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Beyond Babel: East India Company Genre and Colonial Romanticism in an Indo-Persian Diary

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Scholarship largely holds that the “Persianate world”—a transregional sphere of cultural exchange mediated by an Indian Ocean lingua franca—was put paid to by a colonizing English East India Company. Against that historiography, this article reveals how colonial and Indo-Persian modern textual trends were coproduced. Reading a first-person account of the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, written in 1815–17 by a prince from a Mughal successor state under Company rule, the article argues that the travelogue’s unprecedented form of a diary, and its uncharacteristically affective contents for Indo-Persian prose, drew on emerging genres and Romantic ideologies in British India. But while this resulted in a new kind of Indo-Persian ego-document, this text of Indian Ocean travel remained, however, anchored in Mughal concepts of moods and manners. As such it betrayed transitional tensions that compel a reconsideration of how colonialism led ultimately to the passing of a pre-colonial Persianate Babel.

It is conceivable that we misread the Babel myth.

George Steiner, *After Babel*¹

“Our character is now identified with that of the Honorable Company.” So avowed a prince from Arcot, a “successor” state to the Mughals in the Karnatak region of Madras, in a letter to colonial Bombay.² Some two decades earlier, the East India Company had disgorged Arcot of its sovereignty and reduced it to a treaty kingdom. Soon, it would also refuse its nawabs (rulers) royal investiture from Mughal Delhi.³ The prince, however, was not writing with regard to developments in India. He was writing to update Company officials of his personal circumstances in the Middle East. Drafted in Qazwin, Iran,

¹George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1975) (Oxford, 1998), 301.

²Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai (henceforward MSA), Political Department, 1820–21, vol. 36/2, translation of letter from Nawaub Raeesool Omrah Buhadoor, 14 Raubeoolawal 1235 Hijree, 70.

³British Library, London (henceforward BL), IOR/F/4/781/21068, to Nuwab Azum Jah Bahadur, 26 Dec. 1820, 37–40.

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on 14 Rabi al-Awwal 1235 (31 December 1819), his letter also mentioned recent excursions to Khurasan, Mashhad, Baghdad, Karbala, and Mecca. It mentioned, besides, the prince's continued sense of fealty to the Company, "being as much identified with it," he wrote, "as two kernels are in one shell."⁴ The titular Ra'is al-Umara ("Chief of the Nobility"), much like the nawab regnant of Arcot or the Mughal emperor himself, was a pensioner of the colonial state. His travels through the Middle East, originally for purposes of pilgrimage to Iraq and Arabia, had also been facilitated by the British. Even so, the prince now professed a growing estrangement from "British protection." In particular, he complained of how the Company's agent in Iraq "was not friendly disposed towards me," and "was only degrading me in a foreign country."⁵

It was also in the context of being partly disinherited from his patrimonial privileges as an aristocrat from a colonized kingdom in India, on the one hand, and feeling alienated from that same colonial order during his travels across the Indian Ocean, on the other, that the prince penned a text that is at the heart of this article. A daily diary that he kept during his pilgrimage journey from Karbala to Mecca, the Indo-Persian narrative was a startlingly emotional account of the author's experiences of disquiet and discontent. The hajj journey of Hafiz Muhammad 'Abdulhusain (d. 1830) coincided with a decisive phase of colonial ascendancy in India and the Indian Ocean. The year before he wrote to Bombay, the Company had defeated the last of its major Indian rivals to claim "paramountcy" in the subcontinent. The year after that, it pacified "Wahabee piracy" in the Persian Gulf in an inaugural moment of British expansion in the Arabian Sea.⁶ Yet the dislocations of imperial regime change supplied only one backdrop for 'Abdulhusain's brooding travel diary, whose basic tenor was also captured by its title: *Memories of the Ways of Suffering Pilgrims to the Emancipated House of God*.⁷ The text indeed testified to a mercurial array of moods: melancholy (*dilgiriiftagi*), anxiety (*iztirab*), sadness (*huzn*), anger (*ghazab*), fear (*khauf*), confusion (*mashush*), and occasionally, too, "some" happiness (*qadri khwush*). But if such affective articulations appear eminently suitable for the genre, the diary form was in effect unprecedented in the storied canon of Indo-Persian travel literature. What conditions prompted the prince's first-person account?

⁴MSA, Political Department, 1820–21, vol. 36/2, from Raeesool Omrah, 31 Dec. 1819, 72.

⁵Ibid., 73.

⁶BL, IOR/R/15/1/18, HMS *Liverpool* to Bushire, 14 Nov. 1819, 126r; from Court of Directors, 19 May 1815, 22r.

⁷Hafiz Muhammad 'Abdulhusain Karbala'yi Karnataki Hindi, *Tazkirat al-Tariq fi Masa'ib Hujjaj Baitullah al-'Atiq*, ed. Rasul Ja'farian and Esra Doğan (Qom, 2007–8). For the manuscript on which this publication is based see Wilhelm Pertsch, *Verzeichniss der persischen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1888), 377–8. Note, however, that the introduction to the recension is not unproblematic. The editors effectively failed to find details about the life of the author beyond what he himself mentioned in his diary. Strangely, they also identified the diary as the "first Qajar" hajj travelogue. Rasul Ja'farian and Esra Doğan, "Muqaddama'-yi dar-bara'-yi Mu'allif wa Kitab," in 'Abdulhusain, *Tazkirat al-Tariq*, 9–18. Compare, here, Elton L. Daniel, "The Hajj and Qajar Travel Literature," in Daniel, ed., *Society and Culture in Qajar Iran: Studies in Honor of Hafez Farmayan* (Costa Mesa, 2002), 215–39.

Postclassical Indo-Persian under colonial rule

This article reconsiders Indo-Persian prose narratologies under colonialism. Reading ‘Abdulhusain’s diary against evolving textual and intellectual trends in British India, the study reveals how travelogues specifically, and first-person writing generally, transformed under Company rule. Moving beyond a historiography that has emphasized how Indo-Persian literary cultures declined under colonialism, the article argues that the bureaucratic consolidation of the Company state and the coeval rise of colonial Romantic ideologies in the early nineteenth century introduced novel forms and styles to Persographic culture.⁸ A substantial scholarship has now shown how the Mughals and their Middle Eastern counterparts patronized Persian as an early modern lingua franca. A plethora of terms has in turn emerged to refer to a sphere of cultural exchange that spanned the Indian Ocean: the Indo-Persian “republic of letters,” the “Persianate cosmopolis,” the “Persianate ecumene,” the “Persianate world.”⁹ As might be expected, travelogues have featured prominently in this historiography, and the “travel book” (the so-called *safar-nama*¹⁰) has been central to understandings of how Persian writing enabled cross-cultural connections. Yet, as Roberta Micallef and Sunil Sharma have pointed out, with only few exceptions the focus of such studies has remained on “classical Indo-Persian travel writing.”¹¹

This bias for early modern texts is not difficult to understand, at least when looked at from South Asian historiography, which takes it as a truism that the decline of the Mughals as a paragon and patron of Indo-Persian culture led also to the decline of the “Persianate.” The rise of vernacular languages—Urdu especially, given its links to the late Mughal milieu—is usually regarded as a corollary of that process.¹² Yet if a “linguistic monism,” to invoke a concept made famous by George Steiner’s influential study of polyglossia, yielded thus to demotic diversity in the nineteenth century, the historiography further insists that it was colonialism which conclusively reduced to rubble an already teetering tower of Babel. In this regard, the Company’s supplanting of Indo-Persian with English as the

⁸For “Persographic” (as opposed to persophone) to underline the lingua franca’s primarily textual dominance see Nile Green, ed., *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (Berkeley, 2019).

⁹Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 2007); Green, *The Persianate World*; Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf, eds., *The Persianate World* (Leiden, 2019); and Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Stanford, 2020).

¹⁰Pre-nineteenth-century travel writing never consolidated into a self-conscious “genre.” William L. Hanaway, “Persian Travel Writing: Notes toward the Definition of a Nineteenth-Century Genre,” in Daniel, *Society and Culture*, 249–68.

¹¹Roberta Micallef and Sunil Sharma, “Introduction,” in Micallef and Sharma, eds., *On the Wonders of Land and Sea: Persianate Travel Writing* (Boston, 2013), 1–10, at 3.

¹²Tariq Rahman, “Decline of Persian in British India,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 22/1 (1999), 47–62. For a classic account of how the Company’s linguistic policies advanced colonial power see Bernard S. Cohn, “The Command of Language and the Language of Command,” in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi, 1985), 276–329. For an original interpretation of colonial-era Urdu as Indo-Persian’s successor see Javed Majeed, “‘The Jargon of Indostan’: An Exploration of Jargon in Urdu and East India Company English,” in Peter Burke and Roy Porter, eds., *Languages and Jargons: Contributions to a Social History of Language* (Cambridge, 1995), 12–205.

administrative language of judicial and revenue operations in 1831–7 is frequently cited, though Persographic traditions also persisted in South Asian courtly, educational, and scribal pockets until the end of the century.¹³ Undoubtedly, the preference the British gave to English and Indic vernaculars precipitated Indo-Persian's eventual obsolescence. Declensionist teleologies, nevertheless, have resulted in studies that have betrayed much impatience for understanding how colonial-era tropes and trends might have also impacted Persographic culture. Until its removal as an official language, Indo-Persian had interacted with the Company's administration for over a century. And yet, as one recent work maintains, Company rule entailed only "the erasure of the precolonial," the "wholesale rejection of all knowledge produced in the colony," and the misappropriation of Indo-Persian texts for a "colonial knowledge-making machinery."¹⁴

Against such sweeping assertions, this article examines colonially contingent changes in Indo-Persian literature. By centering the study on a pilgrim's account from a post-Mughal polity, what follows intends to keep in view the interregional connections that once prevailed across the "Persianate world." By taking travel writing as its focus, the inquiry, moreover, joins a nascent body of scholarship that has shown how an established precolonial corpus responded to the historic transition to colonialism. Scholars have already noted that Indo-Persian travelogues continued to create "trans-Asian" links between British India and the Indian Ocean, that they safekept the "intimate" thoughts of South Asians abroad, and that they reflected Indian understandings of the deeper implications of colonialism.¹⁵ This article suggests that 'Abdulhusain's pilgrimage diary resonated with many of these themes, yet its uniqueness as an ego-document simultaneously lay in how it drew on colonial genres and imaginaries. The result was a first-person travelogue that showed suggestive signs of transition to modern textual traditions, mixing as it did precolonial prose conventions, Mughal ideas of conduct, and Indo-Persian views on the humoral emotions with the East India Company's textual forms and colonial Romantic ideologies of affect. Said another way, the diary exhibited tensions that defy the historiography's stress on a sudden "loss" of Persianate traditions under colonialism.

The article addresses two interrelated problems. To begin, it analyzes the form of 'Abdulhusain's travelogue, which he identified as a "day-to-day little diary" (*ruznamcha-yi yaum ba yaum*).¹⁶ "To choose the form of a diary," scholars of Indo-Persian have noted, is to align oneself with "modern travel literary culture."¹⁷ And to make sense of 'Abdulhusain's choice, which may even have been a first in Persographic travel writing, his text's connections both to older Indo-Persian and to

¹³Rahman, "Decline of Persian."

¹⁴Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India* (Cambridge, MA, 2020), 3, 26, 67.

¹⁵Arash Khazeni, "Indo-Persian Travel Writing at the Ends of the Mughal World," *Past & Present* 243/1 (2019), 141–74; Michael H. Fisher, "Conflicting Meanings of Persianate Culture: An Intimate Example from Colonial India and Britain," in Green, *The Persianate World*, 225–43; and Nile Green, "The Antipodes of 'Progress': A Journey to the End of Indo-Persian," in Amanat and Ashraf, *The Persianate World*, 216–52.

¹⁶Abdulhusain, *Tazkirat al-Tariq*, 39.

¹⁷Micallef and Sharma, "Introduction," 4.

newer colonial bureaucratic genres are highlighted below.¹⁸ Under Company rule, “new dispositions to writing and paperwork emerged in the early nineteenth century,” including new bookkeeping methods, procedures for determining veracity, and genres of official reporting.¹⁹ The rise of this “document raj,” it is argued below, had important consequences for Indo-Persian writing, including notions of what constituted a “diary.” Next, the article considers the contents of ‘Abdulusain’s text. As a British ward and a member of a dynasty whose powers were fundamentally compromised by the Company, our diarist evinced an awareness of textual developments in his native Madras Presidency. Clearly, though, he was also cognizant of some of the more abstract intellectual currents—or counter-currents—that Company bureaucratization enlivened. For within colonial officialdom at Madras, liberal-utilitarian ideologies that otherwise dominated British Indian politics provoked powerful critiques of the apparent inflexibility and inapplicability of rule-bound governance with appeals to Romanticism. That Romanticism exerted itself substantively on the prince’s narrative.

Colonial-era Romanticism had diverse lineaments. Often couched in the more capacious concept of “improvement,” they ranged from agrarian concerns privileging the “ethnographic specificity” of peasant “custom”²⁰ to naturalist narratives mixing “science and sentiment” in discourses of health and environment.²¹ ‘Abdulusain evoked a similar set of preoccupations as he traveled from Madras to Mecca, although he construed colonial-era themes through Persianate phraseology. His Romanticism, though, was most poignantly expressed in how his diary emphasized the first-person experience of travel by recording his manifold moods (*mizaj*). Conspicuous mainly by its absence in classical Indo-Persian prose, such an affective accent makes sense not only in the context of the investments that British Indian Romanticism made in “the emotions and the glories” of “individual introspection.”²² It can also be understood by situating the prince within more fraught efforts then underway at Arcot to mediate values of political parity between a now-colonized Crown and the East India Company state.²³ Beginning by outlining broader trends under Mughal and Company rule, the article moves to a close reading of ‘Abdulusain’s text. It then argues that, the newness of his diary notwithstanding, the prince’s falling out from British favor mirrored the eventual fate of

¹⁸For precolonial travelogues and their forms see Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*. The most comprehensive Indo-Persian bibliography cites an untitled travel “diary” from the 1780s. Written by a Company *munshi*, that generic classification, however, drew on the manuscript’s English marginalia (“Diary of a journey from Calcutta through various parts of India, kept by order of Sir John Murray”). The next Persian travel “diary” noticed is an 1858 hajj travelogue. ‘Abdulusain’s *ruznamcha*, incidentally, is glossed simply as “an account of a pilgrimage.” C. A. Storey, “13.15: Biography: Travellers, Pilgrims, Tourists,” *Storey Online* (Leiden, 2021), at http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2772-7696_SPLO_COM_10213150 (accessed Dec. 2023); also Pertsch, *Verzeichniss der persischen*, 380.

¹⁹Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago, 2012), x.

²⁰Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History* (Berkeley, 2014), 37.

²¹David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science, 1800–1856* (Seattle, 2006).

²²Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, 1995), 24.

²³Compare in this regard Natasha Eaton, “Between Mimesis and Alterity: Art Gift and Diplomacy in Colonial India,” in Michael J. Franklin, ed., *Romantic Representations of India* (New York, 2006), 84–112.

Indo-Persian under colonialism. Revealingly, though, Company-led reforms of the 1830s brought an “end” not just to the Persianate, but also to Romanticism.

Precolonial precedents

To grasp the distinctiveness of ‘Abdulhusain’s text, a summary discussion of precolonial precedents is necessary. “Ego-documents,” meaning texts focusing on the lives of their authors, were not unknown among the Mughals.²⁴ The first emperor Babur’s sixteenth-century chronicle was here foundational. His daughter, Gulbadan, and his great-grandson, Jahangir, also wrote texts that are today regarded as “memoirs.” *Tazkiras*, anthologies of life histories, were ubiquitous, though such works were not autobiographies, but rather hagiographies exalting pious men or prosopographies detailing the *vitae* of poets or royals. Subaltern subjects also wrote about themselves. Tahmas Beg Khan, an enslaved Ottoman Turk who was gifted to the Mughal governor of Punjab, wrote an Indo-Persian chronicle of that province in the 1780s. Portions of his book verged on the “autobiographical,” and employed even a vocabulary suggestive of the genre (*ahwal-i khud*, “affairs of myself”; *qissa-yi khud*, “story of myself”). Among precolonial ego-documents, we may even include dream journals, kept not only for visions of prophets and Sufi masters, but also for political prognostication. It was the latter that interested Tipu Sultan when, in the small hours of 1 January 1797, the monarch woke from a reverie about his arch-rivals: “The English have been defeated in Europe [*wilayat*] and are of their own accord leaving Bengal.” Letter writers also wrote in self-referential terms. The epistolography of the great Mughal scribe Chandar Bhan Brahman revealed much about his career trajectory.²⁵

Explanations of why the Mughal era witnessed the proliferation of such texts await further research, but heightened awareness of the world in the early modern period might have brought with it greater self-awareness. We might, then, conjecture, after Jacob Burckhardt’s thesis on Renaissance Italy, that the dual “discovery of the world and of man” was a process that also unfolded elsewhere, as some scholars of Indo-Persian travel writing have indeed intimated.²⁶ We could also argue, after Norbert Elias, that a centralizing state meant “civilizing” behavioral norms, and that, even among the Mughals, “self-constraint” meant refining one’s “self-image.” For Taymiya Zaman, Mughal memoirs hence usually had a “didactic” bent to them. Meanwhile, *mirzanamas*, “books of grandees,” instructed Mughal gentlemen on

²⁴On “ego-documents” see Peter Burke, “Representations of the Self from Petrarch to Descartes,” in Roy Porter, ed., *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London, 1997), 17–29.

²⁵On Mughal first-person texts see Stephen R. Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Bābur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India (1483–1530)* (Leiden, 2004); Taymiya R. Zaman, “Instructive Memory: An Analysis of Auto/Biographical Writing in Early Mughal India,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 54/5 (2011), 677–700; Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (Oakland, 2015); and Neelam Khoja, “Historical Mistranslation: Identity, Slavery, and Genre in Eighteenth-Century India,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3/31 (2021), 283–301. For Tipu’s dream journal see Ursula Sims-Williams, “Tipu Sultan’s Dream Book,” *British Library Asian and African Studies Blog*, <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2015/06/tipu-sultans-dream-book-io-islamic-3563.html> (accessed Dec. 2023).

²⁶Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*, 172.

how to speak, read, eat, drink, dress, hunt, and ride. In the last analysis, however, precolonial ego-documents, whether embedded in a *waqia'* ("annal"), told through a *tarikh* ("history"), or tucked into letters, hagiographies, or manuals, all still stopped short of the sovereign genre that was the "autobiography," which is why scholars have labeled them, tentatively, "auto/biographies."²⁷ Precolonial works were more concerned with external events than with an author's life experiences. Even the travelogue, that very first-person of "genres," usually saw travelers being diffident about their own significance. They achieved this through literary conventions like *hamd* (praises to God) or other self-effacing formulae. A Delhiite who traveled to the Middle East in the 1740s was characteristic in his travelogue when he referred to himself as "flawed," "poor," and "the least among the faithful."²⁸

So we are forced to return to the problem: why did classical Indo-Persian writers show an aversion to ego-documents? The question, of course, is rendered moot when we approach it in global historical terms. Even in Europe, it is only Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782) that is regarded as seminal. But scholars have also offered explanations that were purportedly peculiar to Islamic worldviews, as for example "the necessity of humility and the suppression of the human ego in order effectively to worship god [*sic*]."²⁹ Such ideas were not confined to the *'ulama*. Antinomian Sufis strove for *fana*, "self-annihilation." The irreverent poet Mir Taqi Mir—credited by some with having written a late Mughal "autobiography," but which on closer inspection turns out to be a miscellany of anecdotes with only glimpses of the author's life³⁰—likewise idealized "travelers on the road to *fana*."³¹ To the Islamic-Sufistic, we can add the "Persianate" (including its Greco-Roman heritage). Seema Alavi's work on Mughal medicinal culture—*tibb*—drew attention to its connections to the ethics (*akhlaq*) of "aristocratic virtue."³² Care of the humors per Aristotelian, Galenic, and Avicennian notions of temperament was vital. Excessive speaking and writing were thus considered base behaviors. Gentlemanly discourse was "brief and concise."³³ The leading ethical treatise of Mughal India pronounced similarly that "disease"—of the body, of the "soul"—was linked to emotions like "fear, sadness, envy, desire, passion."³⁴ All this in turn would appear to corroborate arguments regarding the emotive "restraint" shown by classical Indo-Persian travelogues. Someone like Mirza I'tisamuddin of Bengal was struck by the "wonders" of eighteenth-century Britain. True to Mughal form, however, there was little affective excitement in his

²⁷Zaman, "Instructive Memory"; Khoja, "Historical Mistranslation."

²⁸Abdulkarim ibn Khwaja 'Akibat Mahmud Kashmiri, *Bayan-i Waqif: Sarguzasht-i Ahwal-i Nadir Shah wa Safarha-yi Musannaf*, ed. K. B. Nasim (Lahore, 1970), 1–2.

²⁹Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises*, 30.

³⁰Mir Taqi Mir, *Remembrances*, ed. and trans. C. M. Naim (Cambridge, MA, 2019).

³¹Mir Taqi Mir, *Kulliyat-i Mir*, ed. 'Ibadat Bareilwi (Karachi, [1958?]), 124.

³²Seema Alavi, *Islam and Healing: Loss and Recovery of an Indo-Muslim Medical Tradition, 1600–1900* (Ranikhet, 2008).

³³Aziz Ahmad, "The British Museum Mirzānāma and the Seventeenth Century Mirzā in India," *Iran* 13 (1975), 99–110, at 101.

³⁴*The Nasirean Ethics by Naṣir ad-Dīn Ṭūsī*, trans. G. M. Wickens (London, 1964), 124.

travelogue. Itisamuddin was dazzled by Britain, but “his emotions retained their balance.”³⁵

A defining feature of the modern intellectual history of the Indian Ocean, Nile Green has argued, was the traveler’s amplified awareness of the ascriptive cultural differences they encountered. South Asian hajj travelogues, Green adds, were no exception.³⁶ Yet if greater awareness of the world was on the ascendant in the nineteenth century, was there also a greater awareness of the “self”? Due to the European travelogue’s colonial connections, scholarship on the genre has been much concerned with how its “gaze” surveilled “Others.” Much less, by contrast, has been said about the ways in which its authors viewed themselves. Barbara Metcalf was among the first to discern a nascent narratological trend in mid- to late nineteenth-century Urdu pilgrimage accounts, wherein “the hajji and not the hajj,” she claimed, became central.³⁷ Still, Metcalf’s explanation for this subjective turn was overly monocausal, as she attributed it entirely to print culture. As ‘Abdulhusain’s diary shows, the turn to narrating individual experiences pre-dated the proliferation of Indo-Persian incunabula in the 1820s (though this is not to deny that print and its mediations of a reading “public” and a discrete “private” realm might have fast-tracked the subsequent expansion of autobiographical narratives).³⁸ Not simply that, but the reasons why that turn took place, at least in ‘Abdulhusain’s case, had much to do with the evolution of Indo-Persian under Company rule and the emergence of colonial Romanticism.³⁹

Madras to Mecca

How, then, was ‘Abdulhusain’s diary different?

Before venturing into the Indian Ocean with his text, it is worth locating it within developments in colonial Madras, which in turn can help us situate the author in context. Now, the historiography’s focus on Indo-Persian’s decline after c.1800 certainly seems in need of qualification when viewed from a kingdom like Arcot, whose rise as a post-Mughal state at the southernmost edges of the Timurid empire owed both to the weakening of Delhi’s authority and to British expansion in the eighteenth century.⁴⁰ As Kevin Schwartz has shown, until the

³⁵Margrit Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity in Colonial India: From Balance to Fervor* (New Delhi, 2019), 3, 22.

³⁶Nile Green, “The Waves of Heterotopia: Toward a Vernacular Intellectual History of the Indian Ocean,” *American Historical Review* 123/3 (2018), 846–74.

³⁷Barbara D. Metcalf, “The Pilgrimage Remembered: South Asian Accounts of the Hajj,” in Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, eds., *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination* (Berkeley, 1990), 85–110, at 87.

³⁸For relevant notes on how colonial-era modernity ushered in changes in how knowledge circulated in South Asia, from between communities and individuals to impersonal archives and institutions, see C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1700–1870* (Cambridge, 2000).

³⁹On Romanticism’s inextricable links to anglophone autobiography compare Frances Wilson, “Romantic Autobiography,” in Maria DiBattista and Emily O. Wittman, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography* (Cambridge, 2014), 71–86.

⁴⁰Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society* (Cambridge, 1990).

Company terminated its position as the ruling house of the Karnatak Payanghat region in 1855, the Walajahi dynasty successfully patronized in the Tamil country “a bustling environment of Persian literary activity.”⁴¹ Emerging as a haven for “out-of-work cadres of litterateurs” from north India—and, it may be added, some out-of-luck Mughal royals, too⁴²—Arcot’s reputation as a neo-Mughal center for Indo-Persian was furthermore captured in its nickname, “Shahjahanabad [Delhi] the small.”⁴³ But Arcot fell under direct Company dominance in 1801, and colonial influence loomed over the polity long before that. As Edmund Burke contended in a diatribe against the Company’s abuses of its powers in India, by 1785 the British had already turned the nawab, Muhammad ‘Ali Walajah (r. 1752–96), from a “real potentate” into “a shadow, a dream, an incubus of oppression.”⁴⁴ Even as Indo-Persian literary culture continued at Arcot, colonialism therefore brought to it significant institutional, administrative, and intellectual changes.

In this regard, the Company’s patronage of Indo-Persian deserves mention. Until 1812, the madrasa at Fort St George, Madras, offered lessons in Persian.⁴⁵ As early as 1710, the Company hired local *munshis* (Persographic clerks) and encouraged its servants to learn the language, promising to “give them the preference to such as do not think it worth their while to take the same pains.”⁴⁶ By 1814, with the establishment of Haileybury College, a new system for teaching Persian to Company recruits of course emerged in England itself. But if efforts to streamline “civilian” recruitment at the metropole made for a more reformed and rational bureaucratic culture at the Company’s Persian secretariats, it appears not to have checked the enthusiasm of local litterateurs regarding the prospects of colonial-era Indo-Persian.⁴⁷ “Truly,” one Madras *munshi* wrote of John Holland, governor of Madras (1792–4), “he was a person of wisdom and experience and spoke the Persian tongue with rhetorical eloquence” (*Farsi ba-fusahat wa ba-laghat mi-kard*).⁴⁸ Another Persian panegyrist lavished praise on Governor Stephen Rumbold Lushington (1827–35):

⁴¹Kevin Schwartz, “The Curious Case of Carnatic: The Last Nawab of Arcot (d. 1855) and Persian Literary Culture,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 53/4 (2016), 533–60, at 534.

⁴²For Mughal princes in the Arcot nawab’s entourage see BL, IOR/F/4/1460/57471, vol. 1460, to Chepauk Palace, 17 Sept. 1833; and Ghulam ‘Abdulqadir Nazir, *Bahar-i A‘zamjahi: Rudad-i Safar-i Maymanat asr-i Nauwab A‘zam Jah Bahadur ki dar sana yak hazar wa du sad u si u hasht Hijri az Madras ta Nagur Ikhtiyar karda*, ed. Muhammad Yusuf Kokan (Madras, 1961), 112.

⁴³Schwartz, “The Curious Case of Carnatic,” 542, 537.

⁴⁴Edmund Burke, “Speech on Nabob of Arcot’s Debts, 28 February 1785,” in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. 5, *India: Madras and Bengal, 1774–85*, ed. Peter Marshall (Oxford, 2000), 478–552, at 536.

⁴⁵Muhammad Yousuf Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic, 1710–1960* (Madras, 1974), 235; Sylvia Vatuk, “Islamic Learning at the College of Fort St George in Nineteenth-Century Madras,” in Thomas Trautmann, ed., *The Madras School of Orientalism* (New Delhi, 2009), 48–73.

⁴⁶Quoted in Henry Davison Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640–1800: Traced from the East India Company’s Records Preserved at Fort St. George and the India Office, and from other Sources*, vol. 2 (London, 1913), 140.

⁴⁷On the new corps of civilian officials see Katherine Prior, Lance Brennan, and Robin Haines, “Bad Language: The Role of English, Persian and Other Esoteric Tongues in the Dismissal of Sir Edward Colebrooke as Resident of Delhi in 1829,” *Modern Asian Studies* 35/1 (2001), 75–112.

⁴⁸Quoted in Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 324. Translations of Persian quotations from this work are my own.

No *gawarnar* is better than this *gawarnar*,
 In wisdom, understanding, intelligence, no one is better than him.

...

In bravery Rustam is nobody to him,
 There are no men more valiant or more courageous than him.⁴⁹

And yet exchanges between the Company and Persographic culture did not just result in Georgian imperialists being recast as heroes of classical verse. British bureaucratic hegemony also impacted Indo-Persian genres, as it did scribal forms in regional languages like Tamil.⁵⁰ Due to its famously rigorous insistence on auditable genres or “forms” of official documentation, the Company’s clerical culture moreover brought new orientations not only to Indo-Persian writing, but also to the social worlds of Indo-Persian writers.⁵¹

At Arcot’s chancery, communications with the Company meant exposure to documentary forms whose colonial provenances were unambiguous. The kingdom’s scribes read daily Company memoranda, “*ishtihar-nama*, which in the English tongue is called *niyus-pipar*.” They also heard the “twangs” (*tarang*) of spoken English at court.⁵² Far from just being force-fed a diet of English texts and chatter, it is evident that many of Madras’s literati themselves “eagerly grasped the new opportunities” that were being afforded by Company rule. Sylvia Vatuk thus illustrated how the regional *‘ulama* learned English to teach Indians seeking employment both as Company *munshis* and as nawabi scribes. In fact, Arcot eventually established a Department of English Correspondence, an opposite number to the Company’s Department of Persian Correspondence.⁵³ As one history of newspapers in southern India clarifies, it was, moreover, from such Anglo-Persianate exchanges that commensurable notions of textual genres evolved. *A‘zam al-Akhbar*, published from 1848 as Madras’s first Persographic “newspaper” (*akhbarat*), crystalized conceptions of a genre that in fact had its preprint roots, both in Europe and in India, in the “journal” (*ruzana*).⁵⁴ Surely such generic transformations set one context for categorizations of the kind, as I show presently, that eventually cast the “diary” as a textual artifact of agentive authorship, and so distinct from “newspapers” and other forms of rote reportage.⁵⁵

Colonial-era Persian also created new ways of assembling knowledge, as well as new ways of assembling intellectual labor. The Company’s zeal for “improvement”—which, “like the romanticism with which it is so intimately associated,”

⁴⁹Quoted in *ibid.*, 236.

⁵⁰Raman, *Document Raj*.

⁵¹For examples of Company-era Indo-Persian genres or “forms” see Francis Balfour, *The Forms of Herkern, Corrected from a Variety of Manuscripts* (London, 1771).

⁵²Abdulqadir, *Bahar-i A‘zamjahi*, 6–9, 113.

⁵³Vatuk, “Islamic Learning,” 58–60.

⁵⁴Muhammad Afzaluddin Iqbal, *Janubi Hind ki Urdu Sahafat: 1857 se Peshtar* (Hyderabad, 1991), 14, 29–30. Though an Urdu newspaper, *A‘zam al-Akhbar*, regularly printed Persian articles.

⁵⁵On how “generic differentiations” between “imaginative” (agentive, creative) and “factual” (rote, documentary) texts were central to “the history of specialization we call *modernization*” see Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 2008), 1–10, original emphasis.

David Arnold showed, “was one of the foundational influences of the period”⁵⁶—led to translations of scientific treatises between Arcot and Fort St George. In 1852, one *sirishtadar* (superintendent) at Arcot’s English Department helped a Company surgeon translate a key English text on midwifery. But again, it would be incorrect to assume that Arcot’s men of letters simply worked at British behest. That European scientific epistemologies brought new taxonomic methods and empiricist outlooks to Indo-Persian is certain. Yet, as a nawabi survey of the Karnatak’s flora shows, they also arrived from Arcot’s selective appropriations of British intellectual trends.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, colonial demands for deskbound discipline clearly impacted the day-to-day agendas of *munshis*, as implied by a set-piece conversation in a Company textbook for Indo-Persian. “Moonshy, I expected you three or four days,” a British cadet complains, “you did not come even one day.” The *munshi* replies that he was ill. “*Pas chara az khana bar amadid*—Then why did you stir from home?” “Lest someone might slander me,” says the *munshi*, “by saying, that I was staying away under a pretence.”⁵⁸ ‘Abdulusain’s choice of the diary form for his travelogue—with its carefully organized daily entries—makes sense when situated within such trends in Persographic culture, colonial developments in diktats and documents that impacted travelers too.⁵⁹

Hafiz Muhammad ‘Abdulusain, Ra’is al-Umara, departed from Madras for the Middle East on a British vessel in February 1814. He was traveling with his mother, Sultan-un-Nisa Begum, sister of Nawab ‘Azim-ud-Daula (r. 1801–19). The Company was then in the habit of dissuading Muslim nobility under its “protection” from leaving India for pilgrimage.⁶⁰ But in this instance, for reasons that need not take up space here, the authorities decided to “afford every proper assistance and attention to her Highness Sultan Oon Nissa Begum, during the performance of her pilgrimage.”⁶¹ The Company issued the travelers *rahdaris* (passports) for use abroad. Madras instructed Bombay to receive the ship carrying the patrician passengers during its layover at the latter city, and the Company’s agent at Bushehr in the Gulf was informed also of their imminent arrival. It appears that the royals planned eventually to “return towards the Carnatic.” But Sultan-un-Nisa eventually died in Karbala in 1821. Later ‘Abdulusain also died in Baghdad.⁶² Nonetheless,

⁵⁶Arnold, *Tropics and the Traveling Gaze*, 6.

⁵⁷BL, IO Islamic MS 3216 (untitled Persian manuscript). The project was inspired by the opening of the Asiatic Society of London in 1822, known locally as Majlis-i ‘Ilm wa Hunar (Assembly of Sciences and Arts).

⁵⁸Francis Gladwin, *The Persian Moonshy*, § III (1795) (Calcutta, 1801) 54.

⁵⁹Pax Britannica “peasantized” many itinerant groups in India, resulting in more rigorous inspection of travel documents. In Madras, one thus heard complaints of travelers using “forged documents” to claim connections to the Mughals, or of roaming around with “no papers or documents, or passports of any kind.” BL, IOR/4/1460/57471, vol. 1460, Fort St George Secret Consultations, 16 July 1833, 6; IOR/F/1460/57466, vol. 1460, from police superintendent, 15 May 1833, 7.

⁶⁰On Arcot’s longer history of connections to Arabia see Rishad Choudhury, *Hajj across Empires: Pilgrimage and Political Culture after the Mughals, 1739–1857* (Cambridge, 2024).

⁶¹BL, IOR Neg 4601, to resident at Bushire, 10 Feb. 1814; from His Highness the Nabob, 12 Jan. 1814; from Sooltan-oon-Nissa Begum, 10 Jan. 1814, n.p.

⁶²I was unable to locate the year of ‘Abdulusain’s birth. Previous biographical sketches do not specify the year of his death. Ja’farian and Doğan, “Muqaddama”; Nabi Hadi, *Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature* (New Delhi, 1995), 497. ‘Abdulusain’s son indicated that he died “at the end of 1246 hijree [1830–31].”

before her departure, Sultan-un-Nisa made certain that her colonial pension would continue to be disbursed in her absence.⁶³ A court chronicle taking note of the royal pilgrims likewise mentioned these arrangements.⁶⁴ So it was after they made landfall at Basra in the Gulf, and after they completed their “visitations” (*ziyarat*) to the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq, that ‘Abdulhusain began his diary.

A diary amid colonial genres

The diary’s exordium retained many classical features. Following praises for God (*hamd*), His prophet (*na’t-i paigham-bar*), and the Shi’a imams (*n’at-i a’imma*), ‘Abdulhusain elaborated, in one of the remarkably few examples of verse in the text, his “reasons” for writing an account of the caravan journey between Karbala and Mecca:

I wanted to write a book of prose [*kitabi ba nasr*], of what occurred to hajj pilgrims this year,
 Whatever happened on a daily basis, from beginning to end,
 I would put in this book.⁶⁵

Though the style of the introduction (*muqaddama*) was consistent with older conventions of stressing an author’s insignificance, it nonetheless contained an aristocratic flair that pointed to ‘Abdulhusain’s proud pedigree as a member of a royal dynasty:

Thusly, this account is being made by the most wretched dust on the feet of the faithful [*khaksar-i turab-i aqdam al-mu’minin*], Hafiz Muhammad ‘Abdulhusain Karbalayi Hindi Karnataki, son of the Splendor of the Realm, Courageous of the State, Nawab Khair-ud-Din Khan Bahadur, Courageous in War, known also as Nawab ‘Abdulahdi Khan, who was the son of the late and absolved Nawab Walajah Amir al-Hind, Pillar of the Realm, Muhammad ‘Ali Khan Bahadur, Victorious in War, who was the governor of the realm of the Karnatak in the region of the Payan Ghath, which is renowned as Arkat, one of the vast kingdoms of Hindustan.

Introducing then his mother—his main travel companion—‘Abdulhusain expanded on the broader circumstances of his travels between India and the Indian Ocean. In the process, he gestured even to the specific nature of his text:

Company officials first noted the matter in 1830. BL, IOR/F/4/1463/57506, vol. 1463, petition from Gholam Hoosain, 27 Nov. 1832, 46.

⁶³BL, IOR/F/4/1463/57506, vol. 1463, Government Agent to Secretary, n.d., 1833, 34.

⁶⁴Muhammad Karim Khairuddin Hasan, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz: Mushtamil bar Waqa’-yi Zindagani-yi Nauwab ‘Umdat al-Umara Bahadur Tajdar-i Siyum-i Karnatak wa Ahwal-i Khanwada’-yi Anwari*, ed. Fazil Habib Khan Sarosh ‘Umari (Madras, 1961), 223.

⁶⁵‘Abdulhusain, *Tazkirat al-Tariq*, 34.

And with family and kin and luggage and belongings [we] took to the sea route and boarded a British ship [*ghurab-i Farangi*] and departed for the purpose of Visitation to the Sublime Threshold of the Highest Throne, and by God's grace [we] achieved our purpose of reaching Holy Karbala, the Exalted and Glorious. Then to the pen arrived a distinctly organized little diary [*ruznamcha'-yi 'ala-hida' mufassali*] regarding the events of the road from departure to arrival, and on the conditions of the pilgrims to the House of God at the Haram [Mecca], namely the Persian and Arab grandees and believers totaling nearly four or five thousand hajjis that took the Jabl Shammar route from Iraq. This weakest among the slaves of God joined them with the purpose of reaching the destination, so that whatever events and occurrences came upon the aforementioned pilgrims due to the attacks of the Arabs of Najd and the Hijaz until their return to this sacred land [Karbala]—may God heighten its honor and greatness—I decided to put in a written statement, which I compiled into [an account] with five separate sections. And I titled it, *Memories of the Ways of Suffering Pilgrims to the Emancipated House* [sic].⁶⁶

The detail regarding the “attacks” suffered at the hands of the Wahhabis of Arabia, and the fact that ‘Abdulhusain was traveling with a mainly Shi’a hajj caravan that included Qajar and Ottoman notables, are both key to unraveling the political context behind the diary, as will be discussed later. But beyond serving up *mise en scène*, what is interesting here is that the *muqaddama*’ was a piece of polished prose. Clearly composed after the diary itself was completed, it contained besides typical poetic flourishes and an author who stressed his own triviality against the foreordained logics of “events” (*ahwal*) and “occurrences” (*waqi’a*). In all this, ‘Abdulhusain was conforming to inherited patterns. Like precolonial ego-documents, his diary also recorded his dreams. “I was very happy,” he wrote after dreaming of a Shi’a imam on the night of 20 March 1816.⁶⁷ And yet, pushing against received literary conventions was his own latent awareness of the uniqueness of the genre he was engaging in. As we shall see, even as he recorded the experiences of fellow pilgrims, it was thus the diary form that led ‘Abdulhusain to turn to his own experiences of travel, his own quotidian and even numbingly ordinary activities, and, ultimately, to his own moods and musings. All this, in turn, was written in an unornamental style that frequently slipped into something like shorthand note taking, which similarly was suggestive of the spontaneity of a personal “diary.”

The Indo-Persian *ruznama* (“daily book”—*ruznamcha* is the diminutive form) and the European “diary” (or “journal”) have analogous etymologies due to similar historical roots. Both emerged from bureaucratic and bookkeeping traditions.⁶⁸ Under the Mughals, scribes called *waqi’a-nawis* (“events writers”) and *akhbar-*

⁶⁶Ibid., 36–7.

⁶⁷Ibid., 127.

⁶⁸C. E. Bosworth, “Rūznāmā,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs (Leiden, 2012), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0947 (accessed Dec. 2023).

nawis (“news writers”) used *ruznamas*, among other forms, to record daily court activities.⁶⁹ Yet these were highly stylized texts with “no explicit intrusion of the voice of the akhbar *nawis*.”⁷⁰ This, moreover, was reflected in the organizing units of “events” or “news” that punctuated such accounts, empirical clusters that supplied grist also to the mill of the annalistic methods of Indo-Persian historiography (*tarikh*), but which were quite distinct from the autobiographically focused contents usually associated with modern diaries.⁷¹ A mid-eighteenth-century Mughal lexicographer’s definition of *ruznama* likewise indicated roots in bookkeeping: “A text [*kaghazi*] in which each day’s incomes and expenses [*madakhil wa makharij*] are written.”⁷² Colonialism brought new meanings, however, and the nineteenth century saw even the anglophone genre in British India becoming linked to travelogues, with titles like *Diary of a Tour through Southern India* (1823) or *Diary of a Journey from Madras to Masulipatnam* (1831). The Romantic tradition, which influenced both perception and policy during early colonialism, encouraged the keeping of published and private diaries among Company servants.⁷³ But so did bureaucratic forms that arose from a demand for auditable records in British India.

There were thus the “diaries” kept by the Company’s “residents” or agents at Indian kingdoms, which, due to deliberate colonial bureaucratization, began to displace the *munshi*-mediated, “flowery” records of courtly events with, as the British saw them, “routinized” reports.⁷⁴ Arcot’s resident when ‘Abdulhusain’s grandfather was nawab, one Richard Sullivan, argued in 1779 that “political wisdom” necessitated the establishment of residencies. Company residents would be “tenaciously watchful,” he ventured, “not only of all public actions, but of all private machinations,” including “the *personal or domestic circumstances of the Princes*.”⁷⁵ Nawab Muhammad ‘Ali himself kept a *ruznama*, “to write down,” as its *munshi* was instructed, “the discussions of every moment, and inventory of the letters.”⁷⁶ Here we have the continuation of a Mughal form, with the notable exception that an “important feature of the diary was the record of the nawab’s interviews

⁶⁹Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 170.

⁷⁰Michael H. Fisher, “The Office of the Akhbār Nawis: The Transition from Mughal to British Forms,” *Modern Asian Studies* 27/1 (1993), 45–82, at 49.

⁷¹Events were acts of God, and so were accorded a more significant ontological status in determining causality than human agency. This explains the millenarianism of Mughal historiography. It explains as well its preference for exemplary “deeds” over routine “doings.” See generally Peter Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India: Studies in Indo-Muslim Historical Writing* (London, 1960).

⁷²Lala Tek Chand Bahar, *Bahar-i ‘Ajam: Farhang-i Lughat, Tarkubat, Kinayat, wa Amsal-i Farsi*, ed. Kazim Dizfuliyan (Tehran, 1380 AH/2001–2), 1115.

⁷³D. H. A. Kolff, “A British Indian Circumambulation,” *Itinerario* 16/2 (1992), 85–100.

⁷⁴Michael H. Fisher, “The Resident in Court Ritual, 1764–1858,” *Modern Asian Studies* 24/3 (1990), 419–58, at 447. Here it is useful to contrast Chandar Bhan’s highly eulogistic account of the daily activities of Emperor Shahjahan (r. 1628–58) with the more matter-of-fact reports that *munshis* produced for English consumption from the court of Bahadur Shah Zafar (r. 1837–57). Gladwin, *Persian Moonshine*, § II, 43–74; and Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls: Studies in Late Mughul Delhi* (Cambridge, 1951), 80–81.

⁷⁵Richard Joseph Sullivan, *An Analysis of the Political History of India: In Which is Considered, the Present Situation of the East, and the Connection of its Several Powers with the Empire of Great Britain* (London, 1784), 308–9, 313, my italics.

⁷⁶Quoted in J. D. Gurney, “Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot,” in Anne Whiteman, J. S. Bromley, and P. G. M. Dickson, eds., *Statesmen, Scholars and Merchants: Essays in Eighteenth-Century History Presented to Dame Lucy Sutherland* (Oxford, 1973), 220–41, at 221.

with Europeans.”⁷⁷ One such European, a powerful British courtier at Arcot, also kept what he called a “private diary of my own which I never mean should see the publick eye.”⁷⁸ This particular diary served as an accounts book, a “confidential record,” a document of “important conversations,” and “a companion to which he confesses his hurts and disappointments.”⁷⁹ All such colonial-era resonances of the “diary”—by turns a travel account, a record “political” and “personal” and, most pertinently, an ego-document where writers submitted their emotive ideations—were to be found in ‘Abdulhusain’s *ruznamcha*.

The most obvious way in which *Suffering Pilgrims* was a diary was in its diligent adherence to daily entries. Suggestive of the format’s roots in accounts keeping, ‘Abdulhusain often checked, and rechecked, “the account of the calendar” (*hisab-i taqwim*) to situate his activities temporally, as, for example, when meeting acquaintances (“He had only seen me some evenings of the month. By the account of the calendar, those evenings were evenings last month”), or when determining the start of a month (“The month’s new moon came into view, but it was high [in the sky]. Last night was the month’s end. The calendar said the same. It rained that night”).⁸⁰ As is evident, chronological coordinates remained fixed to the Islamic Hijri calendar. As for hours of the day, ‘Abdulhusain divided them per the “traditional” schedule of daily prayers. Even as such specifics demonstrated continuity with past patterns, it bears repeating that slotting entries into a set calendrical schema was novel for Indo-Persian travel writing, where dates usually appeared within the body of a narrative. The innovation can be historicized with some precision, however, when considered alongside colonial-era textual trends. ‘Abdulhusain’s diary might have been influenced by European bookkeeping, which during the Company’s expansion had become intricately entangled with Indo-Persian accounting (*siyaq*), and which the prince would have been aware of given both his complicated financial dealings and his dynasty’s infamously dense relations with British creditors.⁸¹ ‘Abdulhusain certainly used his diary to keep track of his financial transactions, including his expenditures on food, rent, and transportation.⁸²

It is, of course, unlikely that ‘Abdulhusain himself ever pored over English travelogues or diaries.⁸³ Yet as a member of a colonized kingdom in close and constant contact with the Company, he would have been sufficiently acquainted, through osmotic exchanges with Arcot’s English-literate *munshis* and scribes, for example, with the changes described so far in this article. Doubtless these transformations were far-reaching enough to have touched Persographic culture more generally. As C. A. Bayly noted, by the 1840s *munshis* “knew English and kept

⁷⁷Ibid., 221–2.

⁷⁸Quoted in Pamela Nightingale, *Fortune and Integrity: A Study of Moral Attitudes in the Indian Diary of George Paterson, 1769–1774* (Delhi, 1985), 14–15.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰‘Abdulhusain, *Tazkirat al-Tariq*, 130, 213.

⁸¹For ‘Abdulhusain’s debts see BL, IOR/F/4/1463/57506, debts of the Raees-ool-Omrah, 18 Dec. 1833, 8–41. For Arcot’s disastrous indebtedness see Jessica Hanser, “From Cross-cultural Credit to Colonial Debt: British Expansion in Madras and Canton, 1750–1800,” *American Historical Review* 124/1 (2019), 87–107.

⁸²‘Abdulhusain, *Tazkirat al-Tariq*, 205, 200, 125, 48.

⁸³On the education of Arcot’s princes, which relied heavily on Indo-Persian and Arabic curricula, see Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 95–8.

European clock-time and had mastered, or had been mastered by, the disciplines of diary writing and empirical description in sciences.”⁸⁴ Such colonial-era complexities force us to rethink assumptions regarding any sudden retreat of Indo-Persian culture after the Mughals. Indeed, long after vernacular literature came into its own and Indo-Persian was displaced as an official administrative language, it is telling that a *fin de siècle* dictionary for its main successor language in the subcontinent should have thus alluded both to “Mughal” and to “British” definitions for the “diary,” describing thus the Urdu (or Hindustani) *ruznama* as a ledger book (*hisab kitab*), a book of “day-to-day states and events” (*hal ahwal*), and in a creolized lexicalization that only too likely drew on colonial forms, “a daily ‘report’” (*ruzana ripurt*).⁸⁵

Suffering Pilgrims as Indo-Persian Romanticism

“Specifying every mortifying or ridiculous situation within which he continued to place me,” the Company’s agent at Baghdad wrote in late 1820, “would have required a regular diary of our intercourse and such things I am by no means desirous of recollecting.”

The agent was referring to ‘Abdulhusain, whose complaints of being snubbed had prompted inquiries from India. But to Bombay’s requests for further information, the resident in Ottoman Iraq detailed his own jeremiads against the “Nuwaub’s general conduct during his residence in Bagdad, which induced me after much forbearance to intimate to him that I could no longer consider him under my protection.”⁸⁶ We shall return later to ‘Abdulhusain’s rift with the British, a turn of events which, while to do with the prince’s personal predicaments, reflected the eventual fate of Indo-Persian culture under Company rule. But first, this section will delve into the contents of his diary, for which it is worth clarifying that ‘Abdulhusain was neither the first South Asian to travel abroad under British patronage, nor the first to write about it. Mirza Abu Talib, who went to Europe from Lucknow in 1799 with a Company official, left a celebrated account of his travels. From ‘Abdulhusain’s hometown, mention may also be made of Turab ‘Ali, a *munshi* who had taught the British at Calcutta and Madras, and who toured the Middle East with a Company “linguist” between 1810 and 1828. He wrote a travelogue titled *Risala dar Masir-i Turab ‘Ali Nami ba-Taraf-i Iran wa ‘Iraq wa ‘Arab* (Account of the Travels of Turab ‘Ali to Iran, Iraq, and Arabia).⁸⁷

Suffering Pilgrims, nevertheless, distinguished itself from its predecessors by how its author documented his reactions to “events” by conscientiously recording his *mizaj*, meaning his mood, temperament, humor, and, more broadly, “health.” For example, on the twenty-ninth of Shauwal, 1230 (4 October 1815), ‘Abdulhusain was indisposed, and “on account of this I felt anxious in my heart and was not at ease.” On the twelfth of Rabi‘ al-Sani, 1231 (12 March 1816), he was at Jannat al-Baqi‘, the great cemetery of Medina. There he discovered that

⁸⁴Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 373.

⁸⁵Saiyid Ahmad Dihlawi, *Farhang-i Asafiya*, vol. 2 (Lahore, 2010), 383.

⁸⁶MSA, Political Department, vol. 36, pt. 2, Sulimania to Bombay, 5 Oct. 1820, 80, 90–91.

⁸⁷Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 299–300.

the Wahhabis, who were “zealous” (*mu‘tassib*) in their Sunnism, had destroyed many tombs to dissuade Shi‘a and Sufi veneration at the grave sites of saints and imams. “My heart exploded.” More melodramatically—though perhaps here also predictably, given it was a day in the religious calendar designated for mourning—on the tenth of Muharram the pilgrim traveler detailed the emotions provoked by the commemoration of the Shi‘a martyrs. “The hearts of the faithful roast like kababs [*dilha-yi mu‘minin kabab shuda*], their livers smoke [*jigar-ha gudakhta*], and their eyes become mournful streams of tears [*chashman silab-i ashk-i jari ast*].”⁸⁸ At times it was others who stirred an emotional response from the diarist, at times the elements did, at times a mix of all those factors did:

Twenty fifth of Rabi‘ al-Sani [1231], Du-Shanbih [25 March 1816, Monday]: In the morning I went to the Haram Sharif [the sacred sanctuary of Medina] and to Baqi‘. I made *ziyarat* and prayer. I came home. My *mizaj* was a little cold and the weather was not pleasant. Mir Yusuf ‘Ali is very upset with me [*man ghussa‘and*]. Again and again he showed his anger toward me [*bar bar az ghazab bar man mi-nigarand*] by calling himself a Muslim, and others, meaning us, something else [*khwud-ra Musulman mi-namanad wa digar ya‘ni maha-ra bar ‘aks-i an*].

Epigrammatic entries like these often gave an impression of the immediacy of personal experience, and the diarist showed a proclivity for a plain prose style largely eschewed in earlier travelogues. However, the genre and the unpremeditated penmanship it might have elicited do not in themselves explain ‘Abdulhusain’s emotional forthrightness. For all the originality of form, we also find in this text the abiding influence of older Indo-Persian ideas.

For instance, the traveler often correlated emotions, both his own and others’, with physical health and weather conditions, an approach entirely meaningful within the principles of *tibb*. “Janab Begum Sahiba, from the weariness of yesterday and today, caught fever,” ‘Abdulhusain wrote of his mother after a taxing leg of their caravan journey through the desert. There was a dearth of potable water on the road, which is why a stopover at the oasis town of Ha’il proved convalescing weeks later. “The climate was very nice and relieving. Janab Hazrat Begum Sahiba became well.” Climactic conditions, *ab-o-hawa* (“water-and-air”), explained no less the character of Ha’il’s inhabitants, who were “of a cheerful disposition, pleasing, and beautiful.”⁸⁹ ‘Abdulhusain accordingly paid much attention to the desert’s heat. “Last night and today it was very hot” (*bisyar bisyar garm bud*), he wrote of the midsummer torridness of the Hijaz in 1816. “A sultry hot wind blew, and the sky filled with clouds.” All this had deleterious effects on his health. “Today I have a headache. Last night was extremely hot,” he noted again days later.⁹⁰ Being under the weather meant being ill-humored, literally. Exponents of *tibb* in India therefore argued that

⁸⁸ ‘Abdulhusain, *Tazkirat al-Tariq*, 124, 85.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173, 180.

“emotional well being [*sic*]” required an “Aristotelian stress on proper environment.”⁹¹

Written by Arcot’s court physician, a late eighteenth-century treatise on the effects of heat on physical (*jismani*) and spiritual (*ruhani*) health is here instructive. Noting that heat-induced illness (*buhran*) had been known since Galenus (Galen), the Indo-Persian text listed among its symptoms fever, sweating, and diarrhea. Indicative of the links between health and emotions, the treatise further observed that symptoms could be identified via physiognomy, as when a patient showed outward signs of fear.⁹² This explains why ‘Abdulhusain was diligent—hypochondriac, even—about monitoring his health and moods under the heat of Arabia. Yet his self-diagnoses were also demonstrative of self-awareness. They hinted at what Foucault, with reference to regimes of care in Greek antiquity, dubbed “technologies of the self.” Moreover, it should be emphasized that the kinds of detail ‘Abdulhusain put down regarding his somatic or spiritual state were altogether absent in classical travelogues, where their inclusion would have been considered highly inappropriate, not to say intemperate. “Today I caught diarrhea,” he wrote in Medina in March 1816. “Glory be to God I [only] caught diarrhea once in India and once here. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.” “Today in the morning I caught diarrhea,” he noted again in July that year. “I had fourteen bowel movements.” A fever came and went. “I slept little by little. Thank God, thank God.”⁹³

Indo-Persian medical theories supplied one basis for ‘Abdulhusain’s cathexis on “health,” but his emotionalist associations resonated also with British Indian neo-Hippocratic narratives. In his study of the writings of itinerant Company physicians and naturalists, Arnold described the profound “influence of Romanticism on scientific as well as scenic ideas of representation.” British anxieties regarding death and disease in the tropics, coupled with the broader colonial desire to imaginatively “annex” Indian landscapes, produced travelogues suffused with “emotional qualities.”⁹⁴ Arnold deemphasized the role Indians played in this “Empire of Emotions,” but in Madras it was clearly coproduced with local actors. As noted, Arcot’s scholars engaged British medical and botanical treatises. Before it abandoned “subjectivity” for “governmentality” in the mid-nineteenth century, colonial science also relied on Arcot’s medical corps to draw causal connections between health and environment.⁹⁵ British epidemiologists in the 1810s, for example, cited Arcot’s physicians to argue that monsoons triggered seasonal cholera.⁹⁶ Given these intermediations, it is unsurprising that ‘Abdulhusain’s diary was strongly evocative of Company narratives, not to mention some of the political motivations that underwrote them.

As Assam’s jungles, Nepal’s summits, and Rajasthan’s dunes exhilarated contradictory colonial sentiments of “delight” and “horror”; as Mughal ruins and derelict

⁹¹Alavi, *Islam and Healing*, 234–5.

⁹²Ahmadullah Khan Dihlawi, *Tahqiq al-Buhran*, ed. ‘Abdulqadir Ahmad (Madras, 1950), 2, 4–5.

⁹³‘Abdulhusain, *Tazkirat al-Tariq*, 131, 163.

⁹⁴Arnold, *Tropics and the Traveling Gaze*, 32, 202.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 34.

⁹⁶S. Hood and M. D. Brighton, “Reasons Why the Medical Staff in India Did Not Consider Spasmodic Cholera Contagions,” *London Medical and Surgical Journal* 1 (1832), 224–8, at 225.

temples conjured “contemplation” of antique splendor yet also “condemnation” of Eastern “despotism”; and, as subcontinental landscapes and flora aroused “nostalgia” for British hamlets and highlands even as they drove ideas of agrarian “improvement,” ‘Abdulhusain’s diary summoned similar Romantic vistas from the Middle East.⁹⁷ Arabia could be a “desolate place” (*wilayat-i kharab*), he wrote, referring repeatedly to how death shadowed travelers through the desert. But the desert could also be “attractive” (*qasim*), with oases that echoed with the “pitter-patter” (*pir-pir*) of spring water. Rice, fowl, dates, and pomegranates in the Hijaz were satiating. The diarist, nevertheless, dreamt of home, of savoring the “sour soup” (sambar?) of Madras.⁹⁸ At Baqī, he contemplated iconoclasm’s ruins. “All the cupolas, tombstones are in poor state.” That wreck underscored for him Wahhabism’s “tyranny” (*zulm*). At one oasis, with its well-planned gardens and roads, he likewise lamented, “pity, it is in Wahhabi hands.”⁹⁹ If the prince had internalized the narratological conceits of Romanticism, they were not simply serving stylistic ends. Company-era Romanticism had political objectives. Those too were being mobilized by his diary.

To demonstrate how colonialism disrupted the “balance” of classical Indo-Persian emotive thought, Margrit Pernau pits the 1857 sepoy rebellion as pivotal. As the anticolonial revolt breached “trust” between the British and their subjects, it also saw South Asian Muslims repudiating temperamental equilibrium for “fervor,” a turn that moreover facilitated the development of Islamic reformist ideas, she asserts.¹⁰⁰ But of course, the rebellion was itself a reaction to colonial reforms. For the pre-1857 setting, liberalism and its adjacent ideologies thus provide another prism through which to refract our analysis of *Suffering Pilgrims*. Liberalism’s links to Romanticism are here especially relevant. As William Reddy argued, after the perceived paroxysms of the French Revolution, European intellectuals sought to stabilize affective mores with liberal politics, on the one hand—which subordinated passions to reason—and Romantic art, on the other—which provided a counterpoint or vent, “a superior realm of the sublime” meant for “inner exploration.” Between liberalism and Romanticism, thus, there also emerged a modern “normative emotional management regime.”¹⁰¹ For the present analysis, the takeaway should be that colonialism did not just bring reform to South Asia. There, too, liberalism had its counterpart in Romanticism. But with a quirk. “In European art and literature this opposition is well known,” Dirk Kolff noted. “But in the colonies these two schools of thought were almost immediately translated into forms of government.”¹⁰² And it was in Madras that Romantic governance reached its apotheosis.

Romanticism hence did not just entail in diary keeping among wide-eyed “grif-fins,” as new Company hands were called. Until the 1830s, when the reformists raced ahead, the almost wholly subjective opinions of colonial Romantics on

⁹⁷Arnold, *Tropics and the Traveling Gaze*.

⁹⁸Abdulhusain, *Tazkirat al-Tariq*, 66, 145, 146.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 124, 144, 48.

¹⁰⁰Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity*.

¹⁰¹William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2004), 217–42.

¹⁰²Kolff, “A British Indian Circumambulation,” 87.

South Asian history, society, nature, and morality also informed policy. This “knot” of Romantic officials, Eric Stokes masterfully argued, had “a strong introspective bent, a sensibility for natural beauty and for historical associations, with an imaginative urge for release and adventure.” They brought an “emotional objection” to what they regarded as the “cold” policies of limited government based on the rule of law and property rights in provinces like Bengal. Against those Whiggish aspirations, they forwarded that a personalized rule predicated on putatively precolonial practices best suited India. As it happened, partisans of these ideas betrayed a special “anxiety to see them adopted in the Madras territories.”¹⁰³ They realized that ambition. Under Thomas Munro, later governor of Madras (1820–27), from around 1800 the province saw the implementation of a crowning “Romantic” policy, the *ryotwari* agrarian tax regime, which privileged cultivating peasants (*ra'iyat*), and not landlords (*zamindars*), as primary holders of rights in land.¹⁰⁴ This was “to take the peasant in all his simplicity,” “to rule him with a paternal and simple government, and so to avoid all the artificialities of a sophisticated European form of rule.”¹⁰⁵ For similar reasons, the likes of Munro tended to defend the Company’s upkeep of the Walajahs, even as opportunities arose to do away with the fiction of nawabi authority.¹⁰⁶

Did the “brooding” and “melancholic” Romantics, as Stokes described them, influence ‘Abdulhusain’s diary? While there is no evidence of direct connections, given how Arcot was wholly beholden to the Madras Presidency, the prince likely had more than a passing familiarity with the ruling ideology of the regional Company state. Certainly, he claimed knowledge of the revenue administration of British India (*jihazati-angrezi*), or “the numerical arrangement of the country.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover, from Muhammad ‘Ali onwards, Arcot showed a keen enthusiasm for British arts and aesthetics. The kingdom patronized British portrait painters. Its neo-Palladian palace was designed by a British architect (Figure 1). Even the palace’s interiors were filled with “English furniture, pictures, and ‘novelties’.”¹⁰⁸ One nawab was, moreover, known to wear British clothing (*libas-i ahl-i wilayat*) on occasion.¹⁰⁹ Modern scholars, meanwhile, accept Romanticism’s influence on nineteenth-century Persian travelogues.¹¹⁰ However, no study has yet explored how that literary turn might have actually occurred.¹¹¹ Munro, an epitome of colonial Romanticism, certainly held strong opinions regarding Indo-Persian. He advocated language learning among Company officials.¹¹² But in ways that incidentally

¹⁰³Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959), 9–22.

¹⁰⁴On *ryotwari*’s roots in “Tory agrarian romanticism” see Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire*, 83.

¹⁰⁵Stokes, *English Utilitarians*, 13.

¹⁰⁶Thomas Munro, “In Consultation, 15th March, 1822,” in Rev. G. R. Gleig, *The Life of Major-General Sir Thomas Munro, Bart. And K.C.B., Late Governor of Madras, with Extracts from his Correspondence and Private Papers*, 3 vols. (London, 1830), 2: 314–48.

¹⁰⁷‘Abdulhusain, *Tazkirat al-Tariq*, 223.

¹⁰⁸Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 169.

¹⁰⁹‘Abdulqadir, *Bahar-i A’zamjahi*, 128.

¹¹⁰Micallef and Sharma, “Introduction.”

¹¹¹But see the suggestive essay by Nigel Leask, “‘Travelling the Other Way’: *The Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan* (1810) and Romantic Orientalism,” in Franklin, *Romantic Representations*, 220–38.

¹¹²Thomas Munro, “Minute on the Study of the Native Languages by Officers of the Army, 7th November 1823,” in Gleig, *Life of Major-General Sir Thomas Munro*, 2: 402–6.



Figure 1. The neo-Palladian Persianate: interior of Chipak Palace, Madras. Built for the Arcot nawabs by the English engineer Paul Benfield in 1768, the structure stands as an early example of both British Romantic neo-classical and “Indo-Saracenic” architecture in South Asia. Photograph by Nidhi Mahajan.

anticipated the plain exposition of ‘Abdulhusain’s diary, he also complained of Indo-Persian’s excesses.

“I have been for some years past amusing, or rather plaguing, myself with the Hindoostanee and Persian languages,” wrote Munro in around 1788. His letter to a compatriot was a sardonic send-up of numerous aspects of Indo-Persian writing, from its tricky syntax and treacherous calligraphy to its apparent penchant for pedantic aphorisms. Yet it was the purple prose that bore the brunt of Munro’s sarcasm. “Long, pompous periods” made also for “ridiculous” language among Indo-Persian letter writers, who habitually claimed, wrote Munro, that they remained in “corporeal and spiritual meeting” with their correspondents —“Molakali Jismania Bohani [*sic!*]” “I never write to a Mussulman without telling him,” Munro then added in a way that suggested how he sought to persuade new practices among Persographic interlocutors, “that notwithstanding our spiritual meeting, unless the Cause of causes, God, shall cause a cause, that shall be the cause of our corporeal meeting, it will be altogether impossible for me to remain longer in the vale of tears.”¹¹³

Romanticism’s introspectiveness, combined with its critique of Indo-Persian’s supposed vacuity, might then have prompted ‘Abdulhusain’s decision to document his travels as a diary. There is, moreover, evidence to suggest that ‘Abdulhusain

¹¹³Quoted in Gleig, *Life of Major-General Sir Thomas Munro*, 1: 58–64.



Figure 2. Madras as a beachhead of British Indian Romanticism: William Daniell's *Madras, or Fort St George, in the Bay of Bengal - A Squall Passing Off* (1833) captured in a colonial seascape the "awfully magnificent and sublime" views the artist had earlier also sought out in an illustrated travelogue of Britain. William Daniell, *A Voyage Round Great Britain, undertaken in the summer of the Year 1818, and Commencing from Land's-End, Cornwall, with a Series of Views, Illustrative of the Character and Prominent Features of the Coast*, vol. 4 (London, 1820), 36. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

might have had in mind a British readership for his text, as we shall see. The plausibility of a Romantic influence becomes more tenable when considering how the prince documented the places, peoples, and polities he encountered during his travels. Again, that gesture was not new.¹¹⁴ But again, it was redolent of Romanticism. Colonial paintings, prose, and poetry in this era highlighted exotic environments, archaic pasts, and savage customs as tropes of difference, to be sure. That orientalism, however, served also to intensify the quintessentially Romantic aesthetics of the "sublime" and "picturesque" (Figure 2).¹¹⁵ As much as 'Abdulhusain relied on Indo-Persian ideas of climate or geography, his reflections on Arabia's atmospherics thus still came very close to British meditations on Madras's landscapes ("It is a romantic country, and every tree and mountain has some charm which attaches me to them"¹¹⁶) and weather patterns ("We have a hot land wind, day and night, and I wish myself in one of your airy bungalows ... Your description is enough to make a plain man romantic"¹¹⁷). "Until its ends," 'Abdulhusain wrote similarly from the Arabian interior, "the space of this country was beautiful."

¹¹⁴For precolonial "ethnographic" travelogues see Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*.

¹¹⁵Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 72. Compare Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago, 1992), for a pioneering postcolonialist reading of the sublime.

¹¹⁶Thomas Munro, "To His Sister, 30th June, 1799," in Gleig, *Life of Major-General Sir Thomas Munro*, 2: 243–5, at 244.

¹¹⁷Thomas Munro, "To the Honourable M. Elphinstone, 21st July, 1823," in Gleig, *Life of Major-General Sir Thomas Munro*, 3: 415.

“And there was thunder and lightning, and the tall palm trees of this mountainous region were like so many Pahlavi ramparts.”¹¹⁸

As for people, ‘Abdulhusain relied on established categories from the “Persianate world” to grapple with cultural heterogeneity. An old distinction between Arab and Persian (*‘Arab wa ‘Ajam*), for instance, he maintained throughout, if also because his caravan was made up of many pilgrims from Iran. Himself evidently a Shi‘a, ‘Abdulhusain identified strongly with his fellow travelers, and so frequently decried the sectarian pushback they faced in Arabia, where it had reached intense levels with the advent of the Wahhabis. With their uncompromising interpretation of Hanbali Shari‘a, the Wahhabis, led by the al-Sa‘ud clan, were in the midst of a serious insurgency against Ottoman rule. Their maritime satraps in the Persian Gulf had meanwhile become an issue for the British in India. For ‘Abdulhusain, the problem, however, remained the sectarianism that Wahhabism had unleashed, in the face of which he not only documented a further array of emotions, but also hinted at the sort of “vernacular” differences one finds in hajj travelogues from the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁹ Crossing “Wahhabi country,” he claimed, he and his fellow pilgrims were subjected to violence, deprived of water, denied Shi‘a rituals, and fleeced for undue tithes. All this produced much fear, crying, and “hoo-ha” (*hai-o-huyi*). But if their actions made the Arabs “evil,” “wicked,” and “hypocritical,” the effects of sectarianism could also be discerned in how ‘Abdulhusain parsed his own identity. At one point, he felt compelled to clarify to a sentry that he was not Persian, but rather Indian.¹²⁰

Sectarian strife clearly set a tone for the “suffering” in ‘Abdulhusain’s diary.¹²¹ Considered alongside its affective ruminations, what also emerge are suggestive similarities with contemporary British travelogues, which were often “expressly organized around the sufferings of travelers.” “Dangers” and “distress” in such accounts roused the romance of adventure and misadventure; their authors’ emotional turmoil against backdrops of rugged beauty evoked the sublime.¹²² For ‘Abdulhusain, the Romantic imaginary meant that older Indo-Persian understandings of difference jostled against new valuations of alterity. “The romantics,” to quote Kolff once more, “sought completeness, the colourfulness of history, of contemporary nations and customs, the surprises of the landscape and the animal realm, the wisdom of peasants, the cultured ways of the aristocracy.”¹²³ As though working through such a checklist, ‘Abdulhusain touched on many such themes, and for each he stressed the foibles of regional culture or supplied his own eccentric opinions on them. At times, he employed timeworn Indo-Persian conventions. In a quizzical language consonant with the traveler’s trope of “wonder and strangeness” (*‘ajā‘ib-o-gharaib*), he thus spoke of “wondrous houses” at one Arabian town. They had “neither head nor feet,” “neither dimness nor openness.”¹²⁴ However,

¹¹⁸‘Abdulhusain, *Tazkirat al-Tariq*, 48–9.

¹¹⁹Green, “Waves of Heterotopia.”

¹²⁰‘Abdulhusain, *Tazkirat al-Tariq*, 124.

¹²¹Arcot itself experienced sectarian tensions in this period. ‘Abdulhusain’s own brother-in-law wrote polemically against sectarianism. Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 294.

¹²²Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveler and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford, 2007).

¹²³Kolff, “A British Indian Circumambulation,” 87.

¹²⁴‘Abdulhusain, *Tazkirat al-Tariq*, 80.

such observations also exceeded classical conventions to take note, as the Romantics might have, of the “customs” (*qa’ida*) of Bedouin society, the “manners” (*ta’aruf*) of Arabia’s tribal elders, and the ways of refined and rustic, “city-dwelling [*shahri*] and desert-dwelling [*barri*] Arabs.”

Yet it was the political motivations behind Romanticism, and how ‘Abdulhusain rallied and redeployed their presumptions, that perhaps best exemplified how his diary should be read as a product of the colonial era and its ambiguities. Historians have persistently drawn attention to how Arcot clung to its powers in the teeth of British subjugation. Susan Bayly noted that, even after signing away its sovereignty, the Crown continued to behave in ways that suggested that “the nawabi was still active, still carrying out the functions of sovereignty.”¹²⁵ Natasha Eaton added that its adoption, and subversion, of the Company’s diplomatic protocols reflected Arcot’s “obstinate resistance” to colonialism.¹²⁶ But surely resistance is not the only relevant rubric here. Even as they reinforced Arcot’s claims to power, the cannibalization of colonial ideas within such asymmetrical circumstances was an intrinsically ambivalent act. The paradoxical consequences it generated were certainly evident in the case of our prince. Romanticism let him cast Arabia, its landscapes, and its inhabitants as beautifully benighted. Those projections contrasted markedly with his representations of himself and his fellow Qajar and Ottoman aristocrats (*a’yan*) as genteel bearers of “reverence” (*tauqir*) and “civility” (*ta’aruf*). Yet the irony was that his internalization of Romanticism’s deeper political implications also made the prince’s assertions of authority appear utterly absurd to British officials.

After his hajj, ‘Abdulhusain was thus pilloried for assuming the same forms of personal power the Romantics so valorized in Madras. In Baghdad, he had evidently corralled some emigrant Indians, given them titles, and formed a court around his person. But this drew loud protests from the Company’s resident, who argued that the prince was thus in “competition” with his office, and that “such a system once tolerated could only tend to compromise government.”¹²⁷ For the colonized, Romanticism had its limits. Its political aspirations in such a setting hence also appeared to become, as Romanticism’s severest modern critic put it in another context, “fantasy.”¹²⁸

Conclusion: Indo-Persian’s passing, Romanticism’s retreat, and the diarist’s death

This article has illustrated how the East India Company’s texts and ideologies brought important changes to Indo-Persian prose, in particular the important tradition of first-person travel writing. A central objective of the study was to shift the terms of the debate, which has disproportionately focused on how a precolonial (even prelapsarian) “Persianate cosmopolis” witnessed its decline under colonialism. The decades of Company expansion that led up to the moment of

¹²⁵Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 224.

¹²⁶Eaton, “Between Mimesis and Alterity,” 107.

¹²⁷MSA, Political Department, 1820–21, vol. 36, Sulimania to Bombay, 5 Oct. 1820, 81–2.

¹²⁸Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, trans. Guy Oakes (Cambridge, MA, 1986).

“paramountcy,” this study has instead suggested, produced complex interplays between colonial and Indo-Persian documents, discourses, idioms, and ideas. In the main, postcolonial and decolonial arguments regarding orientalism and the violence it wrought on local epistemologies have meant that the scholarly focus has largely remained, ironically, fixed on colonial attitudes rather than on Persographic culture itself. By contrast, only recently have studies begun to explore how Indo-Persian “became tinged by contact with the East India Company.”¹²⁹ Such works on “colonial Persian,” to invoke Arash Khazeni’s neologism, promise to reveal new insights into transformations that were “internal to Indo-Persian and its users,” Green has suggested.¹³⁰ As this article has argued, however, even ideas of what constituted the “internal” world of prose, or what practical “uses” texts might have served, were in intricate conversation with colonial contexts. More work needs to be done, ultimately, to illuminate both the “affective and effective meanings” of Indo-Persian under Company rule.¹³¹

That said, ‘Abdullhusain’s diary was still a transitional text, one that came at the cusp of major changes in Indo-Persian, which did indeed suffer a serious if symbolic setback with the Company’s decision to remove it as an “official” language in the 1830s. The broader context of the “orientalists–anglicists” debate, the ways in which the latter faction carried the day in British India, and the wide-ranging “liberal” interventions during William Bentinck’s gubernatorial stints (1828–35) are too well known to require recapitulation here. Two points, though, can still be made to nuance understandings of Indo-Persian’s fate during this “age of reform.”¹³² First, colonial bureaucratization had clearly acquired a “rational” logic which thus led it to distance itself from Indo-Persian. Put differently, it was the success of the very processes that induced generic changes in Indo-Persian that subsequently led to its “end.” Second, it is telling that not just orientalism, but also Romanticism, went into decline alongside Indo-Persian. In north India, a new generation of officials, who incidentally were given an excellent linguistic training at Haileybury, now launched an entirely ideological campaign against “pernicious Persian,” the language of oriental “despotism” and “corruption.”¹³³ In the south, Lushington, who once himself served as Persian secretary, methodically undid his Romantic predecessor Munro’s policies.¹³⁴ The same poet who once hailed him as Rustam was thus now “dissatisfied” with him.¹³⁵ “Now come the reformers, restorers, and comforters of India,” the doyen among British philosophers of the sublime had proleptically lamented. “What have they done?”¹³⁶

The final entry in *Suffering Pilgrims* was dated 3 April 1817. It was written after ‘Abdullhusain’s return to Karbala. The next he appeared in the records was with his letter to Bombay, complaining of the Company’s resident in Iraq. “We have not

¹²⁹Khazeni, “Indo-Persian Travel Writing,” 5.

¹³⁰Green, “Antipodes of ‘Progress,’” 219.

¹³¹Fisher, “Conflicting Meanings,” 226.

¹³²Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*.

¹³³Prior, Brennan, and Haines, “Bad Language,” 98–101.

¹³⁴Katherine Prior, “Stephen Rumbold Lushington (1776–1868),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), at <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17215> (accessed Dec. 2023).

¹³⁵Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 236.

¹³⁶Burke, “Speech on Nabob,” 536.

failed to speak,” he indicated indignantly, “in terms of the highest admiration and applause of the distinguished virtues, and qualities of the British nation in every company in which we have been, in Arabia and Persia.”¹³⁷ His diary bore out that claim. At an earlier meeting with the Wahhabi-Sa‘udi Amir, whose own forces would be defeated by the Ottomans in 1818, and whose Gulf subordinates would meet a similar fate from a maritime offensive from Bombay in 1819, ‘Abdulhusain noted that he had praised British rule in India, including “the quality of peace and security in their domains, and their pleasant disposition toward their subjects [*ra‘aya*].”¹³⁸ Ultimately, what such statements revealed, apart from the depth of the colonial connection, was how the prince might have intended his diary to serve as a record of consultation for Company officials, an interpretation that becomes viable when considering how, across the Indian Ocean, there began after his death an extensive audit of the “documentary evidence” relating to his legacy.¹³⁹

‘Abdulhusain died during a plague outbreak at Baghdad, where he and his mother had settled after their hajj.¹⁴⁰ His relations with the British resident there, however, soured as soon as they arrived. The reasons were various, but chief among them, it turns out, was the unraveling of the transregional tethers that once held together a “Persianate world.” Among allegations made against ‘Abdulhusain by the Company agent, it was said that though the prince was connected to the British residency, he went out of his way to favor Ottomans and Qajars.¹⁴¹ He showed “a decided preference for the Turks,” and in letters “made mere mention of the Honorable Governor’s name,” whereas “that of the Pasha [of Baghdad] was always accompanied by a bead-roll of titles and prayers.”¹⁴² During his time abroad, ‘Abdulhusain had also cultivated connections with Qajar elites from Tehran, where he even spent some time around 1827. The shah himself was said to have taken a personal “interest ... in his fate.”¹⁴³ But in the end, in a sign of the times, the Company backed the resident and informed ‘Abdulhusain he was no longer its ward.¹⁴⁴ His pension was withdrawn. He drowned in debt. After his death, his legatees came forward to request his pension. Reluctantly, the Company agreed to disburse a fraction of the original amount.¹⁴⁵ It only did so, however, after taking stern note of the dead prince’s “disagreeable conduct.”¹⁴⁶

Adab—conduct, comportment—might have once supplied much meaning to precolonial “Persianate selves.”¹⁴⁷ Yet such an “oriental art,” to defer to the Baghdad resident’s words, was clearly giving way to new ways.¹⁴⁸ As in his unique

¹³⁷MSA, Political Department, 1820–21, vol. 36/2, from Raeesool Omrah, 31 Dec. 1819, 72.

¹³⁸‘Abdulhusain, *Tazkirat al-Tariq*, 223.

¹³⁹BL, IOR/F/4/1463/57506, from agent at Arcot, 10 June 1833, 37.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., letter from Fort William, 22 August 1833, 3.

¹⁴¹MSA, Political Department, 1820–21, vol. 36, Sulimania to Bombay, 5 Oct. 1820, 85.

¹⁴²Ibid., 90.

¹⁴³BL, IOR/F/4/1463/57506, letter to Fort St George, 17 Nov. 1830, 9.

¹⁴⁴MSA, Political Department, 1820–21, vol. 36, Basra to Bombay, 2 Feb. 1821, 96.

¹⁴⁵BL, IOR/F/4/1463/57506, to paymaster of Carnatic, 26 May 1826, 62–4.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., letter to Fort St George, 17 Nov. 1830, 9.

¹⁴⁷Kia, *Persianate Selves*.

¹⁴⁸MSA, Political Department, 1820–21, vol. 36, Sulimania to Bombay, 5 Oct. 1820, 84.

ego-document, in his biographical trajectory, too, ‘Abdulhusain captured that transition to novel norms. Yet, along the way, he managed not only to restore, but indeed also to restyle and rebuild, some parts of his place in a crumbling old Babel.

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