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**PROVINCIALIZING ENGLAND:
VICTORIAN DOMESTICITY
AND THE COLONIAL GAZE**

KRISHNA SEN

“Man ... should not merely realize the fact of differences Travelling reaches its best truth when through it we extend our spiritual ownership in return for our gift of sympathy” – so said Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) in ‘Illuminated Travel Literature’ (716), his 1925 English review of Count Hermann Keyserling’s *Travel Diary of a Philosopher*. Tagore’s own extensive travel narratives about his journeys across the globe (not yet translated into English from the original Bengali) are luminous examples of empathetic travel informed by lively intellectual curiosity about unfamiliar cultures. The rubric of travel writing generally suggests colonizing movements from West to East: this essay will focus on travelogues by Tagore and others that subvert such power relations as they move from East to West.

The template of imperial travel was very different from Tagore's ideal of cultural interchange. Said has famously defined this template – “European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient ... during the post-Enlightenment period” (Said 3). Greenblatt (1991) shows how this discursive (and actual) domination in terms of othering and marginalization extended to the whole of the non-West from as far back as the early modern period. Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) embeds the reductive Western gaze in the very title, privileges “a Eurocentric form of global, or as I call it, planetary consciousness” (5), explores how “travel and exploration writing *produced* the ‘rest of the world’ for the European reader” (5-6; emphasis in the original), and defines ‘transculturation’ as the overdetermined cultural transformation experienced by the colonized as they interact with the colonizer in the “contact zone” (6). For Pratt the fixed poles of these contact zones are the Western “traveler” and the non-Western “travelee” (7). Clearly, there is no space within this axiomatic frame for the travelee to turn traveller, or for the gazer to become a gazer. The compendious *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002) has only two cursory references (without detailed analysis) to Olaudah Equiano and Dean Mahomed as “non-Europeans *sufficiently Anglicised*” to write travel narratives (254-5; emphasis added), and does not, even for the record, mention any other non-European travelogue.

By contrast, Tim Youngs includes two non-Western travel accounts in his 2006 edited volume on nineteenth century travel writing, asserting that “It would be wrong to think of nineteenth-century travel only in terms of an outward movement away from Britain” (13). This is a welcome recognition of what Michael H. Fisher felicitously terms the “counterflows” (Fisher 2004) of colonial travel from East to West. A major segment of this reverse travel in the imperial era originated from the Indian subcontinent. Fisher (2007) notes, “Indian men and women have been traveling to England and settling there since about 1600, roughly as long as Englishmen have been sailing to India. Most historians of England, India and colonialism, however, tend to neglect accounts of and by Indian travelers” (153). But not all Indian travellers became partially acculturated settlers, and, as will be seen below, visitors from the colonial margin subjected the metropolitan centre to exacting scrutiny.

The two earliest Indian travelogues on Britain were in Persian (the court language of the Mughals) by court functionaries travelling on official business. Mirza Sheikh I'tesamuddin (1730-1800) wrote *The Wonders of Vilayet: Being the Memoir originally in Persian of a Visit to France and Britain in 1765* ('Vilayet' is Persian for England). Mirza Abu Taleb Khan (1752-1896) composed *Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan in Asia, Africa and Europe* (1799-1803), written by himself in

the Persian language (2 Volumes). These two volumes were translated by Charles Stewart in 1810 and 1814 respectively, while James Edward Alexander published an abridged English version of *The Wonders of Vilayet* in 1827. But two nineteenth-century Urdu travelogues by Yusuf Khan Kambalposh (c. 1830-90), *The Journey of Yusuf Khan Kambalposh to the Land of the Englishmen* (1847) and *How Strange is England* (1873), were translated only in 2014 by Mushirul Hasan and Nishat Zaidi. A large corpus of Bengali travelogues to England still remains untranslated. The earliest English travelogue on Britain from India was by the Armenian immigrant Joseph Emin (1726-1809), *Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin, an Armenian, Written in English by Himself* (1792). But the first Indian author of an English travelogue on Britain was Sake (i.e. Sheikh) Dean Mahomed (1759-1851), *The Travels of Dean Mahomed, A Native of Patna in Bengal* (1794). Within a half century there were more English narratives, such as those by Ardeseer Cursetjee in 1840, Jehangir Nowroji and Hirjibhoy Merwanji in 1841, and Munshi Mohanlal in 1846. Post-1857, English and vernacular travel texts proliferated, including English accounts by renowned figures like Gandhi and Nehru.

There is, however, a marked difference in travelogues from the Company era, and those from the post-1857 colonial era when the subcontinent was ruled directly from England till its independence in 1947. The Com-

pany era is often described as pre-colonial, but this is not entirely accurate. The British East India Company wielded enormous power from around 1757, and its Governors-General directly or indirectly controlled large swathes of upper India through a colonial-type administration, until the formal inception of the ‘British Raj’ in 1858. This is no mere historical quibble. The greater attraction of England over other European destinations for Indians was directly linked to the British East India Company’s ascendancy over the French, Dutch, Portuguese and Danish East India Companies. Yet Company-era voyagers lacked the prior mental map of England that oriented their colonial successors.

This dichotomy can be illustrated by comparing I’tesamuddin’s *Vilayet* or *Abu Taleb Khan’s Travels* with the earliest of Tagore’s several accounts of England. Both courtiers hailed from a highly developed Indo-Persian Islamic culture, but had little knowledge of “Firinghee nations” (i.e. Europe; *Vilayet* 87). I’tesamuddin performs fascinating acts of reverse cultural translation as he encounters unfamiliar Western ways. A devout Muslim whose religion forbids imaging of the Divine, he constructs the West as the idol-worshipping Other: “The Portuguese built a fort in Balagarh [modern Bandel near Calcutta] [...] Together with the fort [...] the Portuguese built a church where they began worshipping idols of Christ, Mary and various Christian saints’ (ibid. 23).

On reaching ‘Vilayet’ he piquantly glocalizes England, as when he appropriates the University of Oxford within his own socio-cultural field, with astronomy sliding into astrology:

Oxford ... is the seat of an ancient madrassah [i.e. Islamic school] ... One of the libraries contained many superb statues and pictures ... purchased from abroad, some for as much as ten to twenty thousand rupees.... The English hold artists in such high regard that they are prepared to pay lakhs of rupees for a painting or a drawing ... I also saw an astrolabe ... with astrological markings, with whose help it is possible to determine auspicious times (ibid. 71, 72, 75).

Abu Taleb Khan inverts the imperial binary of cosmopolitan West/provincial East when he remarks that England is “placed in a corner of the globe where there is no coming and going of foreigners” whereas “in Asia ... people of various nations dwell in the same city” (264). Tagore first stayed in England as a student at University College, London, for several months in 1878 when he was just seventeen. His copious correspondence with family and friends back home was later collected as *Europe Probashir Patra* (*Letters from a Sojourner in Europe, 1881*). The young poet’s bubbling excitement clearly derives from his exposure to Western texts while still in India:

I had imagined the British Isles to be so compact and the English people to be so enlightened that, before I came

here, I thought that England would reverberate from one end to another with Tennyson's sonorous strains; I felt that wherever I went in this tiny island, Gladstone's powerful oratory, Max Müller's Vedic wisdom, Tyndall's scientific maxims, Carlyle's wondrous utterances, Renan's political philosophy, would be ringing in my ears. I imagined English people, young and old, as relishing nothing but intellectual pleasures. (*Sojourner* 242-3; my translation).

So while I'tesamuddin and Abu Taleb reduce England to their own terms, the young Tagore takes England apparently on England's terms.

How did Tagore know England even before he went there? Gauri Viswanathan (1981) attributed this to "the ideology of British education" in India (11). Viswanathan is referring to Lord Macaulay's controversial 'Minute on Indian Education' (1835) that sought to imbriate Indians within Europe's "planetary consciousness" (Ibid). By replacing traditional Sanskrit and Persian scholarship with an English-based Anglocentric educational curriculum, Macaulay attempted to fashion "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect [who] may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern" (116-17). The policy was widely enforced post-1857, and with it the British Government created a cadre of English-speaking, Western-oriented, urbanized professional Indians cutting across caste barriers,

who were dependent on the colonial administration for their livelihood and social standing. This completely new social formation, an upwardly mobile Indian middle class based on education and merit rather than on caste and inherited wealth, had little in common with the traditional orders of the feudal rich and rural poor. As Krishna Sen notes, English was “its point of entry into what is known in the West as the ‘Civil Society’ and it looked to England to structure its evolving social codes” (126). Journeying to England was a rite of passage for this aspiring (and sometimes deracinated) bourgeoisie. And like Tagore, they all carried a hyper-real imaginary of England mediated by English books.

It is precisely here that a historic interface occurs between empire and Victorian domesticity. Visiting England provided colonial Indians with a singular opportunity to meet the people they called ‘Britishers’ on a fairly equal footing, bearing in mind the gulf that separated ‘natives’ from ‘sahibs’ (i.e. Britons) back in the colony (one need only recall the hauteur of several English characters in Forster’s *A Passage to India* and Orwell’s *Burmese Days*). Everyday scenes and occurrences, the conduct of acquaintances and strangers - these were the realities to be measured against the hyperreal imaginary. So for all that metropolitan London overwhelmed these visitors with its magnificence, what they recorded most assiduously were the lives and mores, very different from their own, of ordinary

Victorians, people like themselves. Simonti Sen quotes in her own translation from an anonymous 1880s Bengali travelogue: “We have a special relationship with the city [London]; therefore ... we are not merely interested in her sights – we wanted to closely observe the manners, morals, social conditions, ethics, education and intelligence of her people” (93). Is this not the travelee becoming the traveller, and the gazer a gazer?

Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay (2002) dismisses these travelogues as mere colonial mimicry, arguing that both secular travel writing (as opposed to pilgrimage narratives) and the individualized perspective dating from Europe’s early modern era were colonial imports into India. But leading nineteenth-century Bengali litterateur Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) had already anticipated and countered such historicist critiques. In his English essay, “Confessions of a Young Bengal” (1872), he had indeed admitted: “The very idea that external life is a worthy subject of the attention of a rational being, except in its connection with religion, is, amongst ourselves, unmistakably of English origin” (43). Yet Bankim (who famously indigenized the novel, a Western form) also highlighted the cultural translatability of the “travelling genre” and the situated autonomy of the colonial gaze in his 1873 Bengali review of Romesh Chunder Dutt’s English travelogue, *Three Years in Europe*, 1868-1871:

A volume like this is extremely necessary. Knowledge of English has enabled us to learn much about England from English books ... But English books and epistles are composed by English men. They depict England as it appears to English eyes. They do not portray England as it would appear to our eyes.... Monsieur Taine has published a book on England written from his own French perspective. By reading it, we apprehend how dissimilar a Frenchman's perception of England is from an Englishman's.... So if a Frenchman's England is so divergent, then it is easy to imagine how very different a Bengali's view of England might be. (444; my translation)

The titles of some late nineteenth-century Indian travelogues in English foreground this counterdiscursive positioning of the centre (rather than the margin) as the object of inspection—Behramji M. Malabari's *Indian Eye on English Life, or Rambles of a Pilgrim Reformer* (1891), Rev. T.B. Pandian's *England to an Indian Eye, or Pictures from an Indian Camera* (1897), G. Parameswaran Pillai's *London and Paris through Indian Spectacles* (1897). Fisher (2006) observes: "Indians were beginning to 'reverse the gaze' of Orientalism and analyze Britain based on their own direct observations [...]" (90). It is interesting that Antoinette Burton says of her three voyagers "Like [Pandita] Ramabai's and [Cornelia] Sorabjee's correspondence, Malabari's narrative [...] is a kind of ethnographic text, offering yet another close reading of English civilization, and especially of London life, in the late-Victorian period" (5). It may seem strange to speak of ethnographic work by

colonized Others, since nineteenth-century ethnography is usually associated with the totalizing of Asian and African cultures by the magisterial European gaze. Like many contemporary Indian visitors, Behramji Malabari (1853-1912) differentiates between the courteous Englishman at home and the churlish Englishman in the colony (67-9), but he goes further and nuances the issue of ethnographic 'knowledge' of the metropolis by boldly assuming parity for the periphery. While "contrasting the New Civilization [of the West] with the Old [of the East]" (*Indian Eye* vii), he neither extols nor excoriates his colonial masters, the people of Victorian England, but proposes "a friendly conversation, in open council, with Englishmen on the one hand and Indians on the other" (vii). This postulate for an affable intercourse subtly undermines the ground of empire: "We should be treated as equals ... you must not give us less than our due; and pray do not give us more either ... [and] the same equal treatment in the case of the nation as in the case of individuals" (65).

Hailing from Bombay, Malabari was a journalist, newspaper editor, and leading activist for women's emancipation in India (fittingly, *The Indian Eye* is dedicated "To the Women of England in Grateful Remembrance of 1890"). His first-person narrative conflates the viewing I/eye, staging the colonial viewer as subject, and portraying Victorian England, his object of inquiry, with humour, irony and pathos:

What strikes an Asiatic most, on getting out at Victoria Station, is the noise and bustle about him. Every man and woman ... seems to be full of life.... I happened to have read a good deal about this, but what I actually see here exceeds my anticipation.

And yet the eye, if it can observe well, may detect a good deal of suffering among the gay or busy crowd. Here is some fashionable cad nearly driving over a fragile old woman. She rushes trembling to the constable's side. There goes a knot of boy-sweepers, running about between carriages and even under them, in order to keep the ground clean. You could hardly expect greater agility from mice or squirrels.... Few respectable women, I find, will venture out into some of these streets towards evening ... so great is the rush therein of the unworthy ones of their sex ... The back parts of not a few streets seem to be given up to a Godless population, foreign and English. A large percentage of this, I should think, represents virtue first betrayed, and then crowded out, by vice. (27-29)

He is quick to note the dark underside of empire—acute poverty underlying “the keen pursuit of pleasure or business” (30):

Poor as India is, I thank God she knows not much of the poverty to which parts of Great Britain have been accustomed ... Men and women living in a chronic state of emaciation, till they can hardly be recognised as human, picking up food that even animals will turn away from ... It is in winter, more than six months of the year, that you see the poverty of England at its worst.... And side by side with such heart-rending scenes of misery, one

sees gorgeously dressed luxury flaunting in the streets, dragged along by horses better fed and better looked after than many a human family in the same neighbourhood. (80-81)

He is disturbed by public displays of drunkenness among both men and women:

Water is about the last thing the average Britisher thinks of for a beverage.... He must have something stronger, you know.... Mr. and Mrs. John Bull take a drop because it is so cold, then because they are so tired, or grieving, or disappointed. The habit grows on many till the victims are reduced to a state verging on lunacy. (50)

Malabari is sympathetic towards the impecunious “organ-grinders” (235) and good-natured about the impudent “street arabs of London ... dirty unkempt little urchins” (237) who mock his Indian attire. But he has nothing but censure for fashionable cads and flaunting luxury: “It is the present that we live in, the self that we live for.... If this be your English culture of the nineteenth century, let us remain ignorant in India ... [and] worship her stone-gods.... The worship of self is the worst form of idolatry” (75). He is equally disillusioned after attending debates on India in the Houses of Parliament—“In this huge struggle for success which typifies the political life of England, what chance is there for her far-off Dependency? God help India!” (225).

Yet there are many aspects of the New Civilization that Malabari cannot but prefer to the Old—“Everything speaks of freedom for them [women] here—they have free movement and a free voice. Woman is a presence and a power in Europe. In Asia, woman is a vague entity, a nebulous birth absorbed in the shadow of artificial sexuality” (22). A natural corollary is the difference between domesticity in England and India:

The life in a decent English home is a life of equality among all the members. This means openness and mutual confidence. Wife and husband are one at home ... The children stand in the same position with the parents as the latter stand to each other. ... All this is different in India (62).

Most of Chapter III (62 ff.) demonstrates how domestic equality and the constructive role of the English mother in bringing up her children to be self-reliant and enterprising (both unlike India) constitute the bedrock of English modernity. Ironically, England also exposes Malabari’s innate Indian conservatism. This champion of women’s rights is patently uneasy about unescorted women out of doors (27-28), flirtation in public (232), and especially working wives (73) whom he holds responsible for broken homes! There is no question, however, about his deep appreciation for England, which he does not hesitate to proclaim: “damp, dirty, noisy London” is “Mecca ... Medina ... Persepolis ... Buddha-Gaya ... Benares ... Jerusalem” (2) for the

colonial visitor because of the plethora of illuminating experiences it offers—“Great in varieties, great in contrarities ... I sit entranced, watching thy divergent forces” (245).

Malabari’s refusal to be trapped within the colonizer/colonized binary, his sardonic self-portrayal as an ingenuous provincial beating his “native tom-tom” (245) in the seat of empire, and his witty and sophisticated observations in polished English, scarcely fit the stereotype of the aborigine awaiting the gift of Western civilization. A large number of nineteenth-century Indian voyagers to England were, in fact, neither aides nor employees of ‘sahibs,’ but independent travellers prosperous enough to afford the long sea voyage as first class cabin passengers, very often to take higher degrees at prestigious universities.

Several commentators identify these people solely as “the Anglicised Indian service elite” (Fisher 2006: 90). But this is to forget those enlightened Indians unaffected by Macaulay’s educational reforms who had close links with England unlike I’tesamuddin and Abu Taleb Khan. One thinks of men like the social and religious reformer Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) and reformer and business tycoon Dwarkanath Tagore (1794-1846; grandfather of Rabindranath). Both began by serving the British East India Company before fashioning spectacular careers of their own. Both men, especially

Rammohun, were significant participants, even before they went to England, in transnational networks of intellectual exchange that impacted England as well as India through the burgeoning print culture: Lynn Zastoupil records this important non-imperial interface between centre and margin in her provocatively titled *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (2010). Rammohun was in England between 1830 and 1833; Dwarkanath visited twice in the 1840s using his personal steam ship. Both were greatly respected. Dwarkanath dined with Queen Victoria (later also with King Louis Philippe of France); Rammohun's close friend, the Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, proposed his name for Britain's House of Commons, but the idea was ahead of its time (Zastoupil 152). Cosmopolitan friendships between liberal Britons and educated Indians, running parallel with colonial oppression and racism, culminated in the election of Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), a Bombay businessman with major investments in Britain and a co-founder in 1885 of the Indian National Congress that fought for India's independence, as the first Asian Member of England's House of Commons (1892-1895), after successfully campaigning as a Liberal Party candidate from the London borough of Central Finchley. These complex and contrasting personal/political trajectories in the England-India relationship explain how Malabari or Rabindranath Tagore could assume positions of equality with their British counterparts despite com-

ing from the colony. Nobel laureate Tagore's galaxy of close friends included the most illustrious authors, artists and intellectuals of late Victorian England. Similarly Indian English novelist Mulk Raj Anand's 1920s memoir, *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, chronicles his affable relationship with eminent British Modernists.

Rabindranath Tagore visited England six times between 1878 and 1930. These experiences are recorded in four Bengali prose works—two travelogues, *Letters from a Sojourner in Europe* (*Europe Probashir Patra*, 1881) and *Diary of a Traveller in Europe* (*Europe Jattrir Diary* Parts I & II, 1891 & 1893), and two memoirs, *Memories of My Life* (*Jibansnriti*, 1912) and *Treasures of the Road* (*Pather Sanchoy*, 1912). As the earlier quotation from *Sojourner* indicates, Tagore's initial ideas about England were filtered through its literature. This is reiterated ten years later in *Diary of a Traveller* (so it must have been a deep-seated sentiment) when he wryly apostrophizes London:

Alright, I admit that you are a great city in a great country, your power and wealth are unlimited.... But it is impossible to find here those whom I met daily through your literature. And then one labours under the illusion that one will encounter these 'friends' in the highways and byways of London. But here I find only Englishmen, all foreign to me ... (Diary 400; my translation)

The teenager of *Sojourner* is amazed that “Dr. P, who is very educated, knows only that a poet called Shelley was born in his country, but he heard for the first time from me that Shelley wrote a play called Cenci and a poem called Epipsychidion!” (*Sojourner* 246; my translation). In fact, like several contemporaries who had also imagined the English as a race apart, he is taken aback by the humdrum nature of Victorian life:

I have been sadly disillusioned. The women are busy with dress and fashion, the men with their work, and life goes on as usual—the only excitement from time to time is over politics.... There are wine shops galore. Whenever I go out I spot masses of shoe stores, tailors, butchers, toy shops, but alas, very few book shops—and this never ceases to astonish me. (ibid. 242-3, 245; my translation)

To Tagore, London is all swirling crowds, inordinate haste, and rushing motorcars and trains (ibid. 244-5), and this worship of speed startles him on every visit: “The motor car is a new phenomenon here.... With what gusto the English people manipulate time and space! ... The slightest error is fatal” (*Treasures of the Road* 901-2; my translation). Like Malabari, he is the butt of jeering street-arabs (“Jack, look at the blackies! [in English]” [*Sojourner* 252]), and is aghast at the pollution from London’s innumerable belching chimneys (ibid. 323). Like Malabari, again, he is shocked by the widespread poverty that is harshest in winter (ibid. 258-9), and by the hardship of life in England: “I have

never seen such a struggle for survival anywhere else. ... Here only the ‘fittest survive’ [in English]” (ibid. 245; my translation). Some of his best memories of London are the National Gallery (ibid. 397), the theatre (ibid. 399), Gladstone and O’Donnell declaiming in the House of Commons (ibid. 255-6), and also that even the very poor were very honest (*Memories* 78).

The brash young observer of Sojourner is caustic about upper-class Victorian women:

Though women here are free, their ultimate goal is marriage, and basically this is not very different from India. They may get a good education unlike our girls, but they are also polished up to become good housewives. When a girl reaches the age of marriage, she is dressed up like a shiny doll to make an effective display in the shop window of the marriage market, and at the balls and parties. There is nothing as sad as being an ‘old maid’ [in English] (ibid. 299; my translation)

However, he readily concedes that “the class of women known as ‘old maids’ [in English] are extremely conscious of their social responsibilities. Temperance meeting, Working Men’s Society [in English] etc. - in all such clamorous organisations they may be seen busy in the background” (ibid. 243; my translation). As opposed to the “fashionable dolls,” the “house-keeper,” “nurse,” “governess” and “housemaid” (all in English) work tirelessly in wealthy homes. Tagore is surprised

(coming from a hot country where baths are essential) that “a chief task [of the household help] is filling baths, as bathing is becoming fashionable in England” (ibid. 297; my translation). But middle class housewives without such help have many chores, and the narrator especially compliments their spotless kitchens and domestic economy (ibid. 299-300).

Like Malabari, Tagore is impressed by the equality of husband and wife in English homes. And young as he is, he offers a shrewd judgment on the truism that Englishmen were different in England and in India—“They [most ‘sahibs’] do not come from polite, that is, really good families.... English people from good families have beautiful minds” (ibid. 258-9; my translation). For Tagore, the prime example of beautiful English minds is the family he lodges with in London:

Mr. K, Mrs. K, their four daughters, two sons, three maids, myself and Toby the dog make up this household.... Mr. K is a doctor.... His conduct is as amiable as his appearance is pleasant.... Mrs K. genuinely cares about me. She scolds me if I go out without enough warm clothes. She coaxes me to eat more if she thinks I am not eating well. The English are terrified of coughs and colds. If I even cough twice, she stops my daily bath, rustles up mountains of medicines, and insists on a hot footbath at bedtime.... After breakfast Mrs. K supervises the housework till almost one thirty, assisted by the eldest Miss K.... The second daughter, Miss J, dusts the furniture while the housemaid sweeps the floor.... The

third daughter, Miss A, does all the mending. Now Miss J is relaxing by the fire, reading Green's History of the English People [in English].... After dinner we retire to the drawing room at seven. Sometimes they request me to sing English songs which I have learned from Miss A, while she plays the piano. Then we take turns to read out from books, some days till 11.30-12.00 at night.... The youngest daughter, Ethel, is very fond of me. She calls me 'Uncle Arthur' [in English].... The other day Miss N told me that the Misses J and A had been horrified that an Indian was coming to stay in their home.... The day I was to arrive they went away to a relative's house and didn't come back for a week. ... Anyway, I am very happy here now. Everyone is a good friend, and Ethel won't stay away a minute from her 'Uncle Arthur.' (*Sojourner* 333-7; my translation)

These warm words of appreciation conclude the *Sojourner*.

The Diary covers several European destinations. It has less of the quicksilver observation of the first-time traveller, and is more of a philosophical meditation on the possibility of universal human values in a world fractured by colonialism. Yet Tagore has lost none of his sharp wit. He now responds differently to the tumult of London, with an impish reversal of terminology—"London is cacophonous to us, but not to the 'natives' [in Bengali, with single quotes] of London" (*Diary* 401; my translation). But what Tagore really took back from Victorian England was not just memories, but Britain's

strong intellectual tradition of humanist and liberal thought (*Treasures* 905-921), qualities that he inculcated in his ashrama-school at Santiniketan that is now Visva Bharati University. A feminine perspective on Victorian domesticity would provide an interesting contrast. By the late nineteenth century some Indian women were accompanying their husbands to England. The well-educated Tagore wives and daughters were great travellers, coming as they did from a liberal and affluent family. The lady who spent most time in England (about two and a half years from 1874) was Jnadanandini Devi, wife of Rabindranath's older brother Satyendranath who successfully cleared the tough British Civil Service examination. In *Bilater Katha* (*About Vilayet*; 'Bilat' is the Bengali pronunciation of Persian 'Vilayet'), her reminiscences as transcribed by her daughter, we find the following vignette about the solicitude of ordinary English people: "Miss Donkin, the English lady, helped me a lot during the sickness of my children. She [...] was always going around helping others. When the condition of the children became very serious, she even rushed out in her nightdress to call the doctor" (Mandal 98).

One of the most detailed narratives about England from a feminine viewpoint is *A Bengali Lady in England* (*Englender Bangamahila*, 1885) by Mrs. Krishnabhabini Das (1862-1919), who spent thirteen years in England with her husband from 1876 to 1889. Her life there

was comfortable. London was still an affordable city—for 25 shillings a weeks, inclusive of all meals provided by the landlady, one could rent a beautifully furnished apartment in a respectable neighbourhood (40). Mrs. Das' first impression of London is not of crowds or cars but of myriads of brightly-lit shops brimming with tempting goods (39). The second strong impression is of Sunday mornings when the ceaseless traffic is still, all the church bells ring in unison, and well-dressed groups walk to Mass, “mostly women ... the young girls strutting in their finery since they go to church also in search of husbands ... but needless to say, this is no day of rest for housemaids” (46; my translation). Most unfortunately, however, “wine shops vastly outnumber churches.... Women as well as men prostrate themselves before the Goddess of Liquor with horrifying abandon” (90; my translation).

As a homemaker herself, Mrs. Das has a sharp eye for the details of domesticity. Chapter 18 describes the daily household routines in wealthy, middle-class and working-class homes. Mrs. Das especially itemises meals in detail. In well-to-do homes live-in cooks spend hours preparing elaborate menus, but food gets scantier with the income. She is intrigued by local customs: “There is a strange system of knocking on the door in English households. Friends must knock three to four times. Tradesmen and postmen knock twice. Domestic servants should only knock once. This way

the people inside know exactly who to expect when they open the door” (137; my translation). Like her male counterparts she regrets the absence in India of some English domestic practices. “Here the man devotes himself to earning his living ... the woman is the real queen of the household.... Unlike India, women appear freely before male guests.... Less affluent women actually work outside the home in stores, offices and schools.... Women here are not like the British wives in India who are luxury-loving, lazy and haughty” (73-5; my translation). She appreciates the after-dinner custom of the whole family congregating in the drawing room for music, reading and conversation, and laments: “How unfortunate that in India, men segregate themselves from the women and children and never share these warm family moments together” (136; my translation). And like all Indian visitors Mrs. Das especially commends the English traits of industry and enterprise: “English men are hardy and self-reliant and try to inculcate these qualities in their sons. Unlike Indian families where sons are always indulged and spoilt, an English father will encourage his son to earn his own living and not depend on the father” (53; my translation). England has its flaws too: “Wealth is the Englishman’s God.... Their class system is as virulent as India’s caste system. Rich families will not associate with poor families.... They are not too eager to help even relatives in distress. They usually treat their servants well and give them enough to eat, but never dine or chat

with them” (48-50; my translation; emphasis added). Nevertheless, Mrs. Das is ecstatic about the position of English women: “I cannot tell you how delighted I feel to see scores of girls going to school and college, even up to their twenties, just like the boys. They are allowed to go out alone.... They even go to gymnasiums like the boys. This makes them strong and independent, but less graceful than Indian women.... I believe that if Hindu ladies were given so much freedom, they would be no less efficient than English women” (75, 78; my translation). Indeed, after returning to India, Mrs Das dedicated herself to the upliftment of Bengali women—her gift to them from England.

The travellers discussed here demonstrate the diversity of the counterflow from India—I'tesamuddin and Abu Taleb Khan were Muslims of Persian descent, Malabari was a Gujarati Parsee and a Zoroastrian, the Tagores were Bengalis of the Brahmo Samaj, and Mrs. Das was a Bengali Hindu. None of them spoke from the position of the inferior Other. However, not all Indian travellers reacted in the same way. Bhikhu Parekh has identified four types of colonial Indian responses to England—“traditionalists” who abjured everything Western in their Anglophobia, “critical traditionalists” who adopted a few Western elements, “modernists” who worshipped everything Western in their Anglophilia, and “critical modernists” who advocated a creative synthesis of India and the West (Parekh 42-3). The

Indian counterflow had its share of Parekh's uncritical Anglophile "modernists." Simonti Sen (107) cites Calcutta's Trilokyanath Mukherjee who virtually endorsed the "Orientalist typology" of progressive West/retrograde East in his 1889 English travelogue, *A Visit to Europe*. Malabari, Tagore and Mrs. Das critique both England and India while recommending a productive fusion of both cultures, and 'provincializing' or indigenizing the metropolis by appropriating it within their own epistemology of reverse transculturation. The act of provincializing problematizes colonial binaries. Thus Jyotirmala Devi, a Bengali woman student in 1920s London who fictionalized her experiences in Bengali short stories, shows a young Bengali lodger fondly calling her elderly English landlady, "mother" (115): all older women are customarily regarded as mother-figures and addressed as "mother" in Bengal.

'Provincializing' as a trope for colonial agency is taken from Dipesh Chakrabarty's influential book, *Provincializing Europe* (2000). Chakrabarty contends that "The project of provincializing Europe ... is to write into the history of modernity, the ambivalences, contradictions" (43) of peripheral reception. The premise, shared by many Asian historians, is that colonial margins domesticated (and not transplanted) monologic Eurocentric modernity, evolving local modernities with multiple temporalities and valences. Jinhua Dai's translated Foreword to Xiaomei Chen's *Occidentalism*

(1995) rejects “a single [Western] cultural logic such as modernization” for post-Mao China, opting for “an alternative modernization” instead (ix). Partha Chatterjee (1999) rebuts Benedict Anderson’s model of nation-building, claiming that “The real space of modern life is a heterotopia” (131). Ultimately, the interface between Victorian domesticity and the colonial gaze did not operate along any single axis, either of Pratt’s hierarchies or of Tagore’s reciprocity, but along a spectrum of positive and negative axes emanating from a variety of intellectual and ideological locations, and creating a complex ecosystem of intersecting cultures.

Notes

1. Pioneering work from the 1980s onwards by Rozina Visram (1986, 1987), Antoinette Burton (1998) and Fisher himself has extended the frontiers of colonial travel studies, though their discussions solely focused non-Western narratives in English. However, it is their initiative that encouraged explorations of counterflow narratives in non-Western languages by scholars like Simonti Sen (2004) and Alam and Subrahmanyam (2007).

2. The reverse transculturation of Britain by its Indian migrants over the centuries has been recorded in two major interdisciplinary projects sponsored by England’s Arts and Humanities Research Council, “Making Britain: South Asian Visions of Home and Abroad” (2007-10) and

“Indian British Connections” (2011-12).

3. ‘Lakh’ is 100,000.

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