an expression of a colonial attitude about British superiority. The newspaper report cited above continues its somewhat scurrilous interest in the complexion of Gardner’s daughter, and speculates about whether they were happy to be raised Muslim or chafed against the confinement that came with such an upbringing. It characterizes Gardner as “half an Asiatic” because he has passed most of his time adopting “the opinions and ideas” of Indians. It does not, however, refer to Gardner in any but the most respectful terms, despite his unorthodox lifestyle.

Gardner’s openness about racial mixing signals a pre-Victorian consciousness in which race had not yet been loaded with the pseudoscientific language of biological evolution. His comments about race show that he connects them to class rather than biology. The word hybridity as referring to ‘miscegenation’ or interracial marriage has a particularly
Victorian lineage, and at least in literary texts, always carries allegorical potential. I have already presented some historical reasons why interracial marriage and mixed children did not have a large presence in India. For literary treatments of the subject, it is de rigueur to turn to Kipling’s short stories and *Kim* and I do so now to provide a contrast between Gardner’s narrative and a canonical representation of miscegenation even though almost a century separates the life and writings of the two men. In his fine study of Kipling, John McBratney points out that even in someone as sympathetic to India as Kipling, the attitude towards Eurasians was that they were “caught between British and Indian societies, fundamentally inferior to both, and embraced by neither” (McBratney 55). This would explain the absence of narrative scripts that would include Eurasians as a central part of a literary plot. Late in the nineteenth century, the fear and repulsion against biological crossing and its perceived connection with degeneracy and moral and physical debility generated by the writings of Robert Knox, Count Gobineau, and Edward Long created a severe resistance to imagining children of mixed marriages or the consequences of interracial desire.

McBratney makes a telling distinction between ‘mingling’ and ‘mixing’: the first denotes a combination of two separate elements that keep their integrity intact while the second alters and transforms the two into a third entity (McBratney 63). While in *Kim*, Kipling can imagine a cultural mixing in Kim’s ability to speak Indian languages and pass as Indian, he still cannot contemplate making him racially anything but white, and Irish at that. Making him racially mixed would have meant that “the ‘pure’ Briton is irretrievably lost within the Indian” (McBratney 64). A similar fear is at work in the representation of Indian women in Kipling’s “Beyond the Pale,” where “in the colonizer’s hysterical imagination, a dangerously erotic female India . . . threatens to entomb Englishmen in an underworld from which they cannot return” (McBratney 71). This is still very much the landscape of adventure and romance in which racially other female figures threaten English values. Marriage and children cannot be accommodated in this imagination. My definition of ‘family romance,’ on the other hand, moves the discussion away from a Gothic register to the concerns of domesticity and the mundane and everyday challenges of organizing a household and the raising of children.

Gardner’s letters reveal a very different kind of cultural experience from the English experience portrayed in Kipling’s stories. He confronts racial mixing constantly, in his household, in his children, and his dependents. His affection for his family is expressed over and over
again—he is afraid of being transported to England “from comfort and family” (16 Nov. 1820), and “how I long for Khassgunge—the Butchas [children]—the library, garden and liberty!” (26 Dec. 1820). On returning to his household in Khassgunge and his grandchildren, Gardner writes, “The shouts of joy when I return after an absence of any time can be heard for a mile. And the house is filled with Brats, and the very thinking of them, from Blue eyes and fair hair to Ebony and Wool makes me quite anxious to get back.” (6 Jan. 1821). When he visited the home of James Skinner—another Anglo-Indian known for his mixed household and his Indian wife—Gardner notes that he saw “all Skinner’s children of all hues and colors” (22 June 1820).

In a world where all manner of formal and informal alliances between English men and Indian women are common, Gardner’s son James enters into a relationship with Mrs De Caneiro (who is most likely a Catholic of Portuguese descent), who is then accommodated in the Gardner household. Mrs De Canerio’s two young daughters add to the already large number of young women in the household. Gardner’s response to this is definitely couched in racial terms as becomes clear from this letter laced with his usual riqué humor, when he writes to Edward: “I have now 12 girls of European blood, under 14 years of age, to provide for and get married, how and to whom, God knows. Will you have two or three?” (9 March 1821). While social status seems to have been the paramount consideration in arranging marriages, race was certainly considered. All Gardner’s daughters married Englishmen so that their status would be secured while the sons had the flexibility to marry Indian women. Yet race is only considered in terms of class and status. There is no reflection on its connection to physical strength, morality, or other human capacities. I would argue that in Gardner’s letter, race gets almost entirely subsumed under culture, class, and religion. From the evidence of his letters and the example of other Englishmen in his situation, the same kind of acceptance of racial mixing prevailed among his peers. And, among this small group of elite families in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century India who lived in Anglo-Muslim households, English husbands, while strenuously insisting on English values, were nevertheless competent in Indian language, idioms, customs, and manners. The hybrid self that Gardner does not acknowledge to Edward nevertheless comes through in his smooth and unselfconscous use of language that is replete with Urdu and Hindustani words such as ‘butchas’ (children), ‘pukowing’ (cooking), ‘dada’ (grandfather), ‘zillah’ (district), ‘goulam’ (slave), ‘takraar’ (quarrel), ‘nuzzur’ (sighting), and ‘mungnee’ (engagement).
Fanny Parkes gives a vivid description of the Gardner household, and also the home of his son James, who married into a branch of the ruling Mughals of Delhi. In her account, Gardner appears as a gallant old man trying to keep his family together and battling financial worries. She reports on the power of the women within the household, and their active participation in making decisions about their children’s education and marriages. “I fancy the Begum, his mother, would never hear of her son’s going to England for education . . . ” (Parkes 436). Parkes’s understanding of “native” women leads her to conclude that through a display of anger and sulkiness, they would have got their way in most such decisions. Hence, when the Begum did not want James to go to England for education like many other mixed-race children, her wishes carried the day.13 The Begum follows the injunctions laid down for upper-class Muslim women by actively donating money for religious causes. Parkes notes that “the sums of money and the quantity of food distributed by Colonel Gardner’s Begum in charity was surprising; she was a religious woman, and fulfilled, as far as was in her power, the ordinances of her religion” (Parkes 436). The Begum did not lack initiative when it came to financial matters either. Her son James tried to buy land in a village, but could not complete the deal because the East India Company had just passed new regulations prohibiting foreigners from buying land. The Begum wrote triumphantly to Gardner that she immediately sent an application for purchase of the land in her own name (he uses the word “dhurkchaust” or appeal) “certifying that she was not a feringhy butcha [child of foreigners]” and got the land within the village. Although Gardner’s response to this is to make misogynistic remarks about the growing power of women, there is grudging admiration as well. Parkes’s comments on the old Begum’s daughter-in-law are even more complimentary. William Gardner’s son, James Gardner, a local landowner who runs an indigo farm, is assisted in his business by the advice of his wife, Mulka Begum, “to whom the natives look up with highest respect” (Parkes 436). Mulka Begum’s power and charisma extend beyond her own household, and “her word is regarded as law by her villagers and dependents” (Parkes 436). James Gardner’s wife may have brought these villages in her dowry or may have exercised power over the villagers because of her connection with the royal family of Delhi, but it is clear that as a married woman, she continued to exercise her inherited social power.

In such a household, Gardner often comes across as a compliant and long-suffering husband who accedes to all the demands of the women. When an English gentleman inquires through Parkes if Gardner would
be willing to give him his granddaughter in marriage, he responds, “Tell Mr—— I am flattered by his wish to be of my family, and would willingly give him my grand-daughter, but the Begum is bent on this grand alliance, as she considers it” (Parkes 396; emphasis in original). Gardner is referring to the Begum’s insistence that their granddaughter marry a young prince of Delhi. The negotiations for his son James’s wedding are vividly presented in Gardner’s usual satiric tone. Writing from Ourvowdah, on the left bank of the Jumna, five miles from Calpee, he says, “… The Begum is settling her abominable marriage with Sombres Begum for James, and I do not expect her to return till the end of May unless she gets jealous of the slave girls at Khassgunge” (34). His tongue-in-cheek remarks throughout his letters underscore the quiet domestic felicity achieved after a long, happy marriage. Gardner’s anxiety about his financial situation pervades the letters and James’s impending marriage brings it out again. But attached to this concern is also a commitment to his wife as this comment shows: “I fear James’s marriage will make a deep hole in the 15,000 but n’importe, the marriage will be Hindostanee, and it would break the Mother’s heart not to have Kettle Drum and fireworks” (13 July 1821). The Begum dominates the proceedings as Gardner makes clear:

I believe James is to be contracted at the next Eid [Muslim festival] but can say nothing certain as I am not in the secret—and women are going between daily and the business appears something like the National Debt and sinking fund for I understand as much of the one as of the other—my part is prompted and I act it as instructed—all I have had to do as yet was to tell the old Begum [Samroo] I had brought her a goulam [slave]. Her answer was you have brought my eyes and liver!! This I am told is all as it should be—the only thing I have interfered in was to place my veto to the whole Royal Family coming to the shadee [marriage] as I can not afford it. (6 June 1820)

Gardner explains tongue-in-cheek that the women plot and negotiate a marriage for his son, while he is left out of it all entirely until “prompted.” He plays his part gamely by engaging in witty repartee with the old Begum, who makes protestations of deep affection for his wife, her “slave.” Only when it comes to financial matters does he put his foot down and refuse to invite the entire royal family to the wedding.

During the negotiations for his son James’s wedding in Delhi, Gardner observes that the Begum Samroo “so mixes Hindoostanee and Christian” custom that the British Resident David Ochterlony and
Gardner were both pressed into service to find precedents or invent a mourning ceremony combining both kinds of rituals to mark the death of the Begum’s relative, Mrs Dyce. This episode provides insight into the syncretic cultural universe that Gardner occupied, though he sounds more long-suffering than an active participant. However, it must be noted that most of his complaints are about the expense involved in feeding hundreds of people and the impatience of an older man being conscripted into ceremonies and rituals for which he seems to have only the most perfunctory regard. When the irresponsible Ochterlony forgets about this ceremony, Gardner becomes anxious that “the ceremony and expense will devolve on me in the character of sumdee [relative], and costs from 3 to 4000 Rs in dresses to the family and feeding. Not only her large family but to the wives and families of all the great folks of Delhi who have taken up their quarters at her House from the Day of Mrs D’s Death” (7 July 1820). In his next letter, Gardner explains that James’s intended is the daughter of Mrs Dyce, and hence the family is placed in the awkward position of being in mourning while planning a wedding. Ochterlony finally agrees to the ceremony of the Soogh, a ceremonial observance for a mourning in the family, which involves holding a feast for the extended family and others connected to the estate of Begum Sumroo. Gardner hints that this matter would not be resolved without squabbling between the Begum and Ochterlony, presumably on the subject of expenses. His lively report on the activities in a household which is in the midst of planning an engagement also reveals the central role of women in cultural and social activities. The intermingling of Christian and Muslim custom seems to be an accepted part of this small group of elite families who had intermarried.

Images of the “mixed” life that Gardner led also filter through in his discussion of his library and garden, surely the most British of institutions (although here reflective equally of a Muslim fascination with ornamental gardens), and his large extended family follows the tradition of country estates among the Indian aristocracy. Stationed at Saugor, he writes to Edward, “How I long for Khassgunge—the Butchas—the library, garden and liberty!” (26 Dec. 1820). A similar interest in gardens as an expression of British identity can be found in the case of James Kirkpatrick. His longing for England can be gleaned from the fact that he acquired farmland in which “he wished to create the sort of gentle, informal park that William Kent, Capability Brown and Humphrey Repton had made fashionable in the England of his youth: an arrangement that had become as central to British conceptions of peaceful, civilized refinement, as cool rippling waters and the shade
of overarching broadleaf trees was to that of the Mughals” (Dalrymple 332). It was not the most successful of experiments. What visitors to the Residency remembered were extensive gardens “principally Indian in inspiration” (Dalrymple 333). Fanny Parkes notes that Gardner, like his godfather William Linneaus, is “an excellent botanist. . . . [H]is garden at Khasgunge is a very extensive and most delightful one” and that “it is one of the pleasures of the Begum and her attendants to spend the day in that garden” (Parkes 397). Among the rare trees and plants are many with medicinal properties. In Parkes’s words, the Begum, “although not a botanist, after the European fashion, . . . knows the medicinal qualities of all the Indian plants, and the dyes that can be produced from them; and this knowledge is of daily account in the zenana” (Parkes 397). Both Gardner and his Begum seem to have found a harmonious co-existence based on different systems of beliefs.

In another instance of mixed traditions in his life, Gardner’s belief in European systems of medicine co-exists with his acceptance of the efficacy of indigenous Indian remedies. He reports in a letter to Edward that his Begum is keeping in reasonably good health, but though the Dhilimichi (an honorific for his wife) is happy and for the present does not feel her illness . . . I think unless she submits to European treatment her life is a very bad one” (1 August 1820). Yet later in the month, when he had an attack of cholera which became so serious that he was rendered “cold and insensible,” the family physician Dr. Scott, “was obliged to resign his situation of Doctor to the Begum” (28 Aug. 1820). She takes charge and in Gardner’s wry narration pours down his throat “such a mixture of black and red pepper, garlic juice, onion juice, and ginger juice as was enough to have embalmed an Egyptian” (28 Aug. 1820). There is no evidence to suggest that this incident converted Gardner to another system of medicine or that he acknowledged the limitations of European cures. However, he did not refuse herbal cures and certainly supported his wife in her pursuit of such cures.

This does not of course present a case for religious and cultural hybridity because even though Gardner was constantly surrounded by different customary and religious practices, he expresses great irreverence for religion, especially Catholicism, Islam, and Hinduism. In the absence of any connection with organized religion or a community, he shows an acceptance of different customs, but not necessarily an appreciation of them. He is particularly satirical about Hindu practices that he encounters. Some of this satire is also caused by the fact that these practices are found in his newly appointed senior, General Stuart. Unexpectedly, General Stuart relishes Hindu rituals and Gardner speculates
that “he does not pride himself on the capacity of his stomach or the strength of his head as he regularly performs his poojah [Hindu prayer] and avoid the sight of beef” (5 Jan. 1820). Later the General invites Gardner to meet him at the bathing ghats (steps) of the river where Hindus bathe and then leaves him in command of the corps while he visits a Hindu temple. Gardner reports that he greets every Hindu with “jhey sittaramjee” (Hail to Ram and Sita). Even more amusing is the report that General Stuart “was riding around the Cantonment this morning seated behind his Pundit [priest] on a camel!” (4 April 1820).

In another letter to Edward, Gardner writes about Hindu bathing rituals believed to wash off all sins. The occasion for these remarks is the fact that his “Hindoo fellows” have been insisting that they want to go and bathe in the river “Nerbudda” (Narmada) because such an auspicious conjunction of planets would not happen again for 2500 years. Gardner writes, “What a charming religion! This and the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church are the only comfortable ones after all. Our somber adoration gives the National tone—see how blithe and gay the French and Italians are. No wonder when weekly absolution balances all accounts” (28 March 1821).

Despite his somewhat typical responses to religious practice, and his long-suffering response to the expense involved, however, it is clear that in the Gardner household Muslim festivals are celebrated with expense and traditional pomp. In a letter dated September 19, Gardner writes: “I was in hopes to have avoided the noise and expense of a Khassgunge Ede, but here are all the Widows (?) of the country come to torment me. . . . So God bless you, I could not consider the Ede as Ede had I not assured you, my dear Edward, how affectionately I am yours.” We can guess from these remarks that Gardner accepts the Muslim festival of Id as a festive occasion and probably participated in the festivities. On the other hand, the Muslim festival of Muharram does not seem to have been a favorite of his. His comments about it are noteworthy for the episode they describe involving his irreverent half-brother Valentine, whose behavior seems to have worried Gardner for the latter part of his life. Announcing the upcoming festival, Gardner writes, “My torment, the Mohurrum, has commenced. . . . Val was allowed to look at the sanctum sanctorum last night, on the promise of good behavior, which he kept, with the exception of spanking his backside in sympathy with the maatam (mourning)! However, as he managed these responsive beats without the Begum’s seeing him, it all passed very well” (10 Oct. 1820). So even though he doesn’t participate in the observances, Gardner is concerned that his wife not be angered by any show of
irreverence for one of the most important occasions for Shia Muslims in which the martyrdom of Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet, at Karbala, is remembered with acts of mourning and commemoration. At any given time, Gardner’s household is composed of outsiders and observers as much as enthusiastic participants in Muslim ceremonies. Gardner is thus placed in the strange position of openly acknowledging his discomfort with Muslim ritual yet being embarrassed by an outright act of disrespect for the religion of his wife. Sharing his concern about arranging suitable marriages for his daughters, granddaughters, and other young female relatives in his extended family, rather coarsely expressed as “providing for the blood fillies,” Gardner muses, “what would people say if it was known that they are not Christians, nor are they pagans, still less have I had them circumcised” (Letter 70). Dalrymple’s speculations about a comparable situation, the mixed household of Khair-un-nissa and James Kirkpatrick, are instructive here. He notes Khair’s piety and concludes that she must have wanted her children to be raised as Muslims. Kirkpatrick could have no objections to this as he had been willing to undergo a formal conversion ceremony so that he could marry her. Dalrymple notes that, though “there is no unequivocal evidence that he regularly practiced his new faith, or regarded himself as a an active Muslim, his mother-in-law, who lived closely with him, certainly believed him to be such, as did his Munshi, Aziz Ullah” (Dalrymple 340). Neither Gardner nor Kirkpatrick really discusses what the proximity to Muslim practices meant to them. Dalrymple mentions the fact that Gardner converted to Islam to marry his Begum, but their “official” life required them to assume and perform an English persona and uphold English values. Thus, though the evidence shows their relative comfort and ease with a Muslim lifestyle, it is hard to make a case for a hybrid or syncretic culture in which both kinds of cultural and religious practices were harmoniously blended. It was, rather, more a case of peaceful co-existence.

In navigating the difficult waters of cultural influence and indoctrination, Gardner was very concerned about reproducing British masculinity in his sons. He seems to have been unhappy with his son James’s affair with Mary de Caniero, a Eurasian widow who sought Gardner’s protection. Gardner claims, in one of his letters, that since he considers her under his protection, he is particularly unhappy about James’s paying court to her. James’s second marriage was similarly marked by scandal at the court of Oudh, the Mughal court, and in Gardner’s family. Gardner offered protection to Mulka Begum, the niece of the Mughal emperor who was visiting her sister, the wife of the King of Oudh. The
King fell in love with her and wanted to marry her against her will. At her father’s behest, Gardner persuaded the King to give her up and brought her into his large household. While she was living in his home, Gardner’s son James fell in love with her and they eloped. Gardner was so unhappy with his son that he refused to speak to him for two years. At the end of that period, James appealed to him and Gardner finally softened his hard stand on the issue. He seems to have been very unsympathetic towards his son’s romantic aspirations which were compounded by the “dishonorable” manner in which he acted upon them. James seems to have acted honorably in the end, however. In his will, he left most of his property and assets to his wife Mulka Begum, but also provided for his mistress Mary de Caniero and acknowledged his children by her.

Beleagured and disaffected as he was towards the end of his life, Gardner emphatically states again and again that his greatest happiness was in being with his family. Discussing his plans for retiring from his corps to his estate in Khasgunge, he writes about his finances, his desire for a more settled and peaceful life, and his attachment to his family:

‘Tis but too true that I have not the means to live there as I have for years been accustomed to. On my own Account I care little but am attached to my family and should have wished to provide more substantially for them. However, they are all Predestinarians and will attribute the loss, not to my fault, but their own Stars.

. . . At Khasgunge I anticipate very great happiness. I delight in having nothing to do, I am fond of reading and am fond of my Garden and (there’s no accounting for tastes) have more relish in playing with the little Brats than for the first Society in the World. The Begum and I, in 22 years constant contact, have smoothed off each other’s asperities and roll on peaceably and contentedly. (5 March 1820)

Gardner’s concern with making adequate provision for his family dominates his letters to Edward Gardner. He is obviously very fond of his children and grandchildren and says quite explicitly here that he would rather spend time with them than with “the first Society in the World.” His relationship with his wife is elsewhere portrayed in the language of a humorously querulous old man. When he doesn’t hear from his family, he gets anxious: “I believe the folks at Khassgunge are all Baked or Bedevilled, I have not had a line these 12 days, and some of them used to write to me daily” (Letter 80, Babel 24 June 1821). From his letters, it becomes clear that the separation of Gardner from his family is a hard-
ship for his wife as well. Using his usual combination of raillery and wit, he writes that she has urged him to “leave the service and come starve at Khassgunge” (Letter 80, 24 June 1821). The Begum had made some financial calculations to persuade Gardner that they would have enough to live on, but Gardner thinks it involves counting on certain eventualities such as fixed taxes and price of grain to feed his horses that were not that certain. This exchange reveals the close relationship that Gardner had with his wife and extended family and the good humor with which they seem to have maintained it. When Gardner died in 1835, Fanny Parkes wrote:

My beloved friend Colonel Gardner . . . was buried, according to his desire, near the [domed Mughal] tomb of his son Allan. From the time of his death the poor Begum pined and sank daily; just as he said she complained not, but she took his death to heart; she died one month and two days after his decease. (Parkes 458)

The romance of Gardner and his wife thus had a long life and was carried through even into death, surely a historical instance of a happy interracial marriage such as we do not find in literary texts later in the century. Late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literary texts fail to imagine this kind of domestic life and shy away from representing mixed-race children.

The narrative I have reconstructed reveals the unacknowledged cultural mixing in an interracial household and the indigenization of Englishmen, owed in large part to their Indian partners. The women, even in a segregated Muslim society, enjoyed social and political power and built alliances with other powerful families. In this episode, the romance of empire is about the unexpected sharing of domestic power between an English man and a Muslim woman and their exploration of a syncretic lifestyle; it thus presents a critique of the idea of British benevolence as the core of the romance of Anglo-Indian life. As a coda to this romance, and further evidence of the direction of cultural syncretism, it is worth noting that one of Gardner’s grandsons adopted the traditions of Mughal courtly culture of the mid-eighteenth century and became a noted poet in Urdu. The fact that nine members of the family took on Urdu pen names and became prolific poets have led scholars to note that “there is probably no other Anglo-Indian family of India which has produced so many poets of Urdu” (Saksena 101). Suleiman Shikoh, Gardner’s grandson, is reported to have been fluent in Arabic, Persian, English, Urdu, Hindi, and had, in addition, a smattering of Pashto. He
achieved some literary fame with his writings in Persian, Hindi, and Urdu. He was also considered to be a patron of poets and a famous poet, Jan Sahab, after many wanderings, was given refuge by Suleiman Shikoh and ultimately died there. His son, Daniel Nathaniel Gardner, also named “Shukr” studied with the scholar Mirza Abbas Hussain Hosh Lucknavi. He went on to write poetry in Urdu and Persian, though the complete collection of his poems is untraced. He contributed to literary magazines, especially *Guldastai* in the period 1885–1886 (Saksena 120–21). I recount this narrative of Gardner’s grandson and great-grandson to show how for Gardner’s family a kind of absorption into Muslim culture happened steadily through the next three generations and after. If the romance of empire is about educating good citizens of empire and turning them into quasi-colonials, this narrative moves the other way, absorbing the Englishman ultimately into the traditions of the land that he made his home.