

SAYYID AḤMAD KHĀN (ed. Aṣghar ‘Abbās):  
*Sar Sayyid kā safar nāmāh, musāfirān-i Landan: maḥ tāzah izāfaun, muqaddamah, farhang aur ta’līqāt.*  
 296 pp. ‘Alīgarh: Ejūkeshnal Buk Hā’ūs, 2009. Rs. 250.

SYED AHMED KHAN (trans. and ed. Murhirul Hasan and Nishat Zaidi):  
*A Voyage to Modernism.*  
 xi, 252 pp. Delhi: Primus Books, 2011. Rs. 950.  
 ISBN 978 93 80607 07 8.  
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When Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–98) set off on a journey to England in 1869, one of his projects was to produce a book about what he would see and experience. The plan was to send articles to the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, the journal he founded three years earlier, then revise them, adding suitable illustrations, all by way of inspiring the Urdu-reading public to learn the secrets of Britain’s worldly success. He also hoped to encourage others to undertake similar voyages of discovery.

On paid leave as a judicial officer of the British colonial government, Sayyid Ahmad left Banaras on 1 April 1869. He was accompanied by a son and young cousin, both on government scholarships, another son and a servant, the “London Travelers” referred to in the title of the articles that began appearing in the journal by the end of the first month. Ten more articles were published over the next four months, but they only covered the first month of travel, first by railway and bullock cart to Bombay, then by steamship to Aden and Egypt, across Egypt by train, then across the Mediterranean to Marseilles.

At that point the series came to a screeching halt. Although Sayyid Ahmad and his companions had arrived in London by early May, the resumption of his travel account had to wait many months as a result of controversies he had already stirred up back home and the emotional turmoil he appears to have experienced at coming face-to-face with the wealth and power of Victorian England.

The account of the outward voyage, written as a diary, is filled with high spirits and close observation. He describes with pleasure the friendly and helpful people with whom he interacts, Indian and British, first in Bombay then aboard ship, and gives detailed accounts of the speed of the ship, the technology of navigation, bathing and toilet arrangements, as well as ship board games. He took particular note of the prevalence of Urdu (as opposed to Hindi), a matter of recent controversy.

In Aden and Egypt, Sayyid Ahmad was able to use his knowledge of Arabic, but his command of English by his own account was rudimentary. With the help of his younger companions and the ability of some British passengers to speak Urdu, he was able to have serious discussions about women’s education with the feminist writer Mary Carpenter and the comparative merits of Christianity and Islam with an aggressively evangelical military officer. A firm defender of Islam, Sayyid Ahmad nevertheless provoked vociferous opposition in India by insisting that it was permissible for Muslims to eat meat slaughtered by Christians so long as it wasn’t pork or accompanied by wine. Dietary restrictions, he argued, need not prevent Muslims or Hindus from travelling abroad.

In a letter dated 15 October 1869, nearly six months after his arrival in London, Sayyid Ahmad explained that he had suspended his articles because his free-spirited (*azādāna*) remarks had offended some readers. But then he went on to a fiercely emphatic affirmation of British cultural superiority: that in comparison to an

Englishman a person at any level of Hindustani society could be considered a *maile kuchaile vaḥshi jānvar* (dirty, ragged, wild animal). He then described his social life in England, the nature of the lodgings he shared with his fellow-travellers, the reading habits of the female servants of the house – all evidence of British civility. He goes on to tell the story of a visit to the India Office and his son's humiliation at seeing the ethnographic photographs in *The People of India* (J. Forbes Watson and John William Kaye (eds), London, 1868). He concludes with a major theme of his earlier letters: that the only way to lift Hindustan out of its present degradation is to make the knowledge of the world available in its own language, that is, Urdu.

The publication of this letter on 19 November set off a fierce response in the pages of the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* and other journals of northern India, so that it was not until late January 1870 that Sayyid Ahmad resumed his account of his travels, going back to the two days he and his companions spent in Paris, their channel crossing and arrival in London. Subsequent articles abandoned the spirited voice of the earlier ones but served as dutiful reports on some of the places and institutions that he encountered over the seventeen months that he spent in the country. A few articles followed dealing with Cambridge University, where his son Sayyid Mahmud enrolled, the Athenaeum Club, a visit to Clifton and vicinity, a school for girls, an orphanage, the Queen's birthday, the opening of Parliament and – not until 1881 – Winchester College. He did not write about his journey home.

The travel book that Sayyid Ahmad had hoped to publish never appeared, though in 1881 the early articles detailing the first month of his journey were reprinted with minor changes in *Taḥzīb ul-akhlāq*, the new journal that Sayyid Ahmad established soon after his return to India. Four years later G.F.I. Graham published a biography with extensive translations or paraphrases of Sayyid Ahmad's travel writings. (*The Life and Work of Syed Ahmed Khan*, Edinburgh, 1885), but it was not until 1961 that a book appeared with a nearly full collection of the Urdu texts (Muḥammad Ismā'īl Pānīpatī (ed.), *Musāfirān-i London*. Lahore, 1961).

The Panipati edition included extensive appendixes, most importantly excerpts from the personal letters that Sayyid Ahmad wrote from London to his friend, Sayyid Mahdī 'Alī, later known as Nawab Muhsin ul-Mulk. These letters document an entirely different perspective on Sayyid Ahmad's preoccupations during his journey abroad: a theological defence of Islam in response to the evangelical writings of Sir William Muir, the lieutenant-governor of the North-Western Provinces, who otherwise was not only the chief executive of the government in which Sayyid Ahmad served but also the main patron of his journey and his son's scholarship. (See Avril A. Powell, *Scottish Orientalists and India: The Muir Brothers, Religion, Education and Empire*. Woodbridge, 2010.) It is this theological project that Faisal Devji has characterized as “apologetic modernity” – “attempts to enter into conversation with someone speaking a different language” (“Apologetic modernity”, *Modern Intellectual History*, 4/1, 62).

Asghar Abbas has now compiled a new, scrupulously edited edition of the original articles that appeared in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, including responses by supporters and opponents of Sayyid Ahmad's ideas. In the meantime, Mushirul Hasan and Nishat Zaidi have produced a handsomely illustrated volume with an English translation based mostly on the earlier Panipati edition. Both books have useful introductions and notes, but the translation, organization and editing of the latter volume is seriously flawed. It attempts to organize the material “chronologically” (p. x) rather than according to the sources, blending the journal articles with the correspondence as if they were all of one piece, with no clear demarcation or

reference. The criteria for dating are unclear; the dates are often simply incorrect. There are numerous misprints and mistranslations: *hamara mulk* (our country) is translated as “U.P.” (p. 54); *padr* means father, not son (p. 61). The translators have been unable to decipher English names written in Urdu script or make sense of Sayyid Ahmad’s efforts to develop a new, more colloquial, style of Urdu prose and to coin new terminology. A single example will have to suffice: “Sir William Mill’s house in Vermont” (p. 203) should be Sir William Miles’ mansion and parkland, *makān va ramna* (Asghar Abbas, p. 140). A revised edition of the translation, making due use of the new Urdu one, would be a worthy undertaking.

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MARK TURIN:

*A Grammar of the Thangmi Language: with an Ethnolinguistic Introduction to the Speakers and Their Culture.*

(Brill’s Tibetan Studies Library. Languages of the Greater Himalayan Region.) xxxvii, 958 pp. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012. €169. ISBN 978 90 04 15526 8.

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This is the first, and sobriety compels one to fear the last, book-length study of Thangmi grammar. The tiny preceding literature on this language is here fully reviewed, incorporated and stunningly surpassed. The grammar covers the two dialects of Dolakhā and Sindhupālcok, ubiquitously distinguishing which information pertains to which dialect. The structure of the work is the usual: discussion of Stammbaum, contextualization of the people and their homeland, phonology, the noun, the verb, sentence level morpho-syntax, a selection of texts, a comprehensive lexicon.

Turin argues that Thangmi and Newar are members of the same sub-branch; he bases this suggestion on cognates shared by Thangmi and Newar, but lacking in other languages (pp. 25–8). This hypothesis may prove true, but for some of Turin’s comparisons cognates also exist in Chinese (Chi.), Tibetan (Tib.), or Burmese (Bur.). Thus, to the comparison of Thangmi *gui* ~ *gwi* ‘thief’ to Classical Newar *khu* ‘thief’ one can add Chi. 寇 \*k<sup>h</sup>os ‘steal’, Tib. *rku* ‘steal’, and Old Bur. *khuiv* ‘steal’. Similarly, to Thangmi *cime* ‘hair (on the scalp)’ and Classical Newar *cimū* ‘hair (of the body)’ one can add Chi. 髮 \*s<sup>h</sup>ram ‘long hair’, Tib. *ag-tshom* ‘beard’, and Bur. *cham-* ‘hair’; to Thangmi *thoŋ* ‘home-made beer’ and Classical Newar *thvam* ‘beer’ one can add Tib. *chanñ* ‘barely beer’ and Chi. 漿 \*tsaŋ ‘rice-water drink’; to Thangmi *duŋ bisa* ‘to enter (inside)’ and Classical Newar *dumbiya* ‘to enter, to offer’ one can add Tib. *doññ* ‘hole, pit’; to Thangmi *priŋ* ‘outside’ and Classical Newar *pi* ~ *pim* ‘outside’ one can add Tib. *phyi* ‘outside’. In his discussions of Tibeto-Burman etymology Turin uses the reconstructions of Benedict and Matisoff; this is an unfortunate decision. These two authors do not use the comparative method and their reconstructions are useless to predict attested