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Representations of India, the English East India Company, and Self by an Eighteenth-Century Indian Emigrant to Britain

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Introduction

By writing about the late eighteenth-century revolution which led to East India Company rule, members of the largely Muslim pre-colonial administrative elite in eastern India sought to take control over their own history. They explained the society and *ancien régime* of India, as well as themselves, to the new British rulers for whom they worked. In so doing, they strove to inform and guide the new British colonial authorities into employing them in the new administration as well as into valuing the cultural mores and bureaucratic experience which they embodied. They also wrote introspectively for their own class, trying to understand the causes of the revolution that had displaced their own traditional rulers and themselves with rule by Europeans and administrations staffed increasingly by Indians with backgrounds different from their own.

Most of these 'scholar-bureaucrats' created their histories in their own literary language: Persian.[1] Cole analyzes the genre of Persian-language accounts of the West, by members of this scholar-bureaucrat class in India and Iran.[2] While often sponsored by a British official, such works reached their Anglophone audience only after translation by a European. Chatterjee argues for a shift in the

[1] See Kumkum Chatterjee, 'History as Self-Representation: The Recasting of a Political Tradition in Late Eighteenth-Century Eastern India', in this issue, for an analysis of such histories and chronicles.

[2] Cole suggests that, while some of these Persian authors occasionally criticized the West, they largely modeled their depictions on Western self-understanding. Juan R. I. Cole, 'Invisible Occidentalism: Eighteenth-Century Indo-Persian Constructions of the West', *Iranian Studies* 25, 3–4 (1992): 3–16.

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political/bureaucratic ethos of these classes, brought about by what they saw as a revolution in political leadership, from the Nawabs of Bengal to the English Company. If the scholar-bureaucrats she analyzes made such a shift, how much more did those Indians who entered themselves even more completely into the world of the British rulers.

One product of the nawabi bureaucracy, Dean Mahomet (1759–1851), served the British as a camp-follower and then subaltern officer in the Bengal Army for fifteen years, emigrated as a young man to Ireland in 1784, and then wrote and published in English an autobiographical book about this political revolution in India.[3] Writing directly for the European society within which he lived, Dean Mahomet had an agenda distinct from most writers of the class from which he emerged. Dean Mahomet creatively located himself with respect both to the old regime—and Indian society generally—as well as to the English Company and his British readers. No longer personally dependent on either the Mughal *ancien régime* or the British colonial administration, he could assess each in light of his own values and social position in Ireland. Yet, while removed from the East India Company's authority in India, he nevertheless remained dependent on the patronage of the gentry and aristocracy of colonial Ireland. Thus, he held a particularly problematic position within the burgeoning British Empire and his representations of India and of himself deserve analysis, particularly in comparison with the class into which he was born: Indian scholar-bureaucrats who remained in India, working for the British.

The family traditions from which Dean Mahomet emerged were deeply embedded in the nawabi bureaucracy. Claiming distant kinship with the Nawabs of Murshidabad, Dean Mahomet's family seems to have been part of the military-bureaucratic cadre which enforced authority and administered in the Mughal Empire—and the regional states which broke out from it during the early and mid-eighteenth century. His family stood below the elite level of ranking officials (*mansabdars*); in Richards' and Chatterjee's terms, he was from the class of ' "technicians" of the state . . . a skilled professional corps of lower and middle status officials who served in a

[3] For a full biography of Dean Mahomet and a republication of his book, see Michael H. Fisher, *The First Indian Author in English* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996) or a shorter version, Dean Mahomet, *Travels of Dean Mahomet*, edited by Michael H. Fisher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

variety of capacities' including as subordinate military commanders.[4]

Dean Mahomet attached himself at age eleven to the Company's Bengal Army. He began in 1769 as a camp-follower of a young Anglo-Irish cadet-officer, Godfrey Evan Baker. Under this officer's patronage, he rose to be Market-master (1781), then *jemadar* (ensign) and finally *subadar* (lieutenant). In 1782, Dean Mahomet resigned from the army and chose to emigrate the next year to Ireland. He settled in Cork and soon married a young Anglo-Irish gentry woman, Jane Daly. There, he created his autobiographical *Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794), the first book ever written and published in English by an Indian. His narrative arose from his own experience in the Bengal Army, suppressing resistance to the establishment of British rule by Indian villagers and rulers. In his book, Dean Mahomet developed a sophisticated analysis of the causes of Mughal imperial decline, the changing roles of the English Company and its Bengal Army, and the moral condition of India's peoples and rulers.

Clearly, the language and genre selected by any author indicate the author's intention to appeal to some audiences and necessarily exclude others. Dean Mahomet wrote his *Travels* in formal English, rather than in Persian, Urdu, Bengali, or any other language designed to reach audiences in India; he thus specified the Anglophone gentry and aristocracy of Ireland as his intended audience. Selecting the genre of the English travel narrative popular in his day, Dean Mahomet shaped his enterprise in light of its conventions, different from those of other English genres, or genres produced by his natal culture.[5]

His book reveals his complex position within the British empire. Writing unmediated by translation for a British audience in colonial

[4] Chatterjee, 'History as Self-Representation', and J. F. Richards, 'Norms of Comportment' in Barbara Metcalf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) pp. 255–89.

[5] Leading genres of Muslim travel literature were the *rihla* and pilgrimage accounts of the Haj. See Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Travellers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). For a later and quite different sort of travel account by a Muslim in Europe, see Muhammad As-Saffar, *Disorienting Encounters*, ed. and trans. Susan Gilson Miller (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). See also Eric J. Leed, *Mind of the Traveler* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Arab Rediscovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1063); Henri Pérès, 'Voyaguers Musulmans', in *Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire*, LXVIII (1940); Bernard Lewis, *Muslim Discovery* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982); Mary Louise Pratt, 'Scratches', in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (ed.), *'Race', Writing and Difference* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 138–62.

Ireland, Dean Mahomet followed several agendas. On one hand, he (like most autobiographers) must have been examining himself through the process of writing. Having gone farther afield (in both geographic and literary terms) than other Indian literati, he had to explain to himself how he had reached his current situation. Simultaneously, through his book, Dean Mahomet represented India, and therefore his image of himself, to the European society around him. While he located himself in Britain, he revealed interpretations of Indian society and the British presence there quite differently from those either of Britons or of other Indians. The very existence of this work suggests that Europeans did not monopolize representations of the Orient, or the imperial process, at this time.[6]

Dean Mahomet's description of the rulers and peoples of India remained highly valorized. In his eyes, India's Mughal imperial dynasty had failed to sustain its authority due to moral weakness. In its place, self-serving courtiers had exploited their positions and India's economy for personal enrichment, thus allowing the European Companies access to political and economic power. India's regional rulers often violated what he regarded as moral order, but so did some Europeans. His examination of the role of the Company's Bengal Army, in particular, revealed his mixed assessment of it. He served this army for fifteen years and he showed how it enforced social and political order. Yet he also represented this army as creating injustice through destructive violence against innocent Indian rulers and peasants. Thus, while his descriptions sometimes accorded with British ones, he retained his own voice. This article examines his descriptions of the various layers of Indian society and synthesizes them into his overall argument about the late eighteenth-century transition from Mughal imperial to British colonial rule.

Dean Mahomet's Selection of Genre

Dean Mahomet chose to write *Travels* very much in the fashionable English travel narrative genre. He accepted the definitions of authorial voice and content inherent in this genre (at the time) which fav-

[6] Cf. Edward W. Said's assertion: 'The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging . . . constitutes one of the main connections between . . . culture and imperialism . . . From the beginning of Western speculation about the Orient, the one thing the Orient could not do was to represent itself'. *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), pp. xiii, 283.

ored intertwining pleasure-giving depiction, useful and instructive description, and only limited and modest personal narration.[7] While he adopted the genre, his complex position within the British colonial empire distinguished him and his vision of India from British authors. During this period, many Europeans wrote fictional accounts of the lives and travels of Asians.[8] Uniquely, Dean Mahomet was native to the lands he described but which his readers regarded as exotic and oriental. Even the conventional pattern of the genre—sad departure from home, adventures in unknown lands, grateful return—could be only partially applicable in his case. Dean Mahomet did begin with his emotional parting from his parents in Patna (in Bihar province, north India) but, instead of a return, his book ended with a simple statement about his arrival in a new land: Britain. He did not recount his disembarkation, first impressions of England or Ireland, or particularly remark on this beginning of what was for him a new life in a strange land. His choice of genre, therefore, was apparently a deliberate effort to reach out to a literate, Anglophone audience in a way that shaped the relationship between author and reader in sympathetic ways.

Dean Mahomet chose to use the epistolary form fashionable for fiction and travel literature in his day. England had produced some 800 epistolary novels by 1790; this form was especially strong in the 1750–1800 period, when some one out of every six works of fiction used it.[9] As did most of his contemporary authors of epistolary travel narratives, he used the fiction of pretending to have written his letters contemporaneously with the events they described. Unlike many other travel works of his day, however, he did not back-date these letters or devise a fictive dialogue with an imaginary correspondent. Although Dean Mahomet began each of the 38 letters in his book 'Dear Sir,' he did not seem to have any single real or imagined person as his intended audience throughout. While he occasionally responded to the expectations he imputed to his readers, he never

[7] See Charles Batten, *Pleasurable Instruction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

[8] E.g. Eliza Hamilton, *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*, 2 vols (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1796); James Moirer, *Adventures of Hajji Baba*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1824); Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *Letters persanes* (Cologne: Chez Pierre Marteau, 1730).

[9] See Percy G. Adams, *Travel Literature* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1983); Robert Adams Day, *Told in Letters* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966); Frank G. Black, 'Technique', *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* XV (1933).

even pretended to dialogue with his fictional correspondent. In part, Dean Mahomet's epistolary style might have had the effect of enabling him to write more intimately and confidently, notionally to address an (unnamed) friend, rather than face the Anglophone world at large.

That Dean Mahomet included in *Travels* only limited explicitly autobiographical material also reflected the conventions of the time. The very term 'autobiography' had not yet been invented (it would first appear in English print in 1809). Weintraub argues the concept of the individual as a historically-minded being only started to develop as a significant cultural function in the West at this time; more recent scholarship has questioned his assertion as ethnocentric.[10] Lejune defines autobiography as 'Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality.'[11] Dean Mahomet rarely revealed a self-awareness of how he believed he was viewed by either Europeans or other Indians. What few moral lessons he explicitly drew were either from the lives of others (his European patrons, Indian princes, Indian villagers) or else from abstract types (a courtesan, a sepoy). Since Dean Mahomet did not explicitly examine his inner self and, indeed, made his own life only a relatively minor theme in *Travels*, his work would thus qualify less as autobiography than as memoir. Dean Mahomet described the outer world of the events, customs, and natural features which he encountered. His apparent goals were to provide his readers with pleasure and edification and also to affect their identification of him. The stylistic requirement that the author must proclaim his own modesty therefore reinforced Dean Mahomet's particular self-location as an artless Indian writing for a sophisticated European audience.

We might view the very conventionality of *Travels* as reflecting Dean Mahomet's own remarkable capacity, and desire, to adapt to

[10] Karl Weintraub, 'Autobiography', in *Critical Inquiry* 1, 4 (June 1975), pp. 821–48. For discussion of a Mughal 'individualistic' autobiography see Stephan F. Dale, 'Steppe Humanism', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1 (February 1990), 37–58. Von Grunebaum argues that the pre-modern Islamic biographical tradition generated impersonal stereotypes rather than individual characters. Gustav E. Von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

[11] Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, tr. Katherine M. Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 4. See also James Olney (ed.), *Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and Robert Folkenflik (ed.), *Culture of Autobiography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

Irish, and later English, respectable society. In order to impress his elite patrons, Dean Mahomet selected a formal, even Romantic and poetic, writing style. In this way, he could display his knowledge of classical Latin, Biblical, and English literature.

One of the prerequisites of authentic travel narrative as it was understood by the Anglophone world at this time was veracity. Much fictional travel literature had been published throughout this period, including Robert Challes, *Journal d'un voyage fait aux Indes orientales* (1721), Daniel Defoe, *A New Voyage Around the World* (1725), and Tobias Smollett, *Travels in France and Italy* (1766). As a result, authors of 'true' travel literature had to prove their assertions by appeal to the higher authority of their own lives. Yet much of this 'true' literature mixed 'the false with the fact. Since any writer of travels other than pure guidebooks must . . . often approach the boundary between the existent and the uncertain, between facts for facts and facts for pleasure'.[12] In part, Dean Mahomet's self-characterization as 'ingenuous' would thus validate the truth of his narrative. Further, part of his Dedication pointed out that some of his elite audience (particularly Anglo-Irish officers in the Bengal Army with whom he had served) had been present with him in India at the events he described. These eye-witnesses provided an 'armour of security' that should convince even the most 'judicious' among his readers of the accuracy of his words (D).[13] Dean Mahomet described himself as a 'Native' in order to prove the authenticity of his account, not to marginalize or exoticize himself.

Nevertheless, Dean Mahomet did seek to construct an identity among his British readers. His self-presentation of material from his past proved highly selective. He omitted many events and included others according to an agenda that would, he presumably hoped, demonstrate to his audience an identity of his own shaping. As Spacks argues, in the late eighteenth century, social change often appeared as threatening: autobiographical writings and fiction both rewarded individuals who retained their essential nature unchanged.[14] Thus, Dean Mahomet had to explain himself as retaining his proper social status despite his immigration. For

[12] Percy G. Adams, *Travelers and Travel Liars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).

[13] Throughout this article, to indicate pagination from Dean Mahomet's *Travels*, I will use (D) for Dedication and Roman numerals for the numbered Letters.

[14] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

example, Dean Mahomet never mentioned his religious conversion from Islam to Protestant Christianity. He also stressed his putative descent from Indian aristocracy: the family of the Nawabs of Bengal.

In addition to the leading families in Ireland, Dean Mahomet may also have envisioned as his audience young men considering a career in, or tour of, India. From soon after Dean Mahomet wrote, English literary convention separated more technical descriptions from personal narrative. Dean Mahomet's delineating Indian cities, industries, geography, flora, and fauna heralded later utilitarian tour guides. The list of Persian terms which Dean Mahomet inserted into his book, the duodecimo format (designed as two small volumes for easy portability), and the inclusion (without attribution) of factual descriptions of major cities which he did not himself visit indicate that Dean Mahomet intended, at least in part, for his *Travels* to be a functional guide for future British travelers, colonial administrators, or officers in India.[15] Dean Mahomet clearly wanted Europeans to see India through his eyes. *Travels*, therefore, in its interposition of incidents from his own life, the adventures of others in which he did not appear, and the customs, objects, and scenes he observed all mark its form as a fine example of the genre of English travel literature from the last decade of the eighteenth century.

To understand Dean Mahomet's approach to this genre, we should compare his work with contemporary travel narratives written by Europeans. One European travel account comparable to *Travels* in time period and geographical setting was William Hodges, *Travels in India . . . 1780 . . . 1783* (London: the Author, 1793). Hodges, an artist who had earlier gone with Captain Cook to the South Pacific, covered much the same territory, contemporary with Dean Mahomet, but he presented a distinctly different picture of India.[16] For example, Hodges and Dean Mahomet each visited the island hermitage of Jangerah in the Ganges River. Hodges wrote: 'The situation this holy father has chosen is certainly proof of his taste and of his judgement; for, from the top, he has a most extensive prospect of the country and river; and in the summer heats it must be cooler than any situation in its neighbourhood'.[17] Hodge's artistic descrip-

[15] See Batten, *Pleasurable*, pp. 84–5. Dean Mahomet occasionally paraphrased or plagiarized from John Henry Grose, *Voyage to the East Indies* (London: S. Hooper, 1757, 1766, 1772) and [Jemima] Kindersley, *Letters from . . . the East Indies* (London: Norse, 1777). While he selected words and phrases from these works, he recast them into his own argument.

[16] See Barbara Maria Stafford, *Voyage into Substance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984).

[17] Hodges, *Travels*, p. 26.

tion, which included nothing about person of the hermit, differed considerably from Dean Mahomet's more human-centered one:

> the Faquir or Hermit . . . wore a long robe of saffron colour muslin . . . his appearance was venerable from a beard that descended to his breast; and though the hand of time conferred some snowy honours on his head, that negligently flowed down his shoulders a considerable length, yet in his countenance you might read, that health and chearfulness were his companions: he approached us with a look of inconceivable complacency tempered with an apparent serenity of mind, and assured us that whatever his little habitation could afford, he was ready to supply us with. While he was thus speaking, he seemed to turn his thoughts a little higher; for with eyes now and then raised towards Heaven, he continued to count a long bead that was suspended from his wrist; and he had another girt about his waist . . . At certain hours in the day, he stretched in a listless manner on the skin of some wild animal, not unlike a lion's, enjoying the pleasure of reading some favourite author . . . (VII).

While Hodges romanticized the landscape, Dean Mahomet respectfully portrayed the Indian sage as hospitable, worthy of reverence, and literate. Hodges's work received excellent reviews in the leading literary journals. They lauded Hodges as a man of taste who presented an informed view of India, a subject about which these journals lamented the 'dearth' of information.[18]

A few years later, the famous artists Thomas and William Daniell also presented a picture of this same island in their *Antiquities of India* (1799); their image proved similar to Hodges' but different from Dean Mahomet's.[19] The Daniells' work also received glowing reviews in the leading literary journals of England. In contrast, Dean Mahomet's *Travels*, while known in London, was not even noticed in such journals.[20]

Dean Mahomet's Self-Location in Travels

In the early part of *Travels*, Dean Mahomet located himself in a series of cultures. He used his Dedication and first letter to identify himself in 1794, as a 'native' of India living and writing among the Irish

[18] *The Monthly Review* 9 n.s. (May–August 1793): 133–8 and *The Critical Review or Annals of Literature* 7 n.s. (March 1793): 335–46.

[19] Thomas and William Daniell, *Antiquities* (London: The Authors, 1799), pl. 9 'W.W. View of the Fakeer's rock', and *Oriental Scenery* (London: The Authors, 1812–16), part 5, pl. 9, 10. See Mildred G. Archer, *Early Views* (London: Thomas and Hudson, 1980).

[20] *Willis' Current Notes* (1851), pp. 22–3.

elite. In contrast, in the next few letters, he placed himself with his Muslim birth-family in Patna. He then described in moving terms his shift from his natal family to the military family of his Anglo-Irish patron, Godfrey Evan Baker. This was one of the few places where he focused on himself and his transition in *Travels*. In the remainder of his work, he (often implicitly) wrote from the perspective of an associate of European officers of the Company Army. Never, however, did he show himself to be a member of any of these groups, he only located himself in their respective camps. While he changed social context and status dramatically, he presented himself as remaining essentially the same person.

At the start of *Travels*, Dean Mahomet began to lay out a central theme about the fundamental distinctions between Indian and European cultures, and his own point of origin within the former. In Dean Mahomet's view, Indians (including himself) were essentially natural and artless, filled with 'sincerity', part of an ancient and innocent society (D). In contrast, he charactertized European society as artful: epitomized by 'cultivated genius' (D): sophisticated, highly refined philosophers and polished litterateurs. In many ways, these values reflected much late eighteenth-century European thought about the distinction between art and nature, which Dean Mahomet either internalized himself or else adopted for his British audience; they were also conventional for authors of travel narratives as proof of their verity.

While these initial characterizations romanticized and essentialized the two cultures, as Dean Mahomet proceeded in *Travels*, he expanded on these characterizations to describe the less admirable extremes of these models. The sophistication of Europeans led some of them not only to 'boasting' but also to skepticism toward India's more sincere faith. He generalized that less tolerant Europeans on occasion displayed 'a narrowness of judgement and confined speculation, [and] are too apt to profane the piety of their fellow-creatures, merely for a difference in their modes of worship' (VIII). Dean Mahomet illustrated his judgement with his narrative about a scoffing European officer who contemptuously urinated on the grave of a revered Indian saint; Dean Mahomet revealed his distance from such European skepticism by asserting that the irreverent lieutenant immediately had a fit and expired as a result (VIII). We can only speculate about the response of Dean Mahomet's European patrons to this moral argument about the superiority of Indian sanctity over European skepticism. Similarly, when Dean Mahomet laid out his

sociology of Calcutta society (both European society and its Indian imitators), he mocked its pretentiousness (XXXVII). He directly contrasted this with Indian villagers, living innocently and harmoniously with nature (XXXVII).

Nevertheless, in Dean Mahomet's account, Edenic India also contained less admirable extremes. Its naïveté tended among its less restrained people to savagery. Dean Mahomet recounted repeatedly how the Company's Army had to ward off unwarranted attacks by 'merciless savages' (VI) and 'sanguinary and rapacious . . . lawless aggressors' (IX) among India's mountaineers, tribals, and marauders, particularly Marathas. Dean Mahomet condemned such lawless people's torture of helpless animals in stronger terms than their attacks on the Bengal Army which he served. Nevertheless, even such unrestrained people retained a spark of humanity; Dean Mahomet recounted acts of generosity even among looters and prostitutes (VI, XV). The prevailing naïveté of most of India's people, however, made them victims of the overly sharp among them: gamblers, conjurers, and counterfeiters (XVIII).

For Dean Mahomet, the essence of Indian society revealed itself through its holy-men and ascetics, both Hindu and Muslim. While Dean Mahomet provided great detail about various of these seers and renouncers, he never identified them by religious community, sect, or personal name. Rather, they appeared as variations on a type, with superficial differences but an essentially identical message of a transcendent harmony with the divine. Dean Mahomet stated that Europeans failed to get past the superficial differences of dogma and practice to understand this inner core of meaning (XVII). In the depth and direction of his analysis of the internal divisions within Indian society, thus, Dean Mahomet differed from many of his European contemporaries.

While Dean Mahomet presented the bulk of his *Travels* from the perspective of the Company's army, he did occasionally adopt the viewpoint of the Irish gentry and aristocracy who comprised the book's intended audience. In one example of this, he described an Indian palanquin being borne 'much in the same manner as our sedan chairs are carried in this country [Ireland]' (VI). In another instance, he wrote that a *ghat* (water-front steps) in Benares was named 'Benegaut; as if we said, Sullivan's-quay, or French's-slip'—two wharves on the Cork riverfront (XVII). In contrast, he only referred to the Catholic tenants in Ireland from much the same distance as he did the villagers of India, for example comparing the

similar outside appearance of their thatched-roofed and mat-walled homes (III). Thus, he showed his audience that he could stand with the Irish elite, even if he could never fully join them.

In late eighteenth-century Britain, concept 'race' had not yet solidified into a strong social boundary. During this period, interracial marriages (to use today's terms), especially marriages between white women and non-white men, were not common within the gentry (like his wife's natal family), although they seem to have been fairly frequent among servants.[21] Since neither Dean Mahomet nor his wife ever remarked upon their marriage, we can only speculate about their feelings about it.[22] To my knowledge, none of the many European descriptions and anecdotes about Dean Mahomet during his sixty-six years in Britain criticized his marriage, although a passing Indian dignitary exhibited great interest in his Anglo-Irish wife's social status.[23]

Dean Mahomet used the English term 'race' only thrice in *Travels*. In two instances, he referred to the descent groups of Indian rulers: the Nawabs of Bengal (in which he located his father, I) and the Mughal Emperors (XXII). In the third instance, he quoted a European commentator's gloss about people of mixed Portuguese and Indian descent: 'Topasses—a tawney race' (XVI).

Dean Mahomet used the English terms 'white' and 'black' only slightly more frequently. He classed as living in the 'white' section of Calcutta: 'the European Gentlemen, of every description', consisting of 'English, French, Dutch, Armenians, Abyssinians, and Jews' (X). While he uniformly identified himself as Indian, he never called himself 'black'. Dean Mahomet published portraits of himself as quite dark in complexion yet he applied the term 'black' only to others. When describing south India, Dean Mahomet frequently used the term 'black' to refer generally to the local people, including poor fishermen, Indian soldiers and officers in the Company's Madras Army, and prosperous townsfolk (XXXVIII). In his depiction of

[21] J. Jean Hecht, 'Continental and Colonial Servants', *Smith College Studies in History*, vol. 40 (1954).

[22] For a European woman's view of her husband's elite Muslim family in the early nineteenth century see Mrs Meer Hasan Ali, *Observations on the Mussulmauns*, 2 vols (London: Parbury, Allen, 1832).

[23] Abu Taleb Khan, 'Masir Talibi fi Bilad Afranji', vol. 1, fols 97–8, Add 8145, British Library; translated as Abu Taleb Khan, *Travels*, tr. Charles Stewart, 2 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810; 1814).

Madras, however, he identified Armenians and Portuguese, as well as south Indians, as living in the 'black town' (XXXVIII). At one point, he did describe a Muslim bride marrying one of his relatives as a 'sable Dulcinea' (XIII), but his adding of color to this literary allusion to Cervantes does not appear to suggest that he viewed himself as 'sable' or black. During the course of his life, Dean Mahomet would have had to negotiate his own racial identity in light of the contemporary expectations of different classes in Ireland and England.

Dean Mahomet presupposed in *Travels* a world made up of social groups and classes, of none of which was he a member. In analyzing the sociological typology which Dean Mahomet used both explicitly and implicitly, I argue that he is in each case representing a concept he grew up with: *qaum* ('nation' or 'ethnicity', from his Persian/Urdu vocabulary). Qaum would have been used by his parents to identify the various 'nations' around them: Arabs, Iranians, Afghans, Hindus who had converted to Islam, Bengalis and other regionally-identified Indians, and each of the European nationalities. Also in common use among Dean Mahomet's natal culture would have been the term *jati*: a more Hindu concept, meaning 'genus' or 'birth' and often translated as 'caste'.[24] When Dean Mahomet described churches and temples, he identified them not by a race or creed, but rather by the name of the nationality that patronized them.

By identifying himself occasionally with the perspective of Europeans, therefore, Dean Mahomet was not joining their qaum, but he was perhaps tying himself to their interests. The term *'asabiyat* ('group interest', an idea so central to the classical sociology of the fourteenth-century Muslim scholar Ibn Khaldun) might reflect the concept that Dean Mahomet implicitly applied to his situation.[25] Therefore, Dean Mahomet's typology used a person's birth but also a person's identification with the interests of a particular group (even a group that one was not born into) as the basis for classification. Thus, Dean Mahomet distanced himself from the qaum of his birth but associated himself with the European officers of the Company's army in India, and the British audience of his *Travels* as well.

[24] For discussion of Brahmins as 'native ethnographers' see Richard Burghart, 'Ethnographers', in Richard Fardon, *Localizing Strategies* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academy Press, 1990), 260–79.

[25] See Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, tr. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

Representation of the Mughal Empire

For people of Dean Mahomet's class, as for many others in India, the Mughal Emperor remained at the center of the state, but as a powerless core surrounded by brutal courtiers who stultified the economy. In Dean Mahomet's rich description of Delhi, he stressed two themes in tension with each other: India's grand but archaic past and its current vulnerable condition due to a failure of its political leadership. While these themes were not unique to his analysis, they were more poignantly expressed due to his personal location with respect to them.

First, he evoked the layers of ancient glories of the Mughal capital, and India generally: a combination of power and elegance now in decay (XXII). Earlier cities had been demolished and surmounted by Mughal Delhi; he stressed the power of this Mughal capital, recounting its 'great wall built of hewn stone, and defended with battlements, and a vast number of strong towers'. The foundation of this Mughal city had been cemented by blood. Yet at the same time, the Mughal presence evoked an elegance 'formed with vast judgment and art . . . in all the pride of Oriental grandeur', through circles of palaces centered on the Mughal Emperor himself. Overall, however, by his day this magnificence had fallen into decay and disrepair; Delhi's architectural heritage was its 'ruins of the many grand monuments . . . and other magnificent buildings'. This image of Delhi echoed his depiction of Indian regional capitals—Allahabad, Benares, Dacca, Murshidabad, and Surat. In contrast, the Company's capitals—Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras—appeared as bustling commercial centers. The glories of India's past, therefore, had given way to its current conflicted condition.

Second, he showed how the failure of India's rulers had crushed its economy, opening room for the European Companies' political and commercial assertions. Dean Mahomet dated the political 'revolutions of [the Mughal Emperor's] court' to Nizam al Mulk's departure from the Mughal imperial court and establishment of a virtually autonomous court in Hyderabad, Deccan in the 1720s (XXII). From an unquestioned and 'most arbitrary' sovereignty, now 'royal tenure of the throne, is grown so insecure, that the Mogul has been, of late years, deposed at pleasure . . . His authority, which prevailed, in former ages, over most of the Kings of the earth, now reaches little farther than his seraglio, where he dreams away life, drowned in the enjoyment of dissolute pleasures'. This retreat into

sensual dissolution characterized not just the Mughal Emperor but other Indian rulers as well (in particular the Nawabs of Awadh).

In place of the Mughal Emperor, his 'extremely tyrannical' courtiers 'abridge his power in order to increase their consequence'. The prime beneficiaries of 'their impolicy' were the Europeans, particularly the British, to whom these selfishly short-sighted imperial courtiers 'grant leases and other privileges'. The long-term cost to India of its unworthy Indian rulers, as Dean Mahomet saw it, was economic decline and commercial opportunity for the Europeans.

> From [the courtiers'] oppression its great metropolis [Delhi] has but few manufacturers, who are obliged to work for any price those tyrants please to pay them for their labour, which is always considerably less than the value. This ungenerous treatment has not only compelled the igenious artisan to seek encouragement elsewhere, and proved the certain means of supplying the English factories with skilful workmen, but reduced the people of Delhi to the necessity of purchasing the goods of other places, at a much dearer rate, than they need pay at home, had they given sufficient support to their own manufacturers (XXII).

Thus, the failure of political leadership in India 'must, sooner or later by, precipitate the ruin of the entire empire'. Dean Mahomet, and his family generally, thus reluctantly turned from their traditions of service to the Mughal and regional rulers to that of the English. This transition evoked nostalgia for what they had lost.

Representations of Regional Rulers

As a member of the former administrative service elite, Dean Mahomet focused particularly on the regional rulers of India, whose immorality he identified as a prime cause of its current condition. In so doing, he displayed a sophisticated typology. Some regional rulers, particularly those to whom he or his family had attachments, represented an attractive but archaic past. Others had sunk into a moral decline, especially characterized by unconstrained sensual excess. Of those who opposed the English, some engaged in lawless banditry while others clung to a noble morality, even as they succumbed to unjust English force.

His distant relative, the Nawab of Bengal, in many ways embodied the culture of Dean Mahomet's past. Further enhancing Dean Mahomet's identification of this Nawab, the current incumbent was a youth his own age. On Dean Mahomet's first arrival in the Nawab's

capital, Murshidabad, he went immediately to view the Nawab and his attendant courtiers, among whom Dean Mahomet's family tradition might have located him. In his richly detailed description, Dean Mahomet reveals his affinity for his distant relative and his own cultural roots:

> I was dazzled with the glittering appearance of the Nabob, and all his train, amounting to about three thousand attendants . . . They formed in the splendor and richness of their attire one of the most brilliant processions I ever beheld. The Nabob was carried on a beautiful pavillion . . . in which he sat cross-legged, leaning his back against a fine cushion, and his elbows on two more covered with scarlet velvet, wrought with flowers of gold . . . As to the ornaments of his person—he wore a very small turban of white muslin, containing forty-four yards, which quantity, from its exceeding fineness, would not weight more than a pound and half; a band of the same encompassed his turban, from which hung silver tassels over his right eye: on the front was a star in diamond of the first water: a thin robe of fine muslin covered his body, over which he wore another of cream-coloured satin, and trousers of the same, trimmed with silver edging, and small silver buttons: a valuable shawl of camel's hair, was thrown negligently about his shoulders; and another wrapped round his waist: inside the latter, he placed his dagger, that was in itself a piece of curious workmanship, the hilt being a pure gold, studded with diamonds, and embellished with small chains of gold.
>
> His shoes were of bright crimson velvet, embroidered with silver, and set round the soals and binding with pearls. Two Aid-du-Camps, one at each side, attended him on horseback; from whom he was *little* more distinguished in splendor of habiliment, than by the diamond star in his turban. Their saddles were ornamented with tassels, fringe, and various kinds of embroidery . . . all were clad in a stile of unrivalled elegance: the very earth with expanding bosom, poured out her treasures to deck them; and the artisan essayed his utmost skill to furnish their trappings . . . (XI)

By describing so sympathetically the Nawab and his courtiers, Dean Mahomet suggests his lingering attachments to the culture embodied by the Nawab. His attitude here perhaps reflects a projection of himself onto the role of a courtier, as might have been intended by his family tradition. He may also have been highlighting for his elite European audience his own aristocratic credentials.

Nevertheless, in Dean Mahomet's self-location with respect to the Nawab, he expresses his distance from that world. By placing himself in his description among the onlookers, rather than inside that culture, Dean Mahomet admits his marginality to it. The Nawab of Bengal was not the only ruler who evoked this nostalgia in Dean Mahomet.

Similarly, if somewhat more distant in personal terms, was Dean Mahomet's representation of the Nawab of Dacca. This Nawab is represented by Dean Mahomet on a scale of pomp and state equivalent to a European prince, although an archaic one:

> [The] grand Nabob, who, at his accession to the throne, conformable to an old custom, something similar to that of the Doge of Venice on the Adriatic, enjoys a day's pleasure on the river, in one of the most curious barges in the world, called a samsundar. It is sheathed with silver, and in the centre is a grand eminence of the same, on which his crown is placed on the day of coronation: nearer the stern is a brilliant seat encompassed with silver rails, and covered with a rich canopy embroidered with gold, under which he reclines in easy majesty. This boat and another of considerable value, that conveys his attendants, are estimated at a lack [100,000] of rupees. He is accompanied by a number of the most distinguished personages, and there are no bounds to the lavish waste of money expended on this occasion, in order to aggrandize the pomp of this ancient ceremony (XXXV).

Thus, a whole class of pensioned Indian rulers drew Dean Mahomet's attention, but more as relics of his past than as viable patrons or political leaders. The issue, however, was less of a loss of power than of abuse of power.

The Nawab of Awadh, at that time still a formidable political force in north India, appears both as a wielder of armies and as a dissolute slave to his own unrestrained sensuality. Here Dean Mahomet replicated many of the negative judgments of European commentators of the day not only about this Nawab but also about many among the Indian gentry whom Dean Mahomet criticized as 'fond of every thing that tends to a gratification of the passions' (XXIV). Various Indian elites he faulted for 'living in all the ease and splendor of eastern luxury' and not curbing their hedonistic, particularly sexual, indulgences which they could no longer afford (XX). To demonstrate his point, Dean Mahomet recounted stories of their vast harems. His account of the Nawab of Awadh in particular illustrated this excess: 'his career was pleasure'. That ruler, not content with a 'seraglio, where nine hundred pining beauties, with their attendants, were already immured', offended the rules of war by raping the daughter of one of his defeated neighbors. 'The violated female, with a soul, the shrine of purity, like that of the divine [Roman matron] Lucretia, whose chastity will ever adorn the historic page, fired with indignation at such unmanly treatment, grew frantic with rage, and disdaining life after the loss of honour, stabbed her brutal ravisher with a lancet, which she afterwards plunged into her own bosom, and

expired' (XXI). Even then, the Awadh ruler could not restrain himself from further sexual excess and, reopening his wound through continued carnal intercourse, died.

Dean Mahomet's representation of other regional rulers revealed the underlying principle of his typology. Dean Mahomet, typically for commentators based in eastern India, depicted Marathas as lawless bandits, focusing not on their political leaders but rather on their general character: 'disturbers of the public tranquility' (XXXI). Thus, Dean Mahomet differed from many of his British contemporaries in that he deployed a moral scale based on order and disorder rather than alliance or opposition to the English Company. The Nawab of Awadh remained one of the English Company's greatest allies and yet Dean Mahomet criticized him extensively. Further, Raja Chayt Singh of Benares, who fought desperately against Governor General Warren Hastings and the English Company, received only praise from Dean Mahomet.

According to Dean Mahomet, Chayt Singh displayed a particular concern for his people and their welfare (XXXI–XXXIII). In this characterization, Dean Mahomet differed from many of contemporary European authors who reviled Chayt Singh as an ungrateful rebel against his overlord, the Company. Chayt Singh, resisting his arrest, led a bloody uprising in September 1781 against the Company which nearly led to the capture of Governor General Hastings. Dean Mahomet—recently appointed jemadar of a company of sepoy grenadiers under Baker's patronage—himself fought in several of the battles needed to drive Chayt Singh into hiding. Thus, in Dean Mahomet's account this Raja appears as a noble enemy, concerned for his people, quite unlike many of the other rulers he described.

Representation of the East India Company

Throughout *Travels*, a main point of orientation for Dean Mahomet was the East India Company's Bengal Army, with which he remained in various capacities for fifteen years. He repeatedly contrasted this army, with its European-style military discipline, with the rest of Indian society, particularly with the 'undisciplined rabble' against whom it fought (IX, XX, XXXIV). While European-trained Indian soldiers (sepoys) thus appeared as superior to the Indian warriors, bandits, and villagers who were their opponents, sepoys did not seem, in Dean Mahomet's view, quite to match the European soldiers of

this army. He wrote: 'The Seapoys, who are in general well disciplined in the use of arms, serve as a strong reinforcement to a much less number of Europeans, and on many occasions, display great firmness and resolution' (XVI). The words 'on many occasions' would seem to qualify his assertion that sepoys fully matched Europeans in discipline and courage.

Despite his powerful identification with the army, Dean Mahomet hinted at his understanding of the cost to his natal society of its conquest by the Company. Particularly in the sections of *Travels* which describe the battles in which he himself fought, the violence and destruction of war evoke pity. In two particularly powerful passages, Dean Mahomet contrasted the people of the region around Benares before and after its violent occupation by the military detachment in which he himself served as subadar:

> The country about Benaras, is considered as the Paradise of India, remarkable for its salubrious air, fascinating landscapes, and innocence of its inhabitants, whose simple manners had a happy influence on all who lived near them. While wasteful war spread her horrors over other parts of India, this blissful country often escaped her ravages, perhaps secured by it's [*sic*] distance from the ocean, or more probably by the sacred character ascribed to the scene, which had, through many ages, been considered as the repository of the religion and learning of the Bramins, and the prevailing idea of the simplicity of the native Hindoos, a people unaccustomed to the sanguinary measures of, what they term, civilized nations. (XVII)
>
> The refractory were awed into submission by the terror of our arms; yet humanity must lament the loss of those whom wasting war had suddenly swept away. (XXXIV)

He then proceeded to break into poetry:

> Alas! destructive war, with ruthless hand,
> Unbinds each fond connection, tender tie,
> And tears from friendship's bosom all that's dear,
> Spreading dire carnage thro' the peopled globe;
> Whilst fearless innocence, and trembling guilt,
> In one wide waste, are suddenly involv'd.
> War wake's the lover's, friend's and orphan's sigh,
> And on empurpled wings bears death along,
> With haggard terror, and with wild dismay,
> And desolation in the savage train:
> From slow-consuming time, his lazy scythe,
> With ruffian violence is torn away,
> To sweep, at once, whole Empires to the grave. (XXXIV)

Clearly, Dean Mahomet showed his sensitivity to the costs of living on the Company's military frontier for many of the innocent people

of India. His own sense of personal loss and mixed feelings about serving the colonial army may also be apparent here.

Significantly, Dean Mahomet ended this letter about the costs of war with a brief description about a secret refuge from war:

> Near[by] . . . is a spacious chapel much frequented by the Mahometans, under which is a subterraneous cavern extending a considerable length of way. It is a fort or arsenal, and serves as an asylum for the natives in time of war, as the entrance to it, is only known to themselves (XXXIV).

Dean Mahomet did not reveal that this campaign of subjugation of the Benares countryside also led to the disgrace of his patron Baker.

Complaints by Indian villagers that Baker had used force to extort money from them led to his recall in disgrace and subsequent resignation.[26] Whether these charges against Baker were justified or not, the situation must have proved particularly traumatic for Dean Mahomet. He also resigned from the Bengal Army and emigrated from India following his participation in this campaign of suppression of Indian villagers.

Conclusion

Reading Dean Mahomet's *Travels* enables us to understand another product of, and perspective on, the revolution discussed by the scholar-bureaucrats of Chatterjee's article. Attached to the English Company's Bengal Army, he did not share their judgment that the English East India Company represented 'a negation of the ethical principles' of the Nawabi past. Further, his location at the time of writing *Travels* among the Protestant Ascendancy of colonial Ireland also affected his assessment of both the Mughal Empire and its successor states on one hand and also of the English East India Company on the other.

Dean Mahomet regarded the moral weakness of many of India's rulers—both the Mughal Emperor and his nominal subordinates, the regional rulers—as one of the prime causes of the commercial and political advances of the English Company. Other Indian rulers (with

[26] Hastings Letter, July 15, 1782, in Warren Hastings, *Memoir*, ed. G.R. Gleig, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1841), 2:584–7. Hastings to Doorbijey Sing, July 15, 1782, Persian Correspondence, Translations of Issues, 1781–85, 26, pp. 1–18, No. 38, National Archives of India. Baker Letter 27 November, 1783, Bengal Public Consultation, December 18, 1783 and Minutes of Court of Directors September 10, 1784, Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library.

whom he more closely identified himself) represented ancient glories and attractive traditions, but had become archaic symbols of a no longer viable regime. He saw the English Company, and especially its army, in contrast, as generally imposing order on this political system and defending Indian society from lawless elements within it. Nevertheless, this army also occasioned destructive violence against just Indian rulers and innocent villagers. This differentiation from both his natal culture and that of the British whom he served reflected the problematic location of many Indians who, like him, served the British but harked back to traditions of service to Indian rulers. Dean Mahomet, by leaving India and settling in colonial Ireland, added yet another element to his complex position, a position which he articulated directly for an Anglophone audience.