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From India to England and Back: Early Indian Travel Narratives for Indian Readers

Michael H. Fisher

INDIAN MEN AND WOMEN have been traveling to England since about 1600, roughly as long as Englishmen have been sailing to India.[1] Most histories of England, India, and colonialism, however, tend to neglect accounts of and by these Indian travelers. The mainstream of colonialism in South Asia undoubtedly consisted of the movement of Britons outward as they "discovered," traded with, conquered, ruled, and wrote about India. Yet, over the early modern period, a mounting "counterflow" of tens of thousands of Indian men and women of all classes entered England, exploring life there and producing knowledge about both India and England. Some settled, but most returned after months or years, bringing back to India direct information about Europe. For the first 150 years, however, their travel accounts were largely oral.

From the mid-eighteenth century onward, a small but growing number of these Indians began to produce written travel narratives, which vary in genre, content, and history. This article analyzes the four earliest travel narratives written by Indians for Indian audiences: one in Arabic (soon translated by the author into Persian) and three others in Persian.[2] Each assessed, often critiquing as well as praising, aspects of England in distinctive ways. These accounts informed specific groups of readers in India, functioning in ways that reflected the location and perspective of their individual authors, the nature of literary culture in India, and the expanding power of European colonialism. They contrast with European "Orientalist,"

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1. Over the early modern period, the conception of, and terminology for, what we call Indians was widely various, and included "Asiatic," "Asian," "East Indian," and "Oriental." Nor, for that matter, was "England" or "Britain" or "Britons" used consistently.

2. As discussed below, there were also two travel narratives published in English by people from India during the early modern period. During the nineteenth century, there were another dozen travel books published by Indians in English, Urdu, or Nepali; see Fisher, *Counterflows*.

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ethnographic, and travel accounts of India that both accumulated over this period as part of the colonial archive and permeated public discourse in Europe and, increasingly, in India. These Indian travel narratives must be understood in their own terms, not merely as "other" to, or imitative of, European ones. The production and consumption of these earliest Indian travel narratives about Europe thus reveal some of the complex ways that specific groups in Indian society engaged with early modernity.

Travels, Travel Writing, and Early Modernity

During the early modern period, written and widely read travel narratives had mixed implications for their home societies and for the distant peoples who were subjects of these accounts. In Europe, foreign travel increasingly appeared to many to elevate and broaden the European traveler. Eric Leed argues that for sixteenth-century European humanists, "The new notion of the journey itself as an education, as a civilizing and cultivating process, implied its systematization as a curriculum."[3] In England, interest in the travel-narrative genre spread beyond European aristocrats into the bourgeoisie from the late seventeenth century onward.[4] Discovering new lands and peoples both opened new possibilities and reconfirmed the values of "home." Written accounts of those travels seemed similarly to enlighten readers who could participate vicariously, without facing the actual dangers of the journey. Yet such direct or indirect engagement with foreignness also brought contact and/or confrontation with people who could be dangerous as well as attractive in their exoticness.

Many scholars have shown the roots of European colonialism and racism in such travel narratives and early ethnographies, in which the European imperious traveler abroad and the Orientalist at home both gazed on the "othered" nonwhite subject.[5] Several scholars have particularly noted how such travel narratives made gender inherent in this distancing: mostly male Europeans surveilled and unveiled Asian or African women or effeminized Asian men.[6] As part of this process, many in Europe sought to make "modernity" a template based on Western Christian values and its distinctive development pattern in contrast to all nonwhite non-Christians elsewhere.

3. Eric J. Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York, 1991), 185.

4. See Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge, 1998); and Paul Kaufman, "The Community Library: A Chapter in English Social History," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s. 57, 7 (1967): 30.

5. See Margaret Hunt, "Racism, Imperialism, and the Traveler's Gaze in Eighteenth-Century England," *Journal of British Studies* 32 (1993): 333–57; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, 1992); Francis Barker et al., eds., *Europe and Its Others*, 2 vols. (Colchester, U.K., 1985); Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (New York, 1994); Caroline B. Brettell, "Introduction: Travel Literature, Ethnography, and Ethnohistory," *Ethnohistory* 33 (spring 1986): 127–38; Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern, eds., *Empire and Others* (London, 1999); Henry Louis Gates Jr., "James Gronniosaw," in James Olney, ed., *Studies in Autobiography* (New York, 1988), 51–72; Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (London, 1986); Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991); and Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993), and *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

6. See esp. Antoinette Burton, *Burden of History* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1994); Clare Midgley, ed., *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester, 1998); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity* (Manchester, 1995).

Yet prevailing narratives about European production of "modernity" through racial and religious dichotomies need to be problematized. Many studies about the early history of European cultural notions of "blackness" and "otherness" depend on European literary sources or accounts of "the Orient" by European travelers.[7] While these sources may tell us about European cultural constructions at the time, they should not be presupposed to say much about the actual lives of Asians or Africans, either in Asia and Africa or in Europe.

Nabil Matar makes a particularly persuasive and historically sensitive argument on this issue by analyzing the complex interactions between sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Englishmen and "others."[8] Confirming the findings of Margaret Hodgen, he demonstrates the danger of accepting English fictional or ethnographic representations of "the exotic Oriental" as historical evidence about actual practice on the ground.[9] For example, from the 1580s to the 1630s, dozens of English plays and pageants featured dramatic representations of Muslims, particularly Ottoman Turks. Yet, as Matar observes, these "English plays were all based on continental models and sources, and English playwrights, notwithstanding their imaginative brilliance, invented stage Muslims without any historical or religious verisimilitude."[10] Matar demonstrates that the English constructed these parodies out of cultural and psychological defensiveness, to compensate for their military and political weakness in the Mediterranean, where thousands of English travelers, seamen, and merchants had been enslaved by Muslims.[11] To carry out this intercultural shift, English authors and theologians superimposed images of Amerindians, who were being militarily subordinated to the English, onto the powerful Turks, who regularly defeated the English. Thus, Muslim characters as portrayed in English literature tell us little about the lives of Muslims, including Muslims in England, but much about English culture and its fears.

7. For example, Amal Chatterjee analyzes British fictional images of India showing India to be either "primitive" or "degenerate," both in support of colonialism; *Representations of India, 1740–1840* (London, 1998). See also Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Impossible Purities* (Durham, N.C., 1998); Robert DeMaria Jr., ed., *British Literature, 1640–1789: A Critical Reader* (Malden, Mass., 1999); Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness* (New York, 1996); John Gillies and Virginia Mason Vaughan, eds., *Playing the Globe* (Madison, Wis., 1998); Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's "The History of British India" and Orientalism* (Oxford, 1992); G. K. Hunter, *Othello and Colour Prejudice* (London, 1967); and Kim F. Hall, "'I rather would wish to be a Black-Moor': Beauty, Race, and Rank in Lady Mary Wroth's 'Urania,'" in Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, eds., *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (London, 1994).

8. Nabil Matar, *In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 2003), *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York, 1999), and *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (Cambridge, 1998).

9. In particular, Matar critiques G. K. Hunter, Kim F. Hall, and others for taking literary images as if they were historical evidence about black people instead of evidence about English literary conventions. See also Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1964).

10. Nabil Matar, introduction to Daniel J. Vitkus, ed., *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England* (New York, 2001), 4.

11. See Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600–1850* (New York, 2002).

Throughout the early modern period, many Asians and Africans traveled or settled in Europe. Each had distinctive experiences there, depending on ethnicity, gender, status, particular circumstances, and contemporary relations between Europe and the rest of the world. Among visitors to London alone during the early modern period there were Persian ambassadors and brokers, Armenian traders, African princes and slaves (and, in at least one instance, a man who was both), Chinese seamen and merchants, Pacific Islanders, as well as many thousands of people from India, among others—all arrived and lived there for various amounts of time. The lives of these people bore little resemblance to depictions of nonwhites in English drama or literature generally.

Approaching this issue from a different perspective, Sanjay Subrahmanyam argues for the emergence of "early modernity" in Asia from 1350—a date conventionally considered early even for Europe—with an acceleration of this process from the mid-fifteenth century onward.[12] He thus seeks "to delink the notion of 'modernity' from a particular European trajectory (Greece, classical Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and thus 'modernity'…), and to argue that it represents a more-or-less global shift, with many different sources and roots, and—inevitably—many different forms and meanings depending on which society we look at it from."[13] A key feature of this process was

> the expansion in a number of [non-European] cultures of travel, as well as the concomitant development of travel-literature as a literary genre, whether the routes explored are overland (trans-Saharan, trans-Central Asian) or maritime. The notion of "discovery" thus applies as much to Zheng He's Indian Ocean voyages of the early fifteenth century as those of Cabral or Magellan a century later… These voyages were accompanied by often momentous changes in conceptions of space and thus cartography; significant new empirical "ethnographies" also emerged from them, and not merely after the Enlightenment, as is so often slothfully assumed.[14]

Thus, Subrahmanyam strives to identify multiple and independent origins of "modern," particularly by looking at travel narratives by non-European authors.

The conventional narrative of modernity presents it as an exclusively Western initiative, defined over and against the non-European "other." Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi problematizes this view, describing early Persianate travel writers in Europe as part of the "heterotopic experiences of crisscrossing peoples and cultures [that] provided multiple scenarios of modernity and self-refashioning."[15] Only with the shifts of

12. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes toward a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (July 1997): 735–62; and *Explorations in Connected History*, 2 vols. (Delhi, 2004).

13. Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 737. See also his *Penumbral Visions: Making Politics in Early Modern South Asia* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2001), 251. Ellipsis in original.

14. Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions*, 261–63.

15. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Modernity Heterotopia and Homeless Texts," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 18 (1998): 3. See also his *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism,*

military, political, and economic power inherent in colonialism, he argues, could Europeans, through an act of "genesis amnesia," suppress memory of these formative exchanges with non-Europeans. Our evidence from South Asia—Subrahmanyam's main focus—and from Persianate travel-narrative authors—Tavakoli-Targhi's main focus—complicates the Western account by suggesting how contingent and uneven were the production and consumption of written travel narratives about Europe by specific groups within Indian society during the late eighteenth century.

Indian Traveling and Travel Narratives

In India, people of different religious communities, regions, castes, and genders adopted different attitudes toward, and participation in, overseas travel and interactions with various "others" there. With a few regional exceptions (including the northwestern and southwestern coast of Gujarat and Kerala), elite Brahmanic Hindu society had by the sixteenth century largely turned away from interest in exploring new geographies outside of India (similarly, Ming imperial China withdrew after the 1470s from the overseas exploratory initiatives of Zheng He). These high Hindu groups largely shared a reluctance to encounter polluting impurities beyond India's shores, especially across the "Black Waters" of the oceans. This meant that educated Hindus tended to confine their long-distance travels to pilgrimages within India's boundaries. Those few Brahmins and other educated Hindus who did venture to Europe had little incentive to memorialize this. Not until the late nineteenth century did a significant number of these elite Hindus write about their visits to Europe. Even then, many faced social sanctions on their return to India and their communities.[16] The patriarchic norms of elite Hindu society even more strictly constrained high-class women from long-distance travel and interaction with the *mlecchha* [the "impure foreigner"].[17]

Other groups in South Asian society, however, did value their connectedness with selected distant peoples in particular ways. The Central Asian Mughals invaded India in 1526, conquering most of it over the next 150 years and settling down as a dominant elite. Throughout this period, Muslim north India retained strong cultural ties with the more prestigious Islamic lands of Central and West Asia: welcoming and marrying male and female immigrants from those lands; asserting their own descent from such immigrants; and commissioning and reading texts about travels there.[18] Substantial numbers of Muslim men and women who could afford it made

Occidentalism, and Historiography (New York, 2001). He thus contradicts Cole, who argues that these same Indo-Persian authors criticized the West but largely modeled their depictions on Western categories; Juan R. I. Cole, "Invisible Occidentalism: Eighteenth-Century Indo-Persian Constructions of the West," *Iranian Studies* 25 (1992): 3–16.

16. Even in the late nineteenth century, Brahmanic orthodoxy opposed crossing the "Black Waters"; see Standing Committee on the Hindu Sea-Voyage Question, *Hindu Sea-Voyage Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1894).

17. See Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Europe in India's Xenology: The Nineteenth-Century Record," *Past and Present,* no. 137 (November 1992): 156–82.

18. See Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India, c. 1200–1800* (Delhi, 2004); Richard C. Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia* (New York, 1998); and Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and Highroads to Empire, 1500–1700* (New York, 2002).

pilgrimages to distant Islamic holy sites, especially in the Hijaz, Iran, and Iraq. As A. F. M. Abdul Qadir asserts, a Muslim had to be "a born traveler."[19] A rich travel literature developed, following the *rihla*, *siyahatnama*, and other narrative genres.[20]

Yet the Islamic and Persianate culture of the Mughal imperial court and north India generally took only selective interest in investigating the European cultures with which they increasingly dealt politically and economically. The Portuguese had already been present on India's coast from 1497, decades before the Mughals first invaded. Northern European merchant ships came in increasing numbers from the early seventeenth century. The Mughals, particularly under the eclectic Emperor Akbar (1542–1605), did evince curiosity about some aspects of high European culture, including astronomy and medicine, along with a few other sciences; military innovations; and theology.[21] Thus, Bernard Lewis overstates the lack of attention by Muslims collectively to European ideas.[22] Nonetheless, it is true that the Mughals did not seek to explore the lands of Europe in person. Based on his close and extensive reading of Mughal texts, Simon Digby concludes:

> Although detailed information regarding Western Europe was available at the Mughal court and to other Indian princes from Europeans who could communicate in Persian or Turkish, Indo-Muslim sources of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries evince a profound ignorance of the geography of the world beyond the countries adjacent to India, and of Western European countries in particular… From the end of the sixteenth century there was some receptivity to European technical processes in contrast to the almost total failure to grasp the geographical knowledge of Europe which was simultaneously available.[23]

Thus Europe, as an actual place, appeared largely beyond the pale to most elite Muslims in India until late in the eighteenth century.

Other classes in India showed more willingness to visit the lands beyond Asia. Indian seamen, servants, merchants, and the wives and children of Europeans began

19. A. F. M. Abdul Qadir, "Early Muslim Visitors to Europe from India," *Proceedings of the 6th All-India Oriental Conference* (1930): 83–96.

20. The *rihla* genre usually has the Haj as its ostensible purpose although, as the classic *Rihla* of Ibn Battuta demonstrates, the journey could extend far beyond that. Both it and the less Haj-centered *siyahatnama* genre allegedly described real-life locations and occurrences, but could also recount the marvelous. See Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Travellers* (Berkeley, Calif., 1990). For a later and quite different sort of travel account by a Muslim in Europe, see Muhammad As-Saffar, *Disorienting Encounters*, ed. and trans. Susan Gilson Miller (Berkeley, Calif., 1991). See also Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Arab Rediscovery* (Princeton, N.J., 1963); and Henri Pérès, "Voyaguers Musulmans," in *Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire* 67 (1940).

21. See Gulfishan Khan, *Indian Muslim Perceptions of the West during the Eighteenth Century* (Karachi, 1998).

22. Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York, 2001).

23. Simon Digby, "An Eighteenth-Century Narrative of a Journey from Bengal to England: Munshi' Isma'il's 'New History,'" in Christopher Shackle, ed., *Urdu and Muslim South Asia: Studies in Honour of Ralph Russell* (London, 1989), 49.

to venture to Europe by the long sea voyage around the Cape of Good Hope in Portuguese ships returning to Europe, and then increasingly on north European East India company vessels.[24] Although Hindus comprised some three-quarters of the population of India, proportionately fewer Hindus of all classes made the voyage to England than did members of minority communities—including Parsis, Armenians, Indo-Portuguese, and Muslims—all of which had cultural ties to lands west of India. Yet this journey risked hardship aboard ship, discomfort and ill health from inclement European weather, and also possible degradation by intimate contact with Europeans or ingestion of impure or unhealthful European foods. Therefore, it was not to be undertaken without strong motivation. Nonetheless, a growing number of such Indian men and women ventured to Europe from the early seventeenth century (reaching about a thousand annually by the end of the eighteenth century). The travel narratives of all these people, however, remained oral until the late eighteenth century. Profound as the effects of their experiences in Europe were on individual travelers and their families, they had limited demonstrable impact on mainstream Indian society.

Only after the English East India Company began its dramatic military, political, and cultural aggression in India, from 1757 onward, did even a few educated Indians begin to exhibit interest in exploring England and recording their discoveries for their peers through formal travel narratives. To our knowledge, only six people from India wrote such books by the close of the eighteenth century. Significantly, all were males of minority communities: five Muslims and one Armenian Christian. Each of these travel narratives stood distinct in its voice and purpose. None gained a circulation comparable to the hundreds of European contemporary accounts of India that spread through European society.

Even among these first six authors, two displayed only to a limited degree the features commonly associated with "early modernity": openness to new ideas, desire to interact with different cultures and peoples, and general willingness to innovate.[25] Nor did many in Indian society seek to obtain and read their accounts during this period; only a few scholars and acquaintances commissioned hand-transcribed copies of these manuscripts. While during the early nineteenth century an increasing number of Indians wrote travel narratives about their experiences in Europe, even these had limited circulation within India (indeed, publishing as an aspect of popular culture—newspapers, books, and pamphlets—in India and in Indian languages lagged behind Europe by about a century).[26] Only from the later nineteenth century did substantial numbers of Indian accounts of visits to Europe begin to appear and influence even elite Indian urban culture.[27] Further, many of the early accounts by Indians that do exist survived because they were preserved by European-controlled libraries or archives.

24. See Fisher, *Counterflows*; and Abdul Qadir, "Early Muslim Visitors."

25. Tavakoli-Targhi calls this "heterotopia"; see also Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories" and Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis, 1996).

26. Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (Delhi, 2000); and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ed., *Merchants, Markets, and the State in Early Modern India* (Delhi, 1990).

27. Partha Chatterjee, "Five Hundred Years of Fear and Love," *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, 22 (30 May–5 June 1998): 1330–36.

Of the six eighteenth-century accounts by people venturing from India to England, two primarily addressed English audiences. Joseph Emin (1726–1809), an Armenian Christian born in Iran but domiciled in Calcutta, published in London in 1792 his 640-page *Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin, An Armenian, Written in English by Himself*.[28] Sake Dean Mahomet (1759–1851), a Muslim who converted to Anglican Christianity, published in Cork (Ireland) in 1794 his two-volume *The Travels of Dean Mahomet, a Native of Patna in Bengal,* narrating his journeys in India prior to his departure for England.[29] Since I have already written extensively about these men and their writings, I will not address them specifically here.[30] Instead, let us turn to analysis of the first four accounts written for Indian audiences.

The Travelers and Their Accounts for Indian Readers

All four of these early Indian travel writers shared much, although they also differed significantly from one another, as did their travel narratives. They all belonged generally to, and wrote for, the same class of Muslim scholar-officials. They all received an education in the tradition of Persian literary training that marked the educated man of their class. This tradition both encouraged these four to write and shaped their narratives toward established Islamic travel account genres. All four men valued literary skills highly, and at least two wrote several other books. These men also all had strong cultural ties to the lands west of India. Two were the sons of scholar-officials who had immigrated to India from Isfahan, Iran, earlier in the eighteenth century. The other two were Bengalis of the scribal class, although one (and perhaps both) bore the honorific *Sayyid*, which indicated putative descent from the Prophet Muhammad himself (whatever their actual biological ancestry might have been).[31]

The eighteenth century had proven an uncertain time of transition for their class, as the lives of each demonstrated.[32] The Mughal Empire fragmented, imperiling their security of patronage and established culture. But this also created opportunities for new groups, as well as entrepreneurial members of their own class, to rise. The Persian and Urdu poetry of this period conventionally featured *sha'ir-i ashob* [the poetry of the afflicted], bewailing their lost imperial culture. Yet, at the same time, powerful and wealthy new regional courts grew up to replace the imperial center, each forming a

28. See the reprint edition by his descendant, Emin, *Life and Adventures*, 2d ed., ed. A. Apcar (Calcutta, 1918). See also Michael H. Fisher, "Asians in Britain: Negotiation of Identity through Self-Representation," in Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge, 2004).

29. See the reprint edition by Michael H. Fisher, *The Travels of Dean Mahomet: An Eighteenth-Century Journey through India* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997).

30. See Michael H. Fisher, *The First Indian Author in English: Dean Mahomed (1759–1851) in India, Ireland, and England* (Delhi, 2000); and "Asians in Britain: Negotiation of Identity through Self-Representation," in Wilson, ed., *New Imperial History*, 91–112.

31. Digby suggests that Munshi Isma'il was from "a family with pretensions to gentility and learning; . . . they may have been Sayyids or Shaikhzadas who had been long established there"; "An Eighteenth-Century Narrative," 53.

32. See Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–48* (Delhi, 1986); Kumkum Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics, and Society in Early Modern India: Bihar, 1733–1820* (Leiden, 1996); and Richard B. Barnett, *Rethinking Early Modern India* (Delhi, 2002).

rich new center for patronage in imitation of the Mughals. Significantly, all four authors had family traditions of service in regional Mughal successor states: two served the Nawabs of Awadh, and all four served the Nawabs of Bengal. Further, all eventually worked under Britons, who increasingly represented the political future in Bengal and north India generally.

Yet these men's attitudes toward their European employers remained mixed, as their lives and travel narratives reveal. Serving Britons did not mean that they had relinquished their identification with their own class, or its long tradition of rule, administration, and cultural domination in north India. Rather, there was a strong sense that they were obliged to educate the Britons who employed them about the higher Persianate culture and administrative forms that they themselves preserved and embodied.

Nonetheless, their dependence on Europeans during their travels shaped their experiences of England. All four men sailed to Europe on European ships in the company or employ of European patrons. England was for them an alien land, hence one fraught with threats to their personal and cultural integrity (albeit to different degrees in the eyes of each author). Two made the journey only reluctantly and largely sought to limit their interactions with European society once there. These two men thus did not evince much openness to new ideas and peoples (as we have seen, a marker of "modernity"). Yet, at the same time, England appeared as a land of future possibilities and advancement for all of them. The other two men made remarkable efforts to explore the new lands and cultures they went to encounter.

Significantly, however, none of the four travelers fully realized his goals for the journey. Nor after their return did any receive from Britons in India much in the way of enhanced employment or recognition for their association with England. Indeed, at least two endured increased frustration, since some potential European employers regarded them as "tainted" by their direct knowledge of the metropole.

Each author also traveled at a slightly different point during a tumultuous period of transition to colonialism in India. The first two authors were closest to each other chronologically, in background, and in orientation. They traveled sooner after the dramatic East India Company victory at Plassey in Bengal that brought their homeland under its military control. Both also came from families that were settled in that province, had worked for Britons, and had the least interest in exploring European society. In Europe, they kept themselves relatively more isolated from European influences on their thinking or values.

The first, Mirza Shaikh Iᶜtisam al-Din (1730–1800), went to France, England, and Scotland in 1766–68 as an expert in Persian diplomacy. The Mughal emperor commissioned him as an assistant to envoy Captain Archibald Swinton, a Scot who had resigned from the East India Company's service to accept this post.[33] After a long

33. Swinton to Carnac; Letter to Court, 29 January 1766, British Library (hereafter BL), MSS. EUR F128/56; National Archives of India, *Fort William-India House Correspondence,* 17 vols. (Delhi, 1962), 4:371. Iᶜstisam al-Din gives the date 11 Shaban 1180, which seems to be off by one year; Syed A. S. M. Taifoor, "Sheikh I'tesamuddin of Nadia, the First [*sic*] Indian to Visit London, Account of his Travels in England and Scotland," *Bengal Past and Present* 49 (1935): 117–29.

voyage via the Cape and France, they reached London safely. Their embassy, however, foundered as the East India Company, and also Swinton, manipulated events for their own purposes. Ultimately the emperor gained nothing from this expensive undertaking.[34]

Even during Iᶜtisam al-Din's time in England and Scotland, the obvious impending failure of his diplomatic mission remained a continual frustration for him. Further, he also experienced anguish on a more personal level as he struggled on a daily basis to fulfill his religious duties, particularly in obtaining halal foods. Some derision was directed at his Islamic beliefs, even by Swinton. Since Iᶜtisam al-Din never learned English, he did not socialize very much with Britons and remained dependent on Swinton. Indeed, he largely confined his explorations of Europe to reading Persian-language books and visual observation of its technology, people, and amusements.

Iᶜtisam al-Din's account included his explanations of European technical accomplishments—for example, the compass and London's systems of streetlamps and water supply. He often embedded these descriptions in the ancient cultural traditions of Islamic sciences, comparing them to Greek natural philosophy in Alexander's time. Similarly, he was impressed by the extensive rowhouses in London, but found their unrelieved uniformity bewildering and disorienting.

Despite his limited linguistic access to Britons, Iᶜtisam al-Din did comment on many aspects of local society that he found striking. He compared the negative way the French and British regarded each other and their chauvinistic notions about themselves. He recounted the characteristics of various European ethnicities, including jokes playing on ethnic stereotypes, for example, about rustic but brave Scotsmen. While he often described himself and other Indians (including an Indo-Portuguese fellow passenger) as "black" [*siyah*] in complexion compared to Britons, he expressed no sense of racial or cultural inferiority, as would some nineteenth-century visitors.

Like most other Indian visitors who wrote about Europe for Indian audiences, Iᶜtisam al-Din noticed—and drew his Indian readers' particular attention to—its strikingly different gender practices (what Tavakoli-Targhi calls "Euro-eroticism").[35] He recorded what he took to be the very suggestive words and lustful behavior of market women on the street toward him. He also watched closely as the many lovers in St. James' Park flirted openly without fear of civic authorities. Throughout his account, Iᶜtisam al-Din highlighted the apparently greater sexual license prevalent in Europe, compared to India, and also the more generous care of the illegitimate children of those relationships. Reporting an exchange that would recur with later visitors, he claimed that his hosts urged him to marry an English woman and settle down there as a teacher of Persian. He declined the (abstract) offer, saying that high-class women would not have him and he would not accept a lower-class woman. This exchange took

34. Sir John Fortescue, *Correspondence of King George the Third,* 6 vols. (London, 1927–28), 1:443–46; Select Committee 1769, 268–69; Letter to Court, 17 February 1769, BL, E/4/28. Letter to Bengal, 20 November 1767, BL, E/4/618, vol. 3, fol. 811.

35. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Imagining Western Women: Occidentalism and Euro-Eroticism," *Radical America* 24 (1993): 73–87.

place, as it usually did with Muslim visitors, in the context of a discussion of polygamy. The offer may have been expressed ironically by the hosts, although it was taken as a quite serious proposition by the Muslim visitor. Yet, that European men would suggest such a marriage, even jokingly, indicates that "interracial" marriage was not a forbidden topic among them at this time.

Among the other attractions of London, Iᶜtisam al-Din noted those that had familiar associations with his own culture. At Vauxhall pleasure gardens, he commented approvingly on seeing a painting of the East India Company's military victory of 1757 at Plassey. Visiting Oxford, he compared William Jones's expertise in Persian unfavorably to his own.[36] He also recounted his debates (largely carried out through an English translator) with Christian religious authorities that ended in their defeat in the face of his own advocacy of the doctrines of Islam. Yet he recognized the greater European industriousness, inventiveness, and comparatively more effective and less vainglorious political and military leadership. He also lauded the availability of inexpensive printed books and pamphlets, compared to publications in India.

After his return and resumption of service to Britons, Iᶜtisam al-Din evidently recounted his journey and discoveries orally to those around him, informing some who followed in his wake.[37] Yet the rich knowledge that he brought back about politics and life in Europe did not disseminate quickly or widely among other Indians. He composed his book, "Shigarf-nama-i Vilayat" ["Wonder-book of England/Europe"], only in 1784/85, nearly two decades after his return to Bengal.[38] Writing for an Indian audience, he mixed the more established Persianate genre of the *siyahatnama* (using the name "Wonder-book") with a factual and descriptive account of real-life scenes that approached the contemporary English genre of autobiographical travel writing. He followed a general chronological sequence, in that he began with his journey to Europe and ended with his departure for home. Yet there are few specific details about his travels, the people he met, or his daily routine. Rather, much of the text consists of digressions, metaphorical elaborations, explanations about how things work, critique of Christian religious beliefs and practices, and occasional verse interjections highlighting the implications of what he perceived. Given the long passage of time between his travels and his writing, this degree of generality is not surprising.

36. Tavakoli-Targhi cites this as evidence of early and more equitable dialogue between Asians and budding Orientalists; *Refashioning Iran*, chap. 3.

37. Another early diplomatic mission, from the would-be Maratha Peshwa, Raghunath Rao, was initiated in 1780, soon after Iᶜtisam al-Din had visited the area. At least one nineteenth-century Indian traveler, Karim Khan, who also went as a diplomat seventy-five years later, explicitly states that he read and learned from this book; *Siyahatnama,* BL, OR 2163. It was published in facsimile, edited by 'Ibadat Barelvi (Lahore, 1982), 282.

38. His Persian manuscript, "Shigrif Namah-i Wilayat," is BL, OR 200. See BL, Court of Directors Minutes, 12 January 1768. For a family history, see Qazi Mohamed Sadrul Ola, *History of the Family of Mirza Sheikh I'tesammudin* (Calcutta, 1944). For a full translation (via Bengali) see *The Wonders of Vilayet*, trans. Kaiser Haq (Leeds, 2001). It was earlier incompletely translated into Urdu and English as *Shigurf Namah-i Velaet*, trans. James Edward Alexander [and Munshi Shumsher Khan] (London, 1827). See also Gulfishan Khan, *Indian Muslim*, 72–78; and Partha Chatterjee, "Five Hundred Years of Fear and Love."

Nor did his information guide many other Indians in their own understanding of Europe. These included Indian rulers who were deeply involved in political negotiations with Britons yet lacked even the basic knowledge of the constitutional relationship among king, Parliament, and the East India Company that Iʿtisam al-Din observed, though imprecisely. Many Indian visitors to Europe who followed Iʿtisam al-Din over the following century expressed the same astonishment and surprise at the nature of its society, its reception of Indians, and its political institutions.

In his text, Iʿtisam al-Din occasionally made explicit his awareness of how he himself was being observed by Britons, even as he observed Britons as "other." Tavakoli-Targhi argues that this reflects his modernity:

> Seeing oneself being seen, that is, the consciousness of oneself as at once spectator and spectacle, grounded all eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientals and Occidental *voy(ag)eurs'* narrative emplotment of alterity. The traveling spectators appeared to the natives as traveling spectacles; voy(ag)eurs seeking to discover exotic lands were looked upon by the locals as exotic aliens.[39]

This assertion may be too sweeping since, as we have seen, Iʿtisam al-Din also refrained from the kinds of deep engagement with European society that would mark some later Indian explorers.

The second Indian author of a travel narrative written for Indians, Munshi Isma'il, also came from a background of Muslim scribes and scholars settled in Bengal. He traveled in 1771–73 as a Persian language teacher to Claud Russell, an East India Company official going home to recover his health.[40] Although Munshi Isma'il also lived in Bengal, he left no indication that he knew of Iʿtisam al-Din's earlier experiences. Nor was he evidently any more motivated by a desire to broaden himself. Munshi Isma'il explicitly wrote that he only made the voyage out of a desire to improve his family's dire financial condition, noting that another munshi had been paid well for accompanying a Briton on a voyage between two Indian ports.[41]

Munshi Isma'il sailed from Bengal in December 1771. He spent nine months in London and Bath before the cold weather made staying on hard to endure. He also learned little English and interacted in only limited ways with the local society. Soon after his return in 1773, Munshi Isma'il composed his relatively brief account, "Tarikhi Jadid" ["New History"], based on notes he had taken during his travels. Evidently, he had few copies produced; only one is known to survive.[42] This work never circulated widely and has not been published either in Persian or in translation.

In his writing style and vision, Munshi Isma'il also shows little influence from the contemporary genres of European travel narrative. While he noted some of the

39. Tavokoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, chap. 3.
40. Digby, "An Eighteenth-Century Narrative," 53.
41. Ibid., 49–65.
42. The manuscript is now in the private collection of Simon Digby.

technical achievements of Europe, including those in architecture and communication, he did not present these as models for his own society to learn from, either to emulate or to avoid. He did note that, in England, the state could not arbitrarily confiscate or punish, a critique of both Indian rulers and, perhaps implicitly, European colonial aggression:

> [D]egrees of punishment and exaction…are not brought into operation, nor the forbidden pattern of confiscation and violence without representation…The peasantry…do not suffer from the oppression and blows of the landholder. According to the King's law every man is himself free, but without power over others. A balanced connection has become established whereby the King fears the ministers, the landholders the peasantry, and the populace the law. Through the interposition of this moderating chain of behaviour each man is accountable, and none causes pain or injury.[43]

Overall, Digby characterizes this approach as not very "modern":

> His narrative is a description of a real-life adventure and the marvels which he witnessed in distant lands. When he draws a moral from these sights and experiences, it is usually an illustration of the operation of divine providence rather than an incitement to action.[44]

Among our four travel accounts, his stands as the most traditional in form and content.

The next two authors differed from their predecessors in family background, stood somewhat higher in class, learned better English, and also traveled at a slightly later time in the transition to colonialism in India. Both were the sons of Shiᶜite officials who had immigrated to Awadh from Isfahan, Iran. Their backgrounds and personalities contributed to their greater openness to new ideas and experiences.

Mir Muhammad Husain ibn Abdul Azim Isfahani (d. 1790), had served both the Awadh and Bengal regional successor states. He was also an accomplished poet in Persian. After failing to find other secure employment, however, he had to turn to the English East India Company. After acclimatizing himself to Britons, he went to England in 1775–76 as a Persian teacher with a Mr. Elliot.

Unlike the two earlier travel authors, he explicitly sought to acquire new knowledge from Britons, both in Calcutta and then, even more so, in England:

> During my long social interaction and discourses, meetings and conversations [with European officials in Bengal] I discovered about new thought and fresh discoveries, about celestial mechanics, heavenly

43. Digby translation, based on Digby's manuscript, fols. 45b–46a; "An Eighteenth-Century Narrative," 58–59.

44. Ibid., 52.

> bodies, the nature of terrestrial globe, and life on earth, discoveries of innumerable, hitherto unknown islands in the southern quarter of the globe, New World of America. Therefore, I attempted to elaborate upon some of these, such as the nature of the fixed stars and of the planets…At first sight, this knowledge might cause immense amount of bewilderment, especially to those who were steeped in Greek traditions of philosophy and Greek cosmology…Since the mysteries and principles of the new sciences were not yet diffused in India, consequently, to satisfy mental curiosity, I undertook a trip to the countries of Europe in order to enjoy direct access to the mines of ideas and knowledge.[45]

He thus demonstrated a thirst for new ideas as his impulse to visit Britain.

Mir Muhammad Husain moved more widely and freely through local society than his precursors. His knowledge of English was adequate for him to function relatively autonomously once there. Unfortunately, however, his account of his travels there is quite brief.

On his return to Bengal, he tried to disseminate what he had learned. He proposed leading a systematic project of translations of scientific works from English to Persian, but met with little encouragement.[46] Further, he supplemented his enthusiastic oral accounts to his friends with essays and two written versions of his travel narrative, which included line drawings representing some of the scientific discoveries that he recounted. One version he composed in Arabic at the request of a friend; its concentration on science and technology apparently made Arabic the appropriate language. However, he soon produced a Persian-language version, since that was more accessible to his class of scholar-officials. This work, which he called "Risalah-i Ahwal-i Mulk-i Farang wa Hindustan" ["Letters/Essays about the Conditions of the Land of Europe and India"], remains in manuscript today, with few surviving copies; it evidently has had quite limited circulation since its composition.[47]

The last of these four authors, Mirza Abu Talib Khan Isfahani (1752–1806), traveled to England, Ireland, Scotland, and France in 1799–1802, also out of a desire to gain and spread knowledge.[48] He had already worked as an administrator, under both Indian rulers and the East India Company. He had helped European officials of the

45. K. R. Cama Oriental Research Library, Mumbai, manuscript R.IV-51, (manuscript formerly in Mullah Firoz Library Collection; no longer available), fols. 1–2b; Gulfishan Khan translation, *Indian Muslim*, 93. The Arabic version, and a Persian translation, are available in the Aligarh Muslim University Library, Arabia ulum no. 33 and Persian Collection no. 18/1.

46. Gulfishan Khan, *Indian Muslim*, 92–95, 114–15.

47. See Gulfishan Khan, *Indian Muslim*, 114 n. 91 and 115 n. 104; Charles Ambrose Storey, *Persian Literature* (London, 1970–72), 1144.

48. For biographical information, see Abu Talib's own works and Gulfishan Khan, *Indian Muslim*; Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, "Indian Travellers in Nineteenth Century England," *Indo-British Review* 18 (1990): 137–41; B. M. Sankhdher, "Mirza Abu Talib Khan, His Life and Works," *Islamic Culture* 44 (1970): 245–48; Humayun Kabir, *Mirza Abu Talib Khan* (Patna, 1961); Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna ʿAshari Shiᶜis in India* (Delhi, 1986), 2:230–33.

company by composing books that would educate them about the politics and Persianate culture of north India.[49] Part of his reason for voyaging to England was to establish a government-sponsored Persian-language institute in either London or Oxford, with himself as director. He traveled at the invitation, and in the company, of Captain David Richardson. Abu Talib, however, learned sufficient English to travel and observe extensively on his own in south Africa and then in Europe.[50]

Indeed, of our four authors, Abu Talib had the widest experience of Europe. He enjoyed several successful "seasons" among the fashionable elite of London under the misleading title "The Persian Prince," and explored all levels of local society and culture. He cited the Persian poet Hafiz as justification for his participation in London's sensual pleasures.[51] Prominent European journals recognized him as "a man of considerable experience and knowledge of the world," "well known in the highest and most respectable circles during his residence in England."[52] Six fashionable artists painted his portrait, two of which they displayed in the Royal Academy exhibition of 1801.[53]

Throughout his time in England, Abu Talib strongly defended his own culture, even as he selectively reveled in Europe's. Nevertheless, he frequently confronted ill-informed prejudices against Islamic and other Asian cultures, particularly concerning the inferior status of Asian women. For example, one English aristocrat asserted to him: "the women of Asia have no liberty at all, but live like slaves, without honour and authority."[54] Abu Talib editorialized, "the same wrong opinion is deeply rooted in the minds of other Europeans." Male and female Britons faulted both Asian men for their grievous oppression of Asian women and Asian women for submitting to that oppression.

Simultaneously, however, Abu Talib had daily interactions with European women of all social classes, including romantic bantering with English aristocratic and gentry women, in which he perceived their immodesty in dress and behavior. Most prominent among his hostesses was the notorious Duchess of Devonshire, but he also conversed with all classes of Britons down to streetwalkers. At least one London "beauty" attracted Abu Talib to the extent of "love" [*ʿishq*]; he abruptly ended one of his convivial visits to the country home of former Governor-General Warren Hastings

49. Abu Talib, *Tafzih al-Ghāfilin*, ed. Abid Raza Bedar (Rampur, 1965); Abu Talib, *History of Asaf u'd Daula, Nawab Wazir of Oudh, Being a Translation of 'Tafzihu'l Ghafilin'*, trans. W. Hoey (Lucknow, 1971; reprint of 1885 ed.).

50. Abu Talib, *Masir*, 39. His hostess in south Africa, Lady Anne Barnard, was "First Lady" of the colony in the absence of Acting Governor Lord Macartney's wife. For her romanticized account of Abu Talib, see Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas, 12 September 1799, postscript, in Anne Barnard, *Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas from the Cape and Elsewhere,* ed. A. M. Lewin Robinson (Capetown, 1973), 199.

51. Abu Talib, *Masir*, 107.

52. *Annual Register* 52 (1810): 749; *Monthly Review* 71 (1813): 182.

53. Abu Talib, *Masir*, 142. These artists included James Northcote and Samuel Drummond.

54. Lady Lavinia Spencer (d. 1831), wife of George John Earl Spencer, urged Abu Talib to write about England and English customs candidly and have his writings translated into English; Abu Talib, "Vindication," 100.

with a dash back to London: "my desire was aroused by a fair beloved in London, so I could not be detained."[55] While no permanent attachment eventuated, Abu Talib's interest in European women was both personal and sociological. He knew European men could never have similar access to the women of his family or class. Further, he observed extensive evidence of sexual intercourse outside of marriage in Europe, prostitution and also premarital and adulterous sex among all classes.

While in London, he composed and supervised the translation into English of his essay "Vindication of the Liberties of Asiatic Women."[56] This reversal of the usual colonial gendered assessments of European and Indian societies circulated widely in at least ten English, French, Dutch, and German republications over the following decades.[57] Thus, while present in Europe Abu Talib achieved much prominence, and his voice entered clearly into public discourse there.

On his return, he composed his extensive "Masir-i Talibi fi Bilad-i Afranji" ["Travels of Talib in the Lands of the Franks/Europe"].[58] This remained in Persian manuscript during his lifetime, but was soon thereafter published in both India and Europe. His writing is an amalgamation of Persianate and European forms: a generally chronological narrative, giving details of his adventures, discoveries, and conversations, interspersed with Persian verses. But he was also the first Persian poet to incorporate English and French words and phrases in his verse.[59]

Scholars, both Indian and Euro-American, have analyzed Abu Talib's complex transitional position, seeing in him variously: "the germ of reformist ideas," "that tradition of rational observation of peoples and faiths which we have called spiritual anthropology," and "old patriotism."[60] Tavokoli-Targhi sees him as characteristically "modern":

55. While he does not mention her name, the teenage Julia Burrell stands as a likely candidate; he dedicated three Persian poems to her. She was daughter of Sir William and Lady Sophia Burrell and a cousin of the Duchess of Northumberland; Abu Talib, *Poems of Mirza Abu Talib Khan*, trans. George Swinton (London, 1807). Swinton was Abu Talib's student in London; Abu Talib, *Masir*, 124, 139. Warren Hastings' diary confirms Abu Talib's visit; BL, Warren Hastings Papers, MS. Add. 39884–85.

56. Abu Talib, "Vindication of the Liberties of Asiatic Women," *Asiatic Annual Register* (1801), Miscellaneous Tracts, 100–107. Abu Talib's "Vindication" thus had a quite different rhetorical agenda from the earlier, similarly named *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97). Indeed, "Vindication" was commonly used in the titles of tracts at that time.

57. For an analysis of this essay and its print history and reception, see Michael H. Fisher, "Representing 'His' Women: Mirzā Abu Talib Khān's 1801 'Vindication of the Liberties of Asiatic Women,'" *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 37 (2000): 215–37.

58. See Khan, "Masir Talibi fi Bilad Afranji," BL, Persian ADD 8145–47 (my pagination is from the Persian reprint edited by Khadive-Jam); Mir Muhammad Husain, "Risalah-i Ahwal-i Mulk-i Farang," Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh. For biographical information, see *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, 9:196–97; Digby, "An Eighteenth-Century Narrative," Kabir, *Mirza Abu Talib Khan*; Gulfishan Khan, *Indian Muslim*; Llewellyn-Jones, "Indian Travellers"; Rizvi, *Socio-Intellectual History*, 2:230–33; Sankhdher, "Mirza Abu Talib Khan."

59. Shafi Kadkani, "Persian Literature from the time of Jami to the Present Day," in G. Morrison, *History of Persian Literature from the Beginning of the Islamic Period to the Present Day* (Leiden, 1981), 135–206.

60. Digby, "An Eighteenth-Century Narrative," 52; C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information* (Cambridge, 1999), 86–87; C. A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Govern-*

> Mirza Abu Talib's understanding of contemporary Britain [demonstrates that] Persianate travelers were not gaping at an advanced culture. As keen observers of Europe, they were endowed with a critical "double-consciousness." They critiqued European social settings with their own ethical standards and censured their own society from a European perspective.[61]

Thus, Abu Talib, chronologically last of the four authors we have considered, was also the most open to new experiences.

Nonetheless, Abu Talib's hopes for the future were not realized after he returned to colonial India. Despite promises made to him by influential Britons in London, the colonial government in India failed to entrust him with any office. He died soon thereafter in poverty. Ironically, an invitation from the East India Company's directors to return to England and teach Persian at its college at Haileybury (Hertfordshire) was on its way to him at the time. Yet, after his death, his travel narrative soon emerged as the most extensive and widely influential of those we have studied. The East India Company itself published the Persian original, co-edited by his son, in Calcutta. Various translators also published it in several European languages in Europe.[62] Many later Indian travelers to Europe read and learned from his work. Yet even as an English-language newspaper in Calcutta serialized it in English, the paper's English editor warned Indians not to expect the same honor that Abu Talib had received in London: "In future [Asiatic] travellers were discouraged [from undertaking] any journey to Europe in expectation of similar hospitality [because] perhaps there is no example of any [Asiatic] traveller who has been received in England with equal distinction."[63]

After Abu Talib, the growing number of Indian travel accounts about Europe were all written in English, Urdu, or a regional Indian language. Their authors represented different classes and subsequent intellectual generations of Indians. Many more, like him, ventured to Europe to gain and spread knowledge as part of the project of modernity.

ment in the Making of Modern India (Delhi, 1998); Raychaudhuri, "Europe." For discussion of Abu Talib's political philosophy, see E. Iu. Vanina, "Mirza Abu Talib: 1752–1806," *Vostok* 1 (1991): 30–40; K. Srinivasa Santha, "Two Persian Writers on Awadh," *Journal of Indian History* 58 (1980): 109–20; B. M. Sankhdher, "Mirza Abu Talib Khan," *Quarterly Review of Historical Studies* 10 (1970–71): 213–16.

61. Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, chap. 3.

62. *Masir-i Talibi,* ed. Mirza Husain 'Ali and Mir Qudrat 'Ali (Calcutta, 1812). See BL, Extract Public Letter from Bengal, 9 May 1812, F/4/384/9741. *Masir-i Talibi*, ed. David Macfarlane (Calcutta, 1827, 1836); Abu Talib Khan, *Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan*, trans. Charles Stewart, 3 vols. (London, 1814); *Voyages de Mirza Abu Taleb Khan en Asie, en Afrique et en Europe,* trans. M. J. C. J. [Hendrik Jansen], 2 vols. (Paris, 1811); *Reise des Mirza Abu Taleb Khan durch Asien, Afrika und Europa… Aus dem Franzosischen* (Heidelberg, 1812); *Reizen Van Mirza Abu Talib Khan in Asia, Africa en Europe in Twee Deelen* (Leeuwarden, 1813); *Voyages du Prince Persan Mirza Abu Talib Khan en Asie, en Afrique, en Europe,* trans. M. Charles Malo (Paris, 1819); *Reisen in Asien, Afrika und Europa*, ed. Manfred Rudolph (Leipzig, 1987).

63. Cited in Gulfishan Khan, *Indian Muslim*, 98–99, 116 n. 123.

"Homeless Texts" and Later Travelers

During the early modern period, thousands of men and women from India traveled to England, forming a counterflow of "connected histories" and bringing back direct accounts of their experiences for Indian audiences. Yet, to our knowledge, by the end of the eighteenth century only four wrote books about their travels designed for Indian readers. All four came from, and strongly identified with, the class of Muslim scholar-officials and scribes that had long dominated north India administratively and culturally. They journeyed at a time when the East India Company's drive for cultural hegemony over India was incipient and their class, in particular, was beginning to face degradation and displacement from the very European colonizers who employed or escorted them there. While several received great respect in Europe, on their return to India, colonialism generally relegated them to the status of clerk or hired language tutor. Three sank into poverty. Over the next century, European "Orientalists" sought to appropriate their Persianate knowledge. European "Anglicists" degraded that knowledge and used government institutions to elevate English-medium education and culture in its place.

Yet none of these four eighteenth-century writers whom we have studied approached or lived in Europe with a sense of cultural or moral inferiority. Many admitted their own society's less advanced knowledge of certain sciences and technology—including medicine, politics, transportation, and communication. Nonetheless, these early travelers remained staunch advocates of their own religion and customs, about which they each tried to instruct Britons. Their advocacy of Islamic monotheism assailed their hosts' Christian doctrines, such as the Trinity. For some of these men, insistence on halal meat and/or avoiding alcohol challenged European habits, but also isolated them somewhat from Britons. Indian dress, which they all retained there, distinguished them from the host society. These men's own accounts of such confrontations almost invariably demonstrated to their Indian readers how they, and the truth of their religion and values, had triumphed (European versions of these confrontations usually recorded the reverse outcome). In other cases, however, the traveler or settler accepted, or even reveled in, European drink and food (usually pork aside). Abu Talib, in particular, moved in the highest social circles there, socializing with the aristocracy and holding a position of respect in society.

Significantly for all of them, religion was often coupled with their attitudes toward, and relationships with, women. These men repeatedly noted their strikingly free access to European women of all classes, so amazingly different from prevalent practice in India. Indian writers (like European travelers and officials) assessed the local society based on their valuation of the status of women there. Several commented upon the many unmarried but cohabiting couples and the vast number of prostitutes [*fahisha*] they observed on London's streets.[64] Writing as males, they often felt both empowered and threatened, both titillated and repulsed, by the liberties displayed by

64. Khan, *Masir*, 272.

European women toward them in Europe. In contrast, in India they generally confined their own womenfolk away from non-related males, both Indian and European. Likewise, the few European women present in India remained largely outside of the personal experience of Indian men.

The initiative of these four men in writing travel narratives demonstrates their "modernity" in limited ways. Indeed, two travel authors made the journey only reluctantly, not primarily due to a thirst for new knowledge or experiences of other peoples and lands but merely as a chance for employment. One wrote his account only because of the curiosity of his friends; none published his work. Two of their texts have remained in rare manuscript form until today. The two that received the widest circulation did so in English at the hands of European editors who reshaped them and represented them as literary curiosities. During these men's lifetimes, their travel narratives thus had only limited impact in India.

In India over the following decades, however, new Indian classes rose up and made engagement with European society—sometimes by means of travel narratives—somewhat more popular. While these nineteenth-century travelers proved able to enter into and critique European society, they did so in the face of spreading British colonialism. As Subrahmanyam, Tavokoli-Targhi, and other scholars argue, one aspect of this process of colonialism was the European identification of "modernity" with Western models. This can be measured in part by comparing the travel narratives of the Indians who went to Europe in the early modern period with those written, in greater numbers, over the course of the nineteenth century.

We can contrast the approaches of these earlier and later Indian travelers to Europe in terms of their expectations about what they would find there. Our four travelers saw almost everything in Europe with fresh eyes; as Partha Chatterjee argues, none "had a prior mental map imprinted on his mind telling him how England ought to be seen." In contrast, a later nineteenth-century visitor

> now has a concept of Europe firmly implanted in his mind… The voyage acquires for him the moral significance of a rite of passage… Not everything he would see in England would necessarily meet with his approval; indeed, often he would be disappointed because the real England would sometimes fail to measure up to the conceptual image. But overall, he would have no doubt that what he was experiencing, and what he would need to convey to his countrymen back home, was a moral and civilisational essence, expressed in such virtues of the modern English people as the spirit of independence, self-respect and discipline, their love for art, literature and sport, and above all, their cultivation of knowledge.[65]

This prior knowledge of Europe came largely at the hands of European writers and teachers, not from earlier Indian travel narratives.

65. Partha Chatterjee, "Five Hundred Years of Fear and Love," 1334.

The Indian travel narratives we have considered here have largely become what Tavokoli-Targhi calls "homeless texts."[66] They fit into the national narratives of neither Britain nor India. These Indian travelers, as outsiders, were regarded by most Britons at the time as exotic, even romantic, curiosities, but certainly not contributors to the development of the British nation. Nor were their commentaries on European society taken seriously there. Thereafter, they have largely been forgotten.

These men and their books do not fit into the Indian national narrative either. They were people who left India and engaged (to different degrees) in dialogue with Britons. Members of a later discredited class, they do not appear as precursors of Indian nationality. Instead, later Indian travelers to Britain, including Indian nationalists such as Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917), Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948), and Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) have emerged in established Indian historiography as anti-colonial leaders. To the slight extent that Abu Talib and Iᶜtisam al-Din among these earlier travelers have been recuperated in Indian political and cultural discourse, it has usually been to show heroic if futile initiative in the face of British aggression. As we have seen, the historical contingency and complexity of these early travelers and their travel narratives resist such easy definitions. Instead, these men and their works must be understood within their own historical context. They lived and wrote during the early modern period but they are not part of the narrative of modernity dominant today.

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ABSTRACT

Asians as well as Europeans composed travel narratives about distant lands during the early modern period. In light of current debates about the nature of "modernity," Michael H. Fisher explores in this article the first four travel accounts written by Indians about Britain intended for Indian readers, considering these authors' backgrounds, approaches, and selected content. All four authors emerged from the Persianate class of Muslim scholar-officials that struggled to maintain its sociopolitical position in the face of expanding British colonialism. While these authors recognized British technical, political, and military achievements, they also contested British assertions of cultural superiority, particularly concerning religion and gender relations. Keywords: Indian travelers to Britain, travel writing and early modernity, Indian travel writings for Indian audiences, East India Company, "homeless texts"

66. Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*.