Colonial Subjects and Aesthetic Understanding: Indian Travel Literature about England, 1870–1900

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[Abstract: This essay examines Indian travel literature to Victorian Britain, specifically the narratives of the Raja of Kolhapur (1872), Lala Bajjnath (1893), N.L. Doss (1893), Jhinda Ram (1893), Jagatjit Singh (1895), G. Parameswaran Pillai (1897) and T.B. Pandian (1897). It argues that within these narratives documenting mobility, eyewitnessing and cultural negotiations with the “foreign,” one can discern the emergence of an aesthetic subject. Aesthetics enables the traveler to grapple with and partially undo the easy binaries of colonial subject/imperial city, foreigner Indian/native English, and local/global. The essay makes a case for the cosmopolitan aesthetic of the colonial subject in the imperial metropolis.]

While some (but not enough) critical attention has been paid to Indian travel literature to Victorian Britain, the majority of the studies seem to track the rise of the imperial subject within them. Discussing Indian travelogues set in England in the 1870-1900 period, Julie Codell proposes that the narratives encode a utopian vision of “imagined modern India, grounded in Indian society and Western modernism” (174). Codell is accurate in her interpretation when she claims that the Indian traveler to the imperial metropolis developed a “guest discourse,” conscious of his presence as a colonial subject being welcomed by the imperial center. Two other commentators see the travelling Indian subject as becoming a part of the spectacle of empire.

because they had internalized modes of modern travel (Grewal qtd. in Burton 136).

Missing from these analyses, in my view, is a specific form of the colonial subject’s engagement with England itself: the aesthetic. The colonial subject’s “aesthetic understanding”—which Stephen Greenblatt characterizes as consisting of “wondering, admiring and knowing”—of the imperial metropolis is an important mode of recasting his own subject position. My contention in this essay is that the aesthetic subject possesses, within the framework of colonialism, some amount of agency. Aesthetic understanding also, as I shall demonstrate, moves the Indian traveler outside of the easy binary of native subject-imperial metropolis by enabling him (the travelers, I consider, are all male) to fashion himself as a cosmopolitan. Hence, my focus here is the emergence of a cosmopolitan aesthetic that empowers the colonial subject and also situates him firmly within a Victorian culture of cosmopolitanism. What Julie Codell postulates as the vision of modern India in these travelers is, this essay argues, cast as a cosmopolitan aesthetic.

Amanda Anderson defines cosmopolitanism as a “reflective distance from one’s original or primary cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and contexts, and a belief in universal humanity” (63). It is marked by “overlapping allegiances” (Robbins qtd. in Anderson 78). Anderson’s definition focuses on ethos and character, and eschews geopolitics (Goodlad 400). But, Lauren Goodlad cautions us to note, correctly, that the cosmopolitan ethos of Victorian England grew out of new transnational movements of goods and people, industrialization and geopolitics (400-01), and this is the context of the Indian traveler’s cosmopolitan ethos. It is nineteenth-century industrial modernity’s mobility that enabled (even) the colonial subject to travel across Europe, Australia and America, and which also enabled the circulation of English texts in India. And the cosmopolitan aesthetics of the Indian traveler is, I propose, a direct consequence of the geographical, physical and cultural mobility and the eye-witnessing of England.

The cosmopolitan aesthetic had two intertwined moments. In the first, we see the Indian traveler as a “proper” colonial subject, in awe of the imperial metropolis, enchanted by all things English. In the second moment, we see a shift, in which the Indian traveler offers us a different engagement with England, one that might be called a rationalization of the enchantment—what I shall term “informed enchantment”—of the first moment. I shall map these moments in sequence, even though they seem to work together within these texts.
I. The Colonial Subject and the Aesthetics of Enchantment

You may read of London all your life, but you will never know what it is like, unless you see it.

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Pillai here warns the armchair traveler that nothing, no reading about nor textual familiarity with London, prepares one for the city. Pillai is only rehearsing an old trope in travel literature: the authenticity of the eye-witness; it is embodied cognition that authenticates the sights. It is in the cognitive engagement with the sights of the imperial metropolis that the colonial subject first demonstrates the sense of enchantment in his narrative documentation of his experiences.

Now, enchantment and wonder, commentators tell us, are about the cognition of wondrous events and things, and the emotional response to them. Narratives of wonder demand, Jonathan Sell notes, a bodily inscription of the eye-witness into the event being narrated so that the cognitive and emotional states may be conveyed to the reader who is located in a “contextual disparity” from the traveler (135-36). In London, the colonial subject encounters, cognitively, an industrialized modernity. What these colonial subjects are enchanted by is my focus in this section.

It is with enchantment that the aesthetic negotiation and understanding of England by the colonial subject begins, and it is this enchantment that will later modulate into a more “informed” engagement with the cognitively new. Every Indian traveler of the age marvels at and offers fulsome details of the extensive (modern) mobilities in England, its great museums, monuments and galleries, and finally, its present cultural scene, specifically the theatre.3

Antoinette Burton has pointed to the descriptions of English railway systems as a generic feature of these narratives (“Making a Spectacle” 129). Simonti Sen also notes that urbanism as an index of England’s modernity was the focus of all travelers, and that most of them recorded their astonishment at the sights (76-77). Burton and Sen are right: these descriptions exhibit a sense of wonder at London’s sights. Flowing crowds, the efficiency of the London railways, the helpful cabby and the sights from the omnibus are features that elicit wonder in each of these narratives, suggesting that the colonial subject, above all else, is fascinated by the mobility that the English in general and London in particular embody. This mobility is the marker of the imperial present that the traveler is enchanted by.

G.P. Pillai writes, “Every five minutes there is a fresh train . . . How surprising! And these trains are underground!” (9). Lala Baijnath is even more wonderstruck: “The Metropolitan and District Railways of London . . . are really triumphs of John Bull’s energy and perseverance
in the means of locomotion employed in his metropolis” (35). N.L. Doss exhibits a fair amount of anxious wonder at the crowded streets when he records, “there is a ceaseless stream of vehicles pouring in from the several roads” (39). Jagatjit Singh’s first comments on London include the now-mandatory one on its crowds: “I greatly marvelled at the enormous traffic in the streets as I drove along” (60). The very first comment T.B. Pandian makes about London records bewilderment and anxiety. The setting, yet again, is the railway system:

Alighting at one of the many platforms of the Victoria Station, London, the Oriental stranger is bewildered by the number of such landings he views about him, his unaccustomed eyes being familiar with no more than three on Indian lines. (4)

By presenting himself as a “stranger,” and the sights as strange to his Indian eyes, Pandian inaugurates the trope of the wonder-struck colonial subject.

The bodily inscription of wonder, we can see, takes the form of the personal anecdote. Anecdotes, Stephen Greenblatt argues, are “registers of the singularity of the contingent”; they are not history, they are provisional and can be retold (3).

Pillai narrates the train’s movement in terms of the sheer physical experience of it:

You feel you are perpetually travelling. You find you are beginning to see the same stations, the same porters, and you realise you have been travelling in a circle . . . You may read of London all your life, but you will never know what it is like, unless you see it. (9)

N.L. Doss wakes up to the quiet of the London morning, and records his cognitive disorientation at the stillness:

I waked up in the morning, and thought it was too early to wake up, for I saw no sign of daybreak as I was accustomed to . . . I thought I would lie in bed, until I would hear the crows sing out their accustomed melody in the morning . . . I afterwards learned that a crow or any other bird, except sparrows, is seldom seen in London . . . (36)

Doss is here recording the startling, wondrous difference in the experience of waking up, a difference that brings home to him the difference in settings, environments and cities.

To capture the wonder of London’s crowds, Doss again resorts to the anecdotal mode, where it is his personal experience that is foregrounded:

I often walked along this street, and the constant throng of vehicles of all descriptions that passed along this road, and the immense crowd of foot-passengers that walked on the footpaths on its two sides,
made me quite nervous about my own safety, when I first saw this ever moving mass of men, horses, and carriages. (39)

On another occasion, Baijnath records a sense of threat that he experienced but was fortunate to be saved from. The event is Victoria’s Jubilee “fever.” The crowds throng the streets and Baijnath is taken to witness the spectacle by his friends. In such a crowd, Baijnath discovers, he stands out due to his exotic Indian dress—complete with turban—that he had insisted on wearing. Baijnath writes:

No carriages were allowed in any of the principal streets . . . Here, as on other occasions, my Indian dress proved to me of some advantage. But for that dress and the kind care of certain friends who accompanied me, I would not have been able to enjoy the sight and return home unmolested by the immense crowd in the streets. (82)

Jagatjit Singh, upon perceiving the somber buildings of London, notes that they “give an impression of gloom and sadness”—which is the impression they make on his emotional faculties at that moment (59). Jhinda Ram confesses that, having seen the crowded London streets, he “yielded to the temptation of plunging recklessly into the thick of English life” (11), even though, he says he did not know where he was “going to, or how far, or why” (11). It was, he notes, “a most difficult task to cross the roads” (11).

These anecdotes, the petit histoires of London’s modernity as perceived by the colonial subject, constitute the first and cognitive moments of the aesthetics of enchantment. The enchantment is not simply constituted by viewing, but by the very physical experience of mobility, of the rush of London life. The enchantment references London’s present, its modernity.

The second set of objects that comes in for sustained attention from the traveler is the monumental-memorial-museum culture of England. The Indian traveler, while drawn to the modernity of England’s metropolis, is more enthusiastic about its past. If, as Nigel Leask argues, English and European romanticism “imported the antique, the curious, and the picturesque to the metropolis, as modernity, technology, rationalism, and ‘universalist’ aesthetics were exported to the periphery” (52-53), we perceive a reversal in the Indian traveler’s narrative. If India is the periphery, then the traveler from India who chooses to focus on England’s antiquity wonders at the antiquity at the heart of modern London. The traveler from the margins, therefore, is less moved by the efficiency of modernity than by the existence of the picturesque antiquity within this modernity. It is not, it must be noted, the English metropolis that alone focuses on the picturesque and the ancient, but a traveler from the periphery who does so.
The interest in Macaulay, the English poets, philosophers and statesmen like Carlyle and J.S. Mill constitutes a part of this antiquarian impulse. Pandian is all praise for the “solemn and majestic grandeur of the more ancient cathedrals and churches,” and prefers the “sacred shrines of Old England” for being “a study in themselves” for instance (32). The mandatory viewing of Westminster and the castles suggests an equal, if not greater, engagement with England’s antiquity than with its present. Even when traversing the wealth of the British Museum, Doss confesses, what interests him is the collection of “numerous antiquarian and ethnological collections . . . the signatures of some of the ancient kings and queens of England . . . old charters . . .” (56) and in Scotland, the grave of John Knox (124), even though he is skeptical of the supposed blood stains from a murder committed three hundred years ago (125). Jhinda Ram opens his chapter on memorials and monuments in London with fulsome praise: “to do honor to their names and to show respect to their memory,” (45) before going on to detail the attractions of the ancient civilization exhibited at Crystal Palace (56) and later Westminster Abbey (65-69) and the Tower of London (69-75).

Finally, every single traveler is enchanted by the English theatre scene. For example, the Raja of Kolhapur seems to have gone to practically every theatre in Drury Lane and Covent Gardens (23-24, 36). Pandian refers with considerable awe to the “temples of drama,” the London theatres, before listing them (24). Baijnath too is all praise for the London theatre scene, where watching the staging of *Much Ado About Nothing*, he says, made him “realize what Shakespeare is” (51). Jagatjit Singh claims he enjoyed the Prince of Wales’s theatre “very much” (63).

The enchantment with Madame Tussauds, another commonplace in every travelogue (Jagatjit Singh 74; Jhinda Ram 50-53; Baijnath 25; Doss 69)—the theatre, the memorials and museums—clearly marks the colonial subject as a cultural tourist, a spectator, in imperial London. However, as we shall see, this cultural tourist role is not the only one occupied by the colonial subject. Displacing this identity is that of the cultured tourist, and this tourist’s aesthetic engagement with London is of a wholly different kind.

II. The Cosmopolitan Subject and the Aesthetics of Recognition

Thus far I have argued that the enchantment with things English is characterized by an emphasis on the sheer cognitive pleasures of “seeing” England. But “seeing” as a tourist is not the only way the Indians perceive England. Combined with the role of the passive gazer is that of the enquiring observer. Jonathan Crary has persuasively demonstrated that to be an observer is to follow “codes, rules,
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practices.” An observer is one who “sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, embedded in a system of convention” (5-6). The Indian traveler is enchanted by England, but he is also viewing England from within specific codes and a specific “set of possibilities.” These codes, I now argue, construct a wholly different subject-position of the colonial subject.

N.L. Doss, in the first lines of his narrative, presents himself as a man eager to see England: “The idea of visiting England and seeing its wonders and its still more wonderful people in their native home, was very exciting” (1). Baijnath claims: “It is now-a-days the ambition—the dream of every educated Indian, to pay visit to the home of his rulers, to those lands of civilization and liberty of which he has read so much, or which he wishes his country to come up to” (1). Jagatjit Singh admits, “ever since I can remember it was my great ambition to travel in Western countries, and judge for myself of the marvellous things that were told me concerning them” (iii). Each of them therefore opens with the sense of wonder, eager anticipation at seeing a long-awaited nation. But how exactly is the sense of anticipation created for the colonial subject? And how does it alter his ways of seeing?

The Indian travel narrative moves from an expression of cognitive enchantment to one of recognition. The first is the domain of wondering and admiring that constitutes a part of aesthetic understanding. The aesthetics of recognition is primarily an aesthetics of knowing, and constitutes the second part of the aesthetic understanding of the traveler. The aesthetics of recognition, importantly, displaces the primary identity of “colonial subject” occupied by the Indian and offers another identity: that of an informed, cosmopolitan cultural insider which is made possible by what I shall detail as the traveler’s “memory citizenship” in English culture. But before this identity is forged, the narrative sets out to “enclose” the wonders registered cognitively.

This section has three parts. In the first, I study the modes of textually “enclosing” the wonders of England that we see the travelers adopt. In the second, more extended sub-section, I examine the “informed enchantment” that tempers and modifies the wonders the colonial subject experiences in England. In the final sub-section, I make the case for a particular brand of cosmopolitanism that characterizes these accounts in which the colonial subject has acquired a fair measure of textual, epistemological and aesthetic understanding of the “wonders” of England. This entire section, therefore, moves from the textual comprehension of wonder to the self-fashioning of the colonial subject as a “knowing” subject and cultural insider. Finally, it presents a whole new subject toward the end of the analysis: the colonial subject as cosmopolitan.
The Enumeration Narrative

The Indian traveler, having expressed awe and admiration for the English railway system—which, I assume here, is paradigmatic of their encounter with English modernity itself—also moves toward enclosing the wonder in a particular way: through a enumeration narrative. By “enclosing,” I mean the apprehension and comprehension of wonder, imposing a measure of textual control by casting objects and events that invoked cognitive surprise into a more manageable set of numbers and tables.

Take Jhinda Ram’s narrative for instance. He first cites figures of London’s population from the 1881 Census, followed by statistics of housing, coffee houses and pubs, the city’s consumption of coffee, wheat, liquor, meats, and coal, the extent of sewage canals, the number of theatres, music halls and concert rooms, the incomes of the London Corporation, statistics of street accidents, and figures on missing children (17-18). He gives the timings (24) and extent of the omnibus network. Jhinda Ram’s narrative at once captures the magnitude of London and the cognitive wonder at this. Seeking to impose some form of textual control over this magnitude, Jhinda Ram takes recourse to an enumerative narrative scheme where statistics encapsulate London’s diversity, vastness and variety. His account of London’s transport network reads as follows:

their 668 omnibuses work daily. In 1885 they carried 58,389,997 passengers, over 13,229,219 miles, and earned, at an average of about 2 ½ dimes] each passenger, the sum of 576,780. Each bus earned at the rate of £ 18 a week. The Company’s stud of horses numbered 7242. (23-24)

He also offers information about the number of deliveries the postal system of London makes, and the names of the districts, with their abbreviations in the form of a table (25-26). Ram later lists the costs of the Albert Memorial (48) and the London docks (83). He even numbers the buildings destroyed in the great fire of London of 1666 (44). Baijnath also provides statistics of the numbers of carriages (34), omnibuses (34), post offices and pillar boxes (35), as well as the number of letters delivered (36).

With this enumeration, the Indian traveler manages to not only deliver the magnitude of the culture/country, but to also reduce, enclose and encompass the complexity of England into manageable data. The statistical account does, of course, convey the vastness and variety, but makes it, I propose, less threatening when catalogued and numbered because the traveler imposes a pattern, a certain order, on the vastness. From this point the traveler is also in a position to temper his wonder with understanding and evaluation, or what I am calling “recognition.”
Informed Enchantment

The “stranger” that Pandian opened with is no more visible after the initial moments. He is now an informed visitor. The “codes” of observation are those the traveler has assimilated from his elite background, with English education, the English language and English culture. These codes ensure that the enchantment of the first moment modulates into something else altogether, a condition I am calling “informed enchantment.”

G.P. Pillai, upon observing the countryside, breaks into poetry:

The sudden appearance of the sun in the sky amidst rain, reminds one of the following patriotic lines by Ireland’s greatest poet:

Erin! The tear and the smile in thine eyes
Blend like the rainbow that hangs in the skies;
Shining through sorrow’s stream, sadd’ning thro’ pleasure’s beam . . .

Pillai here is able to function in Wordsworthian mode, where the sight of nature—Irish nature—immediately invokes poetry, even if in the form of quotation from an Irish poet. The enchantment with the sights seems to be almost prepared for, and the verse is right at hand to capture the scenery in words. This form of enchantment constitutes the apotheosis of the colonial subject as observer.

Each individual is writing after the travel, and thus the fact that he casts his act of cognition within an aesthetic that, in his view, presumably indicates the appropriate response of enchantment. This suggests a slippage from cognition to recognition, where the latter is the self-conscious aesthetics—and an act of memory—mediating the recollection of the sights.

When Pillai quotes English poetry, or when Doss identifies the monuments at Westminster “referred to by Irving in his Sketch Book” (48), or when Pandian invokes a Scotch bard (6), they exhibit not just pleasure that the truth of the books and literature has been borne out by the physical sights, but also a certain informed enchantment at this truth. The traveler also takes pleasure in discovering the original “home” of the products he is familiar with in India. Thus Doss is joyful at seeing the factory of Bryant and May, “our Old Acquaintances,” as he calls them as soon as he arrives in London (34). None of this is about cognition. Rather, these instances suggest a recognition on the part of the colonial subject who proudly—at least in the narrative he prepares for later readers—presents himself as a cultural insider.

Describing the neo-colonial traveler Mary Louise Pratt suggests that s/he “does not claim the authority to represent, but only to express recognition of what he has learnt to know is there” (228). But the
expression of recognition is a mode of establishing oneself as a learned traveler, as opposed to an uninformed one. Visitors who speak knowledgably of Christopher Wren and the making of St. Paul’s Cathedral or the bloody events of English history, or cite poetic descriptions of the landscape are positioning themselves not as individuals who lack authority, but as members of an elite group (of colonial subjects) who have learned.

Informed enchantment erodes the sense of surprise and novelty and replaces it with the wonder of the strangely familiar. Thus, Pillai is able to say of the Edinburgh Castle: “to foreigners the Castle has already been rendered familiar by the popular poet of Scotland,” and goes on to quote lines of verse from Scott (56). He maps London in terms of its great literary figures: Milton, Byron, Monk Lewis, Macaulay, Dickens, Ben Jonson, David Garrick, among others (45-46). He then maps Edinburgh similarly, in terms of its literary-historical geography, identifying places of birth or residence of Robert Burns, James Ballantyne, Walter Scott, Adam Ferguson, David Allen, and others (57). T.B. Pandian describes Fleet Street as “inseparably associated with the names of such “Giants of Literature,” as Samuel Johnson, Thackeray and Charles Dickens!” (21). He also quotes Goldsmith (64) and uses literary analogues such as “Pickwickian dispensation” (66). Jagatjit Singh watches Alladin and Chicago at the Alhambra and finds them to be “beautifully mounted” (82). Baijnath even offers a few lines of Shakespeare criticism and references to the authorship problem of Shakespeare’s texts (52-53). He quotes Tennyson (62), George III, the ancient Greeks (63) and Swinburne (107-08) before listing a set of authors “worthy of serious study” by Indians (109). Jhinda Ram also quotes Charles Kingsley (41), Thackeray (42) and Tennyson (48).

Informed enchantment allows the Indian traveler to present himself as a cultivated gentleman in the imperial center. Writing about African American travelers in England, Tim Youngs notes that tourism and the arts enabled the former slave William Wells Brown to create a persona (76). For Pillai, Doss, and others, it is travel and travel writing that empowers them, and allows them to present their persona as cultivated individuals and therefore as cultured tourists rather than simply as culture tourists. Thus, the conventions of travel writing—references to earlier texts, literary history—are empowering for the Indian traveler. Doss, for example, when describing the Tower of London, refers to its bloody history not via a guidebook purchased on the spot, but through what Pratt calls antecedent literarios, or prior literary productions (228). These antecedent literarios and events from English history, which the traveler can “perform” as memory acts when writing his memoirs of the journey, constitute his memory citizenship. Doss writes, “It was through this gate that the seven Bishops were taken into the
tower, as Macaulay describes it” (58). Baijnath, when viewing the Tower of London, quotes Macaulay’s account of it (24). Baijnath also speaks familiarly of Hogarth, Reynolds, Gainsborough and other English painters when he describes his visit to the National Gallery (26).

One acquires a sense of this empowered role early in Pillai’s narrative. Pillai seeks to convey the native subject’s ability to absorb English customs and not be daunted by the task. The native subject is open to new cultural practices, but is also able to adapt himself to these new practices because he has some textual knowledge of this “other” culture. Pillai describes the voyage out to England:

It is a great advantage that you are compelled to go to England by sea. On board the steamer, you begin to eat English dinners, you dress like English gentlemen, you learn English manners and become accustomed to English ways . . . so that when you land, you feel quite at home, whether in the bath room, or at the dinner table, or in the public streets. (13)

Pillai is underscoring his ability to use the space of the voyage to acquire a sense of English culture and also its cultural practices of dining, socialization and personal deportment. A short while later, Pillai describes how one deals with the menu in restaurants, especially when the items are listed in French:

At any of these places you may have your table d’hote or you may dine a la carte giving the finish with a dip of your hands in rose water. You see how easily one becomes accustomed to French expressions here. This is inevitable as long as you dine in restaurants. Your menu is often written in French and your waiters are generally foreigners, mostly Italians. Fancy your being asked whether you wish to begin with hors’ d’oeuvre, have any poisson, pass on to entrée, and wind up with fromage by Gati, Obertti, Frascarti or Lombard! (15)

Pillai here presents himself not as an “innocent abroad,” but as an informed traveler quite at ease with cultural differences, a person who is able to slide into another cultural practice without much trouble. Pillai also seems to showcase, alongside his cultural malleability (“how easily,” he says in the above quote, one adapts to cultural difference), a rather nonchalant approach to the western cultures he encounters. Rather than shock or awe, he seems to display a certain informed detachment and minimal amusement.

Understandably, Pillai is impressed and marvels at each of these moments, practices and events. The Raja of Kolhapur takes dancing classes and records how he “danced the Lancers with Miss S-” (32). He also learns to play croquet (40-41). Baijnath notes that he had “read so much” about the Tower of London at school (23). All this seems to
present the native not as an awe-struck, ignorant subject but as a culturally adaptable one, familiar with croquet, fine wines, dance forms and music.

Arguably, England represents the high point of the traveler’s itinerary (which, as noted before, often also includes Europe), functioning as the symbolic and literal destination of their journey. To adapt Carole Fabricant’s argument about “domestic tourism” in eighteenth-century England, in which English lands, owned by the upper classes, became accessible and even “possessable” by their often middle-class audiences (259), I propose that a similar “possession,” however partial it may be, within the narrative of recognition by the Indian traveler, is generated by acts of memory, and provides the traveler with a cultural insiderness through “memory citizenship.”

Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz argue for a “memory citizenship,” wherein “memory-work” or “performances” of memory, regardless of citizenship status, situate the individual within the past, and within the histories of nations, races and ethnicities. Migrant archives of memory, they argue, constitute a new engagement, multidirectional and transnational, with historical pasts. The recall of English poetry or English historical events, the genealogy of monarchs, and the ability to visually locate and identify antiquarian buildings and places suggest that the English identity and its cultural forms are preserved in more than English memories and circulate through multidirectional memories within the “migrant archives” of Indian travelers. This memory citizenship of the Indian traveler does, admittedly, situate him within an English identity as a colonial subject with English poetry as his legacy as well. But in conjunction with the discursive, “recognitive” possession enabled by tourism, the memory citizenship marks him out as a colonial subject whose knowledge and textual “memories” of England generate not open-mouthed awe, but informed enchantment. Thus, on the one hand, his memory citizenship marks him as a colonial subject whose aesthetics derive from his English education and access to English literature and history, but on the other hand, it also bestows upon him a certain agency of positioning himself as a knowledgeable aesthetic agent.

What we see here is an Indian’s self-making through the acquisition of cultural insiderness and familiarity, immersing himself in the cultural practices of England, and of Europe in general, but with a sense of knowing them all. While not strictly “passing,” it is empowering in the sense that the acquisition of these practices and social skills help the Indian “feel quite at home.” To transform a strange land into something akin to home is an empowering act of agency, made possible through an aesthetic and cultural understanding.
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Burton proposes that the documentation of their enjoyment of English theatre indicates the “identification” of the Indian eye with the English “optic” (“Making a Spectacle” 138). It is also possible, however, to see these as instances in which the Indian sets himself up as a cultural insider who, having trained to understand the plays or the museums, has insinuated himself into English tastes. Again, this is indicative, I argue, of the agency of the colonial subject who, by virtue of acquiring a taste for things English, demonstrates his adaptability. He becomes an aesthetic subject in England. However, it must be added that this “becoming” is not one that originates in England: the colonial subject is already prepared for England through the prior knowledge acquired and employed/deployed when they “see” England. In other words, the self-fashioning of the aesthetic subject is one marked by a dynamic engagement with both, the prior knowledge gleaned through books and conversations (in a textual witnessing of England) and the immediate cognitive appraisals and re-evaluation of the sights eye-witnessed on the experiential journey.

This aesthetic subject, on the one hand, expresses his learned fascination (originating in the textual witnessing of England and the prior knowledge I mentioned above) for England, but on the other hand, he is intensely aware that as he observes England, he is also being observed. That is, we see in these narratives the emergence not only of the aesthetic subject, with his memory citizenship, making authoritative comments about English culture, and thereby positioning himself as a spectator and observer, but also of the self-aware subject who presents himself as an object of admiration. He recognizes that he is a source of enchantment to the English because he embodies difference. Most of the travelers in these narratives therefore mention, with not inconsiderable pride, the emblazoning of their Indian presence in London. Even as they marvel at the crowds in London, Baijnath, Pillai and Doss are aware of their being part of the spectacle, being marveled at. The spectator here is no more the passive viewer, but one who is aware of the politics of looking. He attests to the wonder of the English spectator, acknowledging that he is himself a strange spectacle as an Indian in London. Rather than anxiety at being watched, one gets the feeling from these travelers that they were eager for such an audience.

Lala Baijnath recounts how the Englishwomen in London “now and then stared at my Indian dress” (39). Baijnath, like Pillai, discovers an advantage to his native costume when in London. When the crowds throng the street during the Jubilee celebrations and have to be managed by policemen, he alone is left untouched. As noted above, Baijnath insisted on wearing his full native costume to the celebrations,
an act that locates him as a culturally distinct individual in a very English scene. Baijnath writes:

No carriages were allowed in any of the principal streets . . . Here, as on other occasions, my Indian dress proved to me of some advantage. But for that dress and the kind care of certain friends who accompanied me, I would not have been able to enjoy the sight and return home unmolested by the immense crowd in the streets. (82)

Baijnath discovers that his cultural distinctiveness did not simply draw attention: his path was smoothened even in the crowds. Baijnath is speaking of an ease of mobility in an alien/English space due to his cultural difference. Doss notes that the English, though curious about him, were never rude. Doss writes:

I need not mention that I was noticed by almost everyone in the streets. My dark complexion . . . attracted everybody's notice. They looked at me, and it was quite natural for them to do so; but none ever rudely stared. (37)

The Raja of Kolhapur who was surely more aware of his social class and the need to be impressive in his appearance also seems to expect such attention from the English audiences. He records that when he entered the theatre at Oxford University for the convocation, “the graduates and undergraduates . . . who were assembled in the gallery, made a great noise—I don’t know if it was in my favour” (5-6). The Raja’s ego, the product, undoubtedly of years of such splendorous public outings and adoring attention from his subjects back in India, causes him assumes that the English audience at Oxford was clamoring to see him. Pillai, like Baijnath, “covets” (his word) this kind of attention, but also acknowledges that it can be overwhelming. Pillai writes:

The worst of it [the turban] is that you are the object of too much attention in the streets when you walk about with a turban on. Who will not covet to be the cynosure of all eyes in London?—and such pretty eyes too? (14)

The aesthetics of wonder here is turned around, when the Indian watches himself being watched by “pretty eyes.” The wonder is here the spectacle of English wonder, as the Raja of Kolhapur notes: “The people who were walking in the park [Victoria Park] were astonished to see us natives, and used to make a great noise whenever they saw us” (14). In all these cases it is also important to note that the native subject revels in the ease with which his cultural distinctiveness smoothens his interaction with the curious English onlookers: the exotic appeal produces a cultural passage for the Indians, into the consciousness of the English who wish to see him and know him better.
Mediating Cosmopolitanism

John McBratney in his reading of Dickens’s *Great Expectations* proposes a “mediating cosmopolitanism” that leads to a “partial universalism” (he is following Kwame Appiah here). He suggests that Victorians typically looked outward to enlarge the Empire and also toward rural England, and were not entirely comfortable with fluid national identities of the age (541). For the Indian traveler in England, we can make a case for a similar mediating cosmopolitanism.

The aesthetic produced by the simultaneity of two worlds (England and India) and two subjectivities (colonial subject, informed/competent ethnographic-traveler) is a cosmopolitan one. It is also a geopolitical aesthetic in which many of the travelers are conscious of England’s global position. Further, each one of these travelers visits several European nations, Australia, the U.S. and very different parts of England, such as Scotland and Wales. Thus, the visit to England is part of a larger itinerary (the “West”). Rather than a destination, England was a stop-over, a median point, and thus quietly erodes the uniqueness of England as a destination. Pillai refers to Parisian beauties and charms in his Letters X and XI. Jagatjit Singh’s travel narrative charts an exhaustive journey through Egypt, Italy, the Alps, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Paris, England and New York, covering all the major cities and cultural capitals of these countries. Jhinda Ram travels to Paris, Turin, Florence, Rome and Milan. Baijnath’s narrative has a chapter devoted to his travels in Switzerland, Egypt and Italy, and another on his Sri Lanka sojourn. Doss’s travels take him through England, Sri Lanka, Tasmania, New Zealand and Australia. Tabish Khair’s comment on this globe-trotting, nineteenth-century Indian seems particularly prescient: the “play of difference and similarity between the so-called colonial periphery and colonial centre [is] nuanced by the third axis of continental cities like Paris or Rome” (9).

Antoinette Burton notes a “distinctively Indian eye” in these travelers, where London became the subject of scrutiny and which was created to demonstrate the Indians’ ability to produce an urbane, national vision (“Making a Spectacle” 143). This vision is always double—the informed enchantment with things English, and perceiving England through its poetry, history, and the arts in general, and subjecting it to comparison and contrasts with things Indian.

Thus far I have suggested that travelers like Pillai sought to acquire a cultural insiderness, facilitated by a memory citizenship of the Empire, through an informed enchantment with things English. This informed enchantment was consistently underwritten by the double vision of looking at England and India and seeing in England points of comparison and contrast with India. What I see as the Indian traveler’s
mediating cosmopolitanism is the availability of a cosmopolitan sensibility that accrues through both the acquisition of cultural insiderness and the ability to use this sensibility to offer comparisons of the two cultures. Here I differ from Codell’s assessment that the wonder at England in these narratives turns to “cynicism” (178). It is not cynicism as much as irony that one detects in these texts, when the Indians, through their informed enchantment, delve deeper into English culture. Wonder here leads to inquiry, and not necessarily disenchantment: the Indian travelers are then able to temper their previous amazement with authoritative interpretations of the lacunae in England’s life.

Writing about London at night, G.P. Pillai describes the scene as “an enchanting sight” (32). He has also just quoted Wordsworth’s “Westminster Abbey”: “earth has not anything to show more fair!” (32). Pillai thus not only appreciates the sights and beauties of England, he even describes them in English terms and a language directly borrowed from English poetry. However, this appreciation is not untempered. Indeed Pillai, like other travelers, is also quick to point out to his readers the problems and less appealing aspects of English life and culture. Pillai writes:

But stay, here is a mass of human flesh animate or inanimate you don’t know, which on nearer examination resolves itself into half a dozen individuals, sleeping in the most fantastic positions . . . pinched cheeks and ragged limbs, hatless, shoeless, bearing unmistakable marks of misery! . . . The sight of men of hungry and hunted look, women bonnetless and with dishevelled hair and children extremely dirty and shoeless . . . (33)

Mediating cosmopolitanism is what enables the Indian traveler to tone down his appreciation of England by comparing it to other parts of the world, with India, or by criticizing what he saw as the problems of English culture. Thus N.L. Doss is disappointed when he sees St. Paul’s Cathedral as grimy and sooty, saying, “the walls of St. Pauls in Calcutta look far cleaner and nicer” (50). He makes a similar comment about the Bank of England as well: “it has not that imposing look from outside which the Bank of Bengal in Calcutta presents in its frontage” (54). Baijnath compares St. Paul’s with French and Italian churches and finds it “much inferior” (23); performing the same with English castles vis-à-vis French castles (76). The Indian King’s jewelry-room is “far richer” than the jewel-room of the Tower of London, he notes (24). The East End of London, writes Baijnath, with its “by-lanes and its lifeless streets . . . its insalubrity and drunkenness are not seen even in the smallest town in India” (30). Pandian, an indefatigable explorer of English housing, notes the appalling conditions of the London poor (17-18). Pandian is also disappointed by the Houses of Parliament,
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whose “interior does not impress the visitor with the notion that he is standing in the national council halls of an imperial people” (28-29). He goes on to make similar comments about Whitehall, the India and Foreign Offices, the Home Department, the Colonial Office and other public meeting places (29). Pandian seems to suggest that the buildings are not worthy of an imperial people. This might be read as an act of demystifying the wonder of imperial London that simultaneously underscores the encomium of a colonial subject and the fragility implicit in the edifice. Bajnath, who comes to the Houses of Parliament “with feelings of awe and reverence,” (56) admits that “there is not ordinarily much eloquence in the House” and that he was “somewhat disappointed with the way in which business was transacted here” (58). At one point, he notes that English society is “too great a worshipper of nobility,” before going on to add:

> The Englishman is as great a supporter of caste as the Hindu; and even the most radical peer in England would indignantly scout all ideas of fraternity and equality . . . English society though it professes to be democratic, is really a very aristocratic society . . . (61)

Bajnath is also categorical in his criticism of the British government in India, describing it as “a despotic government, conducted by means of a close bureaucracy, but which, unlike eastern despotism, is a benevolent despotism, ruling after civilized methods and guided by public opinion” (64), before setting out on fulsome praise for the material progress India has attained under the Raj (65-68), even as he points out that this connection (with India) has “vastly benefited England” (69) and is a “valuable acquisition” and thus exhorts its subjects to “take that interest in its [India’s] affairs which in its own interest is required” (69).

Expectedly, many things English are rated higher than their counterparts in India. The British domestic servant, writes Pandian, is much better than the Indian one, since in India “integrity and efficiency cannot be said to be commonly characteristic of the domestics” (14-15). Pillai speaks of the incorruptibility of the English policemen (30), and Pandian of the railway porters (36). This could either be read as a simplistic binary or as a version of internal criticism integral to mediating cosmopolitanism through a moral geography. When Pandian ponders, “what might India not become, if my countrymen could only be roused from their national condition of suicidal lethargy?” (47), he is offering not a simplistic binary as much as an internal criticism.

Mediating cosmopolitanism is also characterized by considerable self-reflection. The Indian “observer” of England is also an observer of India when he travels abroad. I have already proposed that the Indian traveler engages in self-making through the aesthetics of recognition. Seeing things as an Indian, Doss, for instance, is able to criticize the
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aesthetics of Greek and Roman statues in the Crystal Palace. Instead of a blind acceptance of English aesthetics, Doss actually points to its inferiority. Doss writes:

Much may be said of the artistic beauty of several of these figures . . . but tastes differ. The place is so full of naked female figures in the shape of the graces, nymphs, venuses and other mythological characters, that it almost impossible for a person of delicate sensibilities to walk there in the company of ladies. Perhaps an Englishman with all his refined sense of decency will not feel any hesitation in doing so, but we orientals do. (61)

Doss here contrasts not only aesthetics but also aesthetic sensibilities, categorizing them along racial-national lines. While not entirely critical of the aesthetics here, and admitting to his own discomfiture, Doss extends the benefit of the doubt to the Englishman in what sounds suspiciously like a tongue-in-cheek comment. Baijnath, while praising the English, also refuses to reject his own traditions. Considerable space is therefore spent on the merits of the Upanishads and the Hindu traditions (Baijnath 112-17), thus suggesting a self-reflexivity alongside the “looking outward” stance of the traveler. This is an instance of the “overlapping allegiances” of the traveler’s cosmopolitanism: the memory citizenship that enables a certain cultural insiderness that causes a shift from a narrative of (cognitive) awe to a more muted—inform—enchantment with things English, and the double vision that derives from a self-reflection.

The cosmopolitanism of the colonial subject in England also embodies a tangential but related moment. We have already noted that the aesthetics of wonder was articulated as an interest in England and English culture’s antiquity. It is possible to read this interest as a romantic historicism where, as James Chandler has argued, the emphasis is on the dating of cultural place and the locality of cultural moments. What the Indian traveler does is to focus on the distance in time of England’s buildings and seek to locate a cultural moment in its place. Akin to modernism’s dynamization of temporality, the mediating cosmopolitanism of the Indian traveler constantly moves between present and past, even as, on many occasions, they use these “models” of modernity to reflect upon India’s future.

When Pandian rejects India Office and the Houses of Parliament as unworthy of an imperial people he has effectively located a cultural moment (imperialism, overseas expansion and, most importantly, England’s internationalism) within a space. Doss, for instance, recognizes England’s internationalism in the British Museum with its collections from Egypt, Greece and other countries (56). He also notes the supply of fruit from countries like Australia and Tasmania, which are “separated from England by half the globe” (65).
This form of cosmopolitanism where the Indian not only admires England but also critiques it even as he reflects on comparable examples from India is not a “top-down” abstract cosmopolitanism of the Kantian kind. Rather, it is a cosmopolitanism that is born of very particular transnational experiences: the Indian is embedded in (i) his Indian ethos, and (ii) his English learning. He is able to situate himself at a “reflective distance,” as Amanda Anderson puts it, from both India and England as he navigates the cultural topoi of England. And this, in Lauren Goodlad’s account, is no “mere endorsement of multiplicity or hybridity” (401).

I have argued elsewhere that the Victorian age sought to define Englishness as cosmopolitanism, whereby the ability to adapt to, appropriate and assimilate other cultures was treated as a sign of English identity—in contrast of course with cultures like India’s, which remained determinedly stuck in tradition (Nayar). The pageants and exhibitions in London from the 1870s to the 1920s were, I argue, a showcasing of their cosmopolitan tastes and sensibility. The Indian traveler, I argue now, is partaking in this. Even as he responds to the English aesthetic as an Indian (see Doss’s self-reflexive comments above), he is able to position himself as a connoisseur of English sensibility as well. Mediating cosmopolitanism is the calculated detachment from both domains in these narratives. The traveler’s memory citizenship offers multiple allegiances where both histories—Indian and English—work in conjunction.

The cosmopolitanism of these travelogues is restitutive; it restores to the colonial subject (who is otherwise just a subject) a sense of moral and social authority, commenting confidently about English culture, being self-reflective about his identity as an (informed) Indian in England and offering internal criticism of India as well. The aesthetic engagement does not allow a simple sense of enchantment to operate, even though this engagement might be worked through as a part of the memory citizenship emerging from the authors’ antecedent literarios. Ethnography demystifies the wonder of England, and fulsome praise simultaneously retains it. This simultaneity of a knowledge-driven demystification and the retention of wonder for the colonial master’s culture is the mediating cosmopolitanism of the Indian travellers.

Conclusion

The cosmopolitanism of these travel texts showcases a modernity that is transnational and global while being embedded in the local. Thus, we cannot see the learned Baijnath (he was a judge in the judicial services), the evangelist Doss, the Raja of Kolhapur (who was introduced to the Queen of England) as embodying a simplistic nationalist-racialist binary of native versus foreigner, Indian versus
English. The modernity embodied in these works is cosmopolitan in which the first signs of a global Indian are visible in their easy mobility across England’s *cultural* geography recorded in these texts. The cosmopolitan colonial subject whose origins and characteristics I have traced here is a cosmopolitan whose aesthetic engagement with England, derived from very real historical and geographical contexts—colonialism—ensured a complication of the racial and national binary. The aesthetic subject who emerges in these travel texts embodies the “reflective distance” Amanda Anderson identifies as “cosmopolitanism.” It is precisely this “distance” and its attendant mobility away from India, through England but ultimately also away from imperial as well as racial-national formations that produces the freedom of the Indian at the heart of the Empire.

Notes

1. Jan Borm uses the term “travel literature” to indicate the “literary” at work in all travel writing (13).
2. Mobility is of course the key element here. Indeed, the arrival of railway systems, argues sociologist John Urry, is “central to modernity’s appearance” (95). It is movement—travel, mechanized transport but also social mobility—that characterizes modernity in Urry’s reading. From a different domain, Helen Carr has proposed that modernism as a literary movement in the 1875-1915 period was heavily indebted to travel, and the modernist text frequently presents the metropolis as a contact zone for writers, and in which modernity and change, and meeting with other cultures—furthered by the extensive travels—are inseparable (74).
3. Modernism, Tim Armstrong’s cultural history points out, was marked by a “dynamization of temporality” in which the past, present and future exist in a “relationship of crisis” (7). The colonial subject, I propose through my reading, has a different relationship with time when in the European metropolis: it is polychronic, at once timeless and modern, with the colonial subject focusing on the old and yet contemporary nature of England’s culture, buildings and practices.
4. Baijnath, having quoted Carlyle extensively, claims he has “always risen a better man” from reading Mill (105-06).
5. Critics might propose that this acquisition of English manners indicates the very opposite to what I have argued: that it suggests a slavishness to English norms by the colonial subject. Given the voice of authority in these travelogues, this argument does not quite hold. The colonial subject in each of these narratives navigates England with consummate ease and confidence, suggesting a degree of comfort within English culture that cannot be explained away as merely imitation or slavishness.
6. Joseph Childers detects this sense of irony in T.N. Mukharji’s travel narrative, where Mukharji’s praise of London culture is tinged with considerable amusement at its foibles and drawbacks.
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