

Queen Victoria through Punjabi Eyes: The Travel Writings of Hardevi

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That moment [Queen Victoria's jubilee in 1887] was beyond any comparison—it seemed as if the Goddess Lakshmi herself had descended in her vehicle, was surrounded by the *devatas*, or as if Indrani, along with her son Jayant and a pantheon of gods, had come down to grace London with her presence.

Hardevi, *London Jubilee*, 20

I urge my sisters in my country to read this brief book with great concentration. They will feel inspired by a woman who possesses power and rules a large empire but is not given to arrogance and laziness. She has fulfilled her womanly duties (*stridharma*) towards her husband and children, as also towards her country. She has fulfilled all these duties wisely and efficiently in the past, and she continues to do so at present. I have written in brief about her exemplary life in simple language for you all so that you can emulate her in fulfilling your domestic and womanly duties (*grihadharma* and *stridharma*). When the queen of our country can have such good values and qualities, we must be happy to read or listen to an account of her life. Like ruler, like subjects. . . . You must discard laziness, guile, and deceit. You must involve yourself in all domestic work, rear and educate your children, look after your family, respect your relatives, be honest and sweet, read scriptures and uplift yourself spiritually, and follow the word of God. In all this, you have the best role model to follow—our saintly, illustrious queen, who is an embodiment of such piety.

Hardevi, *London Jubilee*, 55–57

SRIMATI Hardevi, the writer of these observations, was a remarkable figure who advocated for women's rights in colonial Punjab toward the end of the nineteenth century. Born into a prominent Arya Samajist family, she traveled from Lahore to London in 1886 and in 1887 witnessed the golden jubilee celebrations of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne. While in London, Hardevi wrote two travel accounts in the Hindi language, *London Yatra* and *London Jubilee*. The manuscripts

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were sent back home to Lahore to be published the following year, in 1888.¹ The extracts that serve as epigraphs for this essay are drawn from these accounts. The author addresses her narratives specifically to the women of Punjab: a readership that she calls the “*Punjab deshiya bhagini samaj*” (the society of sisters in the Punjab). In addressing a specific, gendered community—the *bhagini samaj*, or society of sisters—the narratives envision a new community of women, ostensibly not organized along caste, class, or communal lines, even though late nineteenth-century Punjab was riven by precisely these fissures. To this new community of women, Hardevi narrates her autobiographical experience of travel.

The title of the first book draws attention to the crucial term around which the narrative is built—*yatra*, or journey. *London Yatra* describes the journey of the autobiographical subject from her home in the colonial metropolis of Lahore to the capital city of the empire, London. On the way, she passes through the port cities of Bombay, Aden, and Alexandria. London, the high seat of imperial modernity, serves as the telos that gives meaning to the preceding journey. As she narrates her journey toward London, the narrator seeks to textually reconfigure her own nation and its women, to facilitate their journey toward modernity. In this, she is spurred by the image of a woman reigning over the empire as its political head.

Titled *London Jubilee*, the companion volume draws attention to a second crucial term around which the author organizes her autobiographical experience. In Hardevi’s narrative, the term “jubilee” first evokes the event of imperial celebration on which she reports as eyewitness: the majestic spectacle that unfolded in the metropolitan capital in 1887. In addition, her language also evokes the royal personage at the center of the spectacle, Victoria. A substantial part of the narrative is devoted to the life history of the queen: her public life as the empress of India, and her private life as wife and mother. The author sets up this royal figure of Victoria as a model for herself as well as the community of women readers in Lahore that she addresses.

If *journey* and *jubilee* are the crucial terms that the author announces in the very titles of the narratives, she mobilizes a larger process without naming it, to create meaning out of her experiences of travel as well as the commemorative celebrations—what we might call “vernacularization.” The passages quoted at the beginning of the essay draw attention to the workings of this category. Vernacularization allows Hardevi to interpret her own experience of imperial modernity and articulate it

for her audience through Indic vocabularies, enabling her to make herself at home in the world of the imperial modern. The first quotation imagines Queen Victoria as a mythological and transcendental figure, comparing her to the Hindu goddess Lakshmi. In other words, it reinscribes Victoria's imperial pomp and majesty in the Indic language of divine femininity. The second passage shows how the ideal womanhood that the queen represents is seamlessly accommodated within the construction of a modern, educated, and *pativrata* (conjugally virtuous) woman that was being advocated by the prevailing reform discourse in Punjab. The Indic terms *stridharma* and *grihadharma* are mobilized to assess Victoria's life history and present it as an exemplum to the women of the Punjab.

In thus vernacularizing Queen Victoria, not only does Hardevi assimilate the new world of London into her own cultural vocabulary, but she also draws British and Indian women into a sympathetic continuum. In *London Jubilee*, she writes: "It is only appropriate that the community of women should give her gifts in recognition that one of their own has adorned the throne. God has made possible this propitious day for us—what more opportunity could we have asked for to show our devotion!" (4). Victoria thus enables Hardevi to imagine a global community of women and claim membership in it—not only for herself but for the women readers she addresses in Hindi, the *bhagini samaj* of the Punjab. Writing travel thus becomes a means to claim physical and discursive mobility, to define a new literary subjectivity for women in the nascent print spheres of colonial India, and to imagine a conceptual space of possibilities for a modern, gendered self—a space in which to envision new iconographies, including that of the queen.

Milinda Banerjee has argued that Indians vernacularized the British monarchy "to voice their personal or national hopes and ambitions."² On occasion, vernacularization involved the mythical apotheosizing of the British—a mode of narration that seemingly sought to uphold the legitimacy of their rule. However, Banerjee also points out such a mode "implicitly deprived the colonial rulers of their racial superiority and presented them as instruments of a celestial order of which Indians possessed special knowledge and where ultimate authority rested with Indic gods."³ This oscillation between an adulatory and a resistant or subversive mode of address points toward the colonial subject's embrace of multiple self-positionings. The negotiation, as we will see, is true of Hardevi as well.

This essay analyzes the ways in which Hardevi's travel writing is entangled with the political imagination of a new nation and the modern women who could be its citizen-subjects. Moreover, this new, gendered self is positioned variously—sometimes as an obedient subject, and at other times as an assertive, critical commentator—in relation to the imperial center and its monarch, Queen Victoria. While being subjects of a woman monarch could become a means of claiming a civic subjecthood for women, we see contradictions emerge between Hardevi's liberal expectations of reform and betterment for women and her colonial subjecthood to the queen. The essay also examines Hardevi's deployment of a strategically positioned mode of subjectivity whereby she could be a willing participant in the spectacle of a liberal empire and, thus, an obedient colonial subject construing modernity as worthy of mimicry—and simultaneously negotiate with this idea of liberalism to demand more social interventions from the colonial powers for women in Punjab. Her narratives testify that colonial subjects traveling to imperial centers could inhabit multiple subject positions in relation to the empire, depending on contextual needs: these range from the assimilative to the critical to the combative. In light of these shifts in subject position, I argue that this cross-cultural encounter cannot be reduced to simplistic binaries of mimicry and rebellion, or dominance and resistance, but instead insists on being framed as a sophisticated, self-conscious, and plural negotiation of identities that helped her to inhabit the imperial world.

1. LOCATING HARDEVI

In seeking to understand how race, class, and gender mediated representations of empire and self at this time, it is useful to read Hardevi's account in relation to the published narratives of several other contemporary travelers. As well as the larger context of the culture of travel and travel writing in the colonial era, Hardevi's life and writing, as understood from archival sources, allow us to trace the new discursive spaces that opened up for women through reform movements in Punjab and through transnational print and travel networks. These broader forces are clearly at work when we go on to read Hardevi's *London Yatra* and *London Jubilee*, to examine how her participation in the celebration of Queen Victoria illustrates the constitution of the self and the community of women in Punjab.

The archival sources that allow us to piece together Hardevi's life and writings include quarterly lists of books published in Punjab,

mentions of her activities in the *Journal of the National Indian Association* (begun by Mary Carpenter in 1871 and published in London), and the editorials in *Bharat Bhagini* (Sisters of India), a Hindi monthly for women started in 1889 in Lahore and edited by Hardevi (the periodical ceased to exist in July 1911). The editorial details in *Bharat Bhagini* mention the editor as Srimati Hardevi, daughter of late Rai Bahadur Kanhya Lal of Lahore and wife of Roshan Lal, barrister-at-law. Official catalogues of publications reveal an 1892 book on women's reform titled *Istriyon pe samaajik anyay* (Social injustices visited upon women) authored by her. For periodical editors such as Hardevi and her contemporaries Kamala Sathianadhan and Sarala Devi Chaudhurani,⁴ print activism became allied with their social activism and attempts to create early social networks and a women's movement in Punjab. Editorials and articles in *Bharat Bhagini* would frequently report women's conferences and alliances and meetings of the editor (for example, the January 1902 issue reports Hardevi's meeting with Pandita Ramabai, the well-known Maharashtrian social reformer). Literary columns in *Bharat Bhagini* would train women in techniques of metrical writing in "pure" Hindi, thus influencing generic choices and creating communities through language. Citing examples of American and British women of the time, the editor of *Bharat Bhagini* (September 1902) examines the possibility of allying with British women's associations for political mobilization. For the anonymous women who contributed letters, essays, and poetic works, the periodical became a medium to share pain, anger, aspirations, discontent, embodied experiences, and affective desires. It is these writings and anonymous letters from women sharing the collective language of everyday dilemmas, domesticity, aspirations, and rights, written from as far as Burma, Canada, America, and Penang, that give us the first evidence of imagined collectivities in print. Hardevi's roles as editor, activist, and writer are thus co-constituents of the discursive space that she imagines for the community of women.

These archival footprints point to the development of reform organizations, "associational publics,"⁵ and print proliferation in Punjab at the end of the nineteenth century. The Arya Samaj, Singh Sabha, and the Ahmaddiya Movement are examples of reformist associations in nineteenth-century Punjab, respectively identified as Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim. This period was marked by the exigencies of identity politics and a religious divide between the Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims, enacted through bitter print wars by the reformist presses affiliated with these associations. The "*samajes, sabhas* and *anjumans*" were examples of a

variety of new “print publics” that undertook debate, arguments, and reform at a remove from colonial state control.⁶ Print technology has been largely interpreted as contributing to “scriptural imperialism,” with the administrative, legal, scientific, and pedagogical fields being organized through the production of knowledges and texts. However, Farina Mir interprets the Punjab print sphere in terms of resistance and “resilience” to colonial discourses.⁷ She locates this resilience precisely in these literary formations and multiple publics mentioned above, which proliferated without the financial support of the colonial government.

Hardevi’s access to the press would have been made possible through these middle-class reformist groups and, therefore, ostensibly aligned with their identity politics. The use of the Hindi language and the constructions of the modern “Arya” woman in the periodical *Bharat Bhagini* and the two travel books are in consonance with the politics of the Arya Samaj and the Nagari Pracharini Sabha at the end of the nineteenth century, which came to be centered on a Hindu identity promoted through the Hindi language. And yet, her affiliation with the reformist press notwithstanding, Hardevi frequently critiqued Hindu reformers for failing the cause of women through her ironic and bitter editorials in *Bharat Bhagini*. The emerging print spheres, thus, opened up conceptual spaces and performative sites where new assertions of womanhood could be enacted, and predefined identities and affiliations challenged. While it was increasingly possible for middle-class women to mobilize resources and networks offered by the local print spheres, they could also have access to transnational print networks that were facilitated by increased travel and idea exchange in the nineteenth century.

Even though writing that emerged at this time in Punjab can be largely located in the politics of language and religion, it must not be viewed exclusively through the frames of communal, provincial, and nationalist identity formation, because these borders had been rendered porous by the movement of people and publications between India and the world. Oral histories and written accounts of travelers from Punjab to the West, sometimes published in England; records of Indian publications or publications about India sold in England; booklists of foreign publishers such as Macmillan, with India-specific titles; autobiographical records and communication of foreign publishers with authors in India; records of social and print networks in locations in India and outside; missionary records; and records of “inflammatory” material sent by international post intercepted and proscribed by the Punjab government: a

huge array of archival materials attests to a busy traffic of publications between India and the world.

Hardevi's *London Yatra* finds a place in *Trübner's American, European and Oriental Literary Records* (London), an 1889 register of important books published in India. The *Indian Magazine*, a publication of the National Indian Association in Aid of Social Progress and Education in India, reported Hardevi's travel writings as well as her treatise on the kindergarten system published in India.⁸ The inclusion of Hardevi's work in such London publications invites us to recognize transregional and transnational publishing networks as important parts of identity formation, especially for women's groups in India and England. While the technology of the book has been described as part of a global "paper empire" and as "a carrier of imperial opinion and authority,"⁹ the print sphere can also be analyzed as an "imperial commons" in a transnational print space that served as a site of new transnational alignments, undermining imperial authority.¹⁰ Alluding in particular to the transnational associational forms that the Indian Ocean world fostered, Isabel Hofmeyr writes that, "While these transoceanic projects evinced cosmopolitan elements, they equally constructed distinct boundaries whether of race, civilization, religion, or class."¹¹ Thus, the imaginings of transnational alliances solidified community construction at home, as we shall see in Hardevi's work. In fact, given the traffic of material between books, periodicals, pamphlets, and other material forms of print, and the new modes of reading and authorship being fashioned around them, it is possible to imagine these material print forms as contingent and ambivalent, thus unsettling judgments of the book as asserting an imperial form of power.¹²

2. MULTIPLE ACCOUNTS, MULTIPLE SELVES

Indian travelers and writers who had been published in England in the latter part of the nineteenth century and thereafter, such as Toru Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, B. M. Malabari, T. B. Pandian, W. C. Bonnerjee, Dadabhai Naoroji, and Sarojini Naidu, influenced British literary and print culture through their fiction, poetry, and travel writing. Travel accounts from Punjab that allow us to glimpse the West through Indian eyes include the writings of Olive Christian Malvery, Raja Jagatjit Singh, the maharani of Kapurthala, and Jhinda Ram; along with the oral testimonies of Dharam Vira, Fazl Hussain, and Prakash Tandon. These works evince their writers' negotiations of ideas of

Western modernity and cultural rootedness, and offer us an important context for Hardevi's narratives. As Julie Codell points out, print cultures "generated these co-histories in which Britain and the colonies textually constitute themselves and each other with and against each other and in each other's constant presence, real or imagined."¹³ Print became a regular medium for the dissemination of travel experience by this middle-class, literate community and provides evidence of a complex relationship with the West, of both fascination and critique. Hardevi's relationship with the queen's London is one such example.

The work on transcultural mobilities by many scholars such as Rosina Visram, Antoinette Burton, Susheila Nasta, and others shows that the experiences and responses of South Asians who traveled to England were undergirded by race, class, gender, and location.¹⁴ Two important points, relevant to the arguments in this essay, emerge from this body of work. First, that travel opened up new ways for colonial subjects to perform identities—emphasizing travelers' agency rather than casting them as passive. Second, travel writers deployed a whole range of shifting subject positions, attesting to their class positions and aspirations. The traveler can adopt the seemingly contradictory positions of being both a "seeing subject," critiquing and inverting the power hierarchies they encounter, and a "mobile exhibit" who participates in the empire's liberal self-representation, using the "creative tension between objectification and subject formation."¹⁵

The travels of Olive Christian Malvery, an Anglo-Indian woman from Lahore, present an interesting example of the playfulness and instability of identities adopted by these travelers.¹⁶ Sponsored to receive an English education and to be useful to charitable and temperance organizations in London, Malvery authored *The Soul Market* (1906), a popular work highlighting the plight of London's poor. While she adopted the persona of a metropolitan native to experience firsthand the life of London's female urban poor, she also presented herself as a native informant who paraded her Indian identity. This example shows us how both imperial and colonial selves could be performed simultaneously in response to specific situations. Hardevi similarly positions her relationship with the queen through a shifting subjecthood that expresses fascination and critique, claiming both mobility and a "rooted" selfhood. Recent historical studies on gender in Punjab suggest a fluid understanding of subjectivity as being formed through constant processes of negotiation, accommodation, and contestation with available discourses—and, therefore, agency being understood through the specifics of time and

location rather than simply through preestablished notions of subversion and conformity.¹⁷ This framework helps us understand the shifts in position that Hardevi makes in relation to Queen Victoria.

3. HARDEVI'S TRAVELS: *LONDON YATRA*

Hardevi commenced her travel to London on February 9, 1886, from Lahore, with a group of people who were going to witness the queen's jubilee. In her narrative, she points out the rarity and adventurousness of being a woman (one of two) traveling in this group and recounts the disapproval she has had to face from other women in the family and community. In a preface addressed specifically to women (the address to "*Pyari paathikaon*" can be translated as "Dear women readers"), she tells them of the respect and benefits that accrue from foreign exposure. In her opinion, women should especially nurture a desire for exposure and betterment to earn social respect. She says that people who have traveled abroad and gained exposure are well regarded. Travel enchants Hardevi with the experience of liberal modernity and shores up her sense of discursive authority back home. In *London Yatra*, she offers her account as evidence of discovery and growth.

I present myself in your service with the story of my travel abroad, with the new things that I have seen, the positive and negative thoughts that have been generated in my mind during my travels to foreign lands and the morals, manners, ethics, conduct and rites of another race. These new experiences have encouraged me to present the story to you for your pleasure. Scholars have also said that the fruits of foreign travel should be shared with friends and that doing so gives happiness to both parties. Besides, these days it is common practice that those who have traveled abroad are received with great respect by their friends and society at large and their accounts are heard with great admiration. Not only do people derive joy from these travel accounts but also gain immense knowledge.

It is very unfortunate that our sisters in Punjab, even if they travel out in the name of pilgrimage, are secluded within strict purdah and cannot experience the joy of togetherness for other reasons as well. Till now, we do not have any group or society where women from respectable homes can gather together and be happy to hear from their sisters, stories of their travels to distant lands. These helpless women are confined to homes and lead suffocating lives within even if they want to connect with each other. Now tell me, who do we complain to and who will find a solution to this huge deprivation? (i–ii)

One of the modes of subjectivity that became possible via print culture was a claim to professional authorship and the intellectual work that

it involved. For middle-class, educated women like Hardevi, being included in this sphere of writing also meant cultural power and self-affirmation. In *London Yatra*, as we can see, Hardevi regrets the confinement of her fellow women in Punjab, and the fact that they do not get to travel abroad. Even if they travel more locally for pilgrimages, they are in purdah and cannot associate with one another. Clearly, Hardevi's desire to write a travel account is related to the authority and credibility that she would get from authorship. Ruing the lack of spaces and societies where women can meet, she dedicates her book to all women who are restricted in their narrow and oppressive domestic spaces, and hopes that they derive joy from listening to other women. She indicates that the book is written in simple language for women to comprehend and asks literate women to help illiterate women partake of the pleasure that access to literature brings by reading to them.

Many women who come to meet Hardevi before her departure were apprehensive about her free movement, she tells us, but she explains that purdah (which she criticizes as a legacy of contact with "the Muslims"), should not be used to imprison women.

As far as purdah is concerned, that which you understand as our tradition, was never the practice of the *Aryas*. Our fore-fathers learnt these practices from the Muslims. You can understand that they would adopt customs of the race they had to extensively transact with. Our *Kayasth* [an upper-caste community traditionally consisting of clerks, scribes, and other "writing" castes] ancestors had close relations with the Muslim kingdom, so the practice of purdah came to be part of our belief system. However, now we live under the just British rule. It is unfair to continue to imprison our daughters within this torturous custom which has harmed them immensely and rendered them illiterate. (5–6)

Thus the narrator treats Muslim women as "the Other" even while she wishes to create and consolidate a community of women. She invokes the "just" nature of British rule to seek administrative intervention to better the condition of women (the primary subject of reform clearly being a middle-class, upper-caste Hindu woman). As she travels from Lahore to Bombay through Rajputana, Hardevi's sympathetic gaze aggregates the diverse landscapes, histories, and people of these lands and binds them together as a nation, thus assimilating them within the expansive notion of the "Arya" culture. The narratorial eye does the cultural work of imagining the nation as an upper-caste Hindu nation whose "purity" needs to be restored by erasing unwanted influences. Such racial narratives of India, which centered on the superiority of the Aryan races,

emerged from Orientalist ethnography and knowledge-production, particularly in the colonial period, and were further propagated by people like Dayanand Saraswati and his Arya Samaj followers.

Mobility and travel outside the home sharpen the sense of home, community, and nation, on one hand, and orient the writer to cosmopolitan experiences on the other. The narrative frequently attests to Hardevi's enchantment with the spectacle of Western modernity through technology. As she begins her journey on the ship, she is overawed by British technological advancement: "Many of my sisters may have heard the name of the ship but know very little about how the ship moves, how people live on it, and how they behave. The ship is a vehicle to travel on the seas and is operated in many ways. In ancient times, only wind was used to ride them. It was a difficult task and also took a lot of time. . . . Now, the skilled and wise Englishmen have devised a way to run ships on steam, like the railways" (30–31). While this awe at British modernity pervades Hardevi's writings, the focus of her description turns to her social life on the ship and later to the queen's household. In contrast, another Punjabi traveler, Jhinda Ram, focuses more closely on the mechanics involved, marveling at the technology of the ship and the Suez Canal as a "triumph of the art of engineering."¹⁸ A pleader at the Chief Court of the Punjab, Ram was an educated, privileged, middle-class traveler who undertook his trip to Europe for pleasure, publishing his account in the form of *My Trip to Europe* (1893), a book in English. Unlike Hardevi, he places European technology and the experience of freedom and democracy at the center of European modernity, rather than locating modernity within home and family.

It is Hardevi's close contact with British women on the ship that first impinges on the questions of identity and difference and makes her experience power in a closed space, which Antoinette Burton suggests is a crucial interpretive category for studying colonial power relations.¹⁹ The narrative notes the unfeeling and discriminatory attitude of an English memsahib who demands a lower berth for herself, raising a hue and cry when it is given to an Indian child. The close contact in the ship becomes a space that enables the narrator to protest: "Let me now talk a little about the arrogance and cruelty of the English race. I do not wish to include the entire race here, but only those vile and vulgar people who come to Hindustan in search of power and money. In a short span, they become power-drunk and conceited, and begin to treat human beings like animals" (47). Thus is made visible a contrast between the powerlessness of colonial subjecthood felt in India and on the ship, and the experience of freedom when she reaches England.

The physical journey becomes a rite of passage for Hardevi, whereby she must cultivate social bonds, overcome physical vulnerabilities, and struggle with the arduousness of the travel, not just because of the usual seasickness, but due to the additional difficulty in communication and the fear of being ridiculed. Acquiring confidence and emerging from these difficulties, she must produce a stable, confident self to explain her experiences to women back home. The passage through Italy and Egypt becomes a story of how a woman can overcome her fears and language problems; the description of cultures, social practices, and the position of women in Aden, Egypt, Italy, and France allow her to stretch her perspective to cultures outside India. And yet, almost paradoxically, it reinforces her Indianness. Significantly, she begins to envisage the presence of women as conscious civic subjects, giving to women a role in the history and formation of the nation. While describing the social mores of Switzerland, she writes:

The women of this fortunate land enjoy full freedom to live their lives as they please. When I saw them, I was reminded of my own unfortunate sisters who live a life of complete subjection and dependence. Their images floated in my anguished mind and made me think that if God has created all things and human beings as equal on earth, why have their destinies not been equally scripted? What have the unfortunate, hapless women of India done to deserve this fate of subservience and suffering? Alas! Till when will they have to endure this animal life of complete subjection, in which era will they be liberated so that they can realize their human life fully? (116–17)

This claim to civic subjecthood, expressed here in the language of women's rights, will be reiterated in *London Jubilee* as the experience of a colonial subject, as Hardevi participates in the grandeur of the jubilee celebrations.

4. QUEEN VICTORIA THROUGH HARDEVI'S EYES: *LONDON JUBILEE*

London Jubilee, written shortly after *London Yatra*, is an eyewitness description of the pomp and ceremony that accompanied the commemoration of fifty years of Queen Victoria's rule. While Hardevi describes in detail the presence of Indian royalty, discussing their positions of importance in the celebrations, her focus is more fully trained on the position of Indian women, as subjects of the queen's empire, and on the queen's family life. Harking on the promise of the liberal empire to women, and hailing the queen's rule as a moment of justice and progress for

women, she hopes that this liberalism will be no mere token and will deliver substantial freedom to women in India. The stance adopted is not antagonistic to imperial authority—in fact, the desire to assimilate into the celebratory crowd is visible. While she critiqued the power and arrogance of colonial rule in *London Yatra*, *London Jubilee* instead draws attention to the position of Indian women by employing the language of rationality and cooperation. The narratorial voice calls for a change within the system by showing loyalty to the “*Kaiser-i-Hind*,” the empress of India, rather than using the language of resistance within the book. Hardevi’s approach anticipates the later memoir of Sunity Devee, maharani of Cooch Behar, which recalled her first meeting with the queen in 1887—also on the occasion of the queen’s jubilee. The maharani, herself a committed proponent of women’s education and rights, describes her awe at the queen as a widely shared sentiment: “To us Indians she was more or less a legendary figure, endowed with wonderful attributes, an ideal ruler and an ideal woman, linked to our hearts across ‘the black water’ by silken chains of love and loyalty. . . . I was delighted to find that I had not been disappointed in my ideal, and felt eager to go back to India that I might tell my country-women about our wonderful Empress.”²⁰

As with Hardevi, the celebration of the “ideal woman” becomes an inspiring example to recount to “my country-women.” Later in the narrative, however, Sunity Devee offers a more ambiguous position on the injustice of being the queen’s colonial subject.²¹ In many other such accounts, too, we find colonial subjecthood being constantly improvised and repositioned depending on the context: it is never a stable entity. As Codell notes about colonial subjectivity, there is a whole range of self-positionings and “subjectivities between Anglicized hegemony and indigenously subalternity” in writings by Indians.²²

Whereas Hardevi celebrates the queen in *London Jubilee*, writing her eyewitness account as a supportive colonial subject, the biting critique she articulates in *London Yatra* could also be turned against the monarchy. Years later, in the periodical *Bharat Bhagini*, Hardevi writes sharp words on the occasion of the queen’s death, directed against the British government. Poor India, she comments, will be forced to show “*rajbhakti*” (monarchism) by coughing up fifty lakh (five million) rupees for a memorial, while the rich West will contribute twenty-five lakhs, just half that figure.²³

But all that is to come. In *London Jubilee*, instead, we see her craft the empress of India into an exemplar of reformist ideals. In an important

act of cultural translation, moreover, Hardevi reclaims the queen into the making of a modern “*sugrahini*” (good housewife). She projects modern conjugality onto the married life of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, highlighting his love for her and their partnership in bringing up children, the fact that he was particularly involved in their education and “would frequently hold instructive sessions for them with loving care” (43). The tender moments of the prince supporting his wife and her public duties after childbirth are offered as an example of ideal conjugal love for women in “modern” domestic spaces in India.

The queen writes in her book that the prince took great care of her during confinement, serving her with his own hands. When she would be incapable of moving, he would sit on a couch near her bed and would perform her political and domestic duties. He would drag her wheelchair himself and take her wherever she wanted, even if he was absorbed in his desired interests. He would run to her instantaneously with a smile, whenever called. She did not ever see even an iota of anger or harshness on his face. God bless such a caring beloved always and in all circumstances. (40–41)

If the prince appears as a model husband and father, the queen is rendered into an image of the “Arya” woman who is both highly educated and devoted to her husband and children: “The queen fulfilled all her filial duties efficiently, as is the duty of a *sugrahini*. She was devoted to her husband, cared for her children and their education, and fulfilled her duties towards the household and the state to the satisfaction of her subjects” (44). Hardevi remarks that the queen followed her “*pativrata dharma*” (duty as a faithful wife), even after the death of her husband, by living a simple and frugal life, thus assessing Queen Victoria through the Arya Samaj aesthetic of austerity and domestic efficiency that the association advocated for women. The reform movements of the time were instrumental in formulating the notion of an ideal, modern woman and her *stridharma* within an egalitarian Hinduism, and Hardevi’s appropriation of the queen into this is almost, in Homi Bhabha’s terms, an “insurgent act of cultural translation.”²⁴

The writers of our *shastras* have prescribed *pativrata dharma* for women, which our Queen demonstrated in every respect in her domestic life. There was no royal or domestic subject on which she would take a decision on her own, without consulting her husband. Her pleasure, happiness, and opinion lay in her husband’s happiness. The prince reciprocated similarly—it seemed as if they were a single soul in two different bodies that were outwardly male and female. There was no occasion, journey, or festivity in which

they were not together—they were inseparable like shadows, even in their daily routine. (38)

The subordinate *pativrata* model of taking no decision on her own undergoes a subtle shift toward a more “companionate” model of the marriage, as the narrative foregrounds the prince’s reciprocal devotion.

The narrator also exhorts Indian women to claim their fair share of education and modernity under their benevolent ruler—a woman herself and a powerful symbol of women’s achievement, both in her private and public life. While the queen’s simplicity and subordinate model of femininity fits into the “ideal woman” construct of the reform discourse, it is her power as a public figure that is hailed to ask for women’s participation in public spaces.

The people of my country, who have seen the *rajahs* of even small principalities, loaded with diamonds, pearls, rubies, gems, gold, and velvet, will probably expect the queen, who is the ruler of these *rajahs*, and the ruler of England, to surpass them in grandeur, and her procession to be magnificent. This misconception should be removed from their mind because our queen is a very simple-minded person. Ever since her husband departed for his heavenly abode, she has not adorned herself with jewels, royal robes, or even colored clothes. As far as her procession was concerned, it would not be wrong to say that as compared with the most minor of our *rajahs*, this entourage was half the size. However, if we consider the grandeur and significance of her empire, then no one else can match its glory. (14–15)

It is in these words that Hardevi seeks to reconcile the grandeur of the monarch with the humility of the queen as a woman, thus holding her as an exemplar for appropriate domesticity as well as an inspiration for the public participation of women in India. The description of the queen’s modest attire, comportment, and entourage also conforms to the Arya Samaj ideal of austerity.

As a colonial subject, Hardevi records the benefits that have accrued to Indian women on account of being subjects of a woman ruler, mentioning the queen’s hand in establishing the Lady Dufferin fund for the medical aid of women in India as a sign of her largesse and munificence. While Hardevi invokes the benevolence of the queen to negotiate reforms for Indian women, ruptures between her liberal expectations and colonial subjecthood do show up. When the queen declares that she will give all the gifts that she has received on the occasion of her jubilee to charity, the narrator praises her but advises at the same time that the queen should spend the money received in gifts on the colonies

where the gifts have come from: “She made it known to everyone through newspapers that she would not use any of her gifts for private purposes or consume them, but give them away for philanthropic use. . . . I have a request to make of the queen—the riches that have come from other nations should be divided into two and both nations should benefit from its charitable use” (3).

One finds that Indian women who could access the colonial state frequently adopted the approach of strategizing with the British government and seeking reform through the government. A letter written in response to child marriages by “a Hindu lady” published in 1885 in the *Journal of the National Indian Association*, which had appeared earlier in the *Times of India*, said: “I have been thinking, Sir, for a long time of some means by which we could escape the grinding thralldom of this wicked custom, and the only efficient remedy that suggested itself to me was to appeal to Government to come to our help.”²⁵ She takes it upon herself to suggest reforms and legal measures because the prominent men of reform have vested interests, and therefore their opinion cannot be relied upon.

These examples further establish the inadequacy of understanding all responses to colonial rule within the neat frames of victimhood, co-option, and resistance. It is particularly interesting that women, including Hardevi, look to collaborating strategically with the colonial government, rather than outrightly resisting British intervention in customary practices like most reform organizations. Hardevi thus argues that the Western model of the queen’s household is indeed worthy of replication and mimicry in modern households in India, and the colonial regime has to make good on its promise of reform for Indian women. At the same time, she articulates modern womanhood, as exemplified by the queen, in the locally specific vocabulary of *pativrata* and *sugrahini* ideals, thus vernacularizing the queen by rendering her into a local imaginary. The simultaneous impulses of mimicry and vernacularization thus produce a shifting, ambivalent response to the queen. Travel to the heart of the empire becomes an occasion for Hardevi to articulate these responses and assert her claim to make demands as a subject.

5. CONCLUSION

Hardevi’s travel narratives are significant in the context of women’s absence in scholarship on the print cultures of colonial Punjab. Her

work shows that at a time when ethics and moral conduct of women in private and public spheres were being constantly redefined by reformers and the state, women were able to imagine languages of self-articulation, participation, intervention, and resistance. They modulated oral and written cultures into new genres of expression, negotiated modes of subjectivity with the reform discourse, contested the reform idealization of women, and imaginatively delineated affective communities of belief, gendered kinship, transnational solidarities, and literary and linguistic sensibilities.

In her travel writings, Hardevi uses mimicry and difference strategically, and exercises agency to articulate a modern, civic subjecthood for Indian women as part of the queen's empire. Rather than valorize the idea of "agency," my attempt in this essay has been to show that its enactment in Hardevi's travel writings occurs through shifts in stances and multiple strategies in relating to the queen—strategies of appeal, assimilation, collaboration, contestation, and critique. This articulation of civic subjecthood negotiates with both the reformists and the colonial authorities back home, and creates a space for the Hindu woman to demand and negotiate rights as a civic subject of the queen rather than as an object of missionary and colonial benevolence. Hardevi's act of writing itself can be interpreted as a political act of constituting a self-identity as well as the broader cultural identity of the "Arya" woman, an urgent question of the time. It is an "epistemological strategy" as well, because it enacts the construction of a conceptual space to articulate identity formation.²⁶ In that sense, Hardevi gains not only physical mobility—rather, discursive and conceptual possibilities for imagining a gendered community also open up. She attempts to bring more legitimacy to this community by appropriating and attaching to it the powerful symbol of Queen Victoria. This appropriation of the queen as an ideal *pativrata* arguably becomes a power move to gain approval for women's changed roles in the domestic sphere as well as their presence in the public sphere.

In the process, even if Hardevi upholds the narrative of the West as a font of modernity, which it was destined to disseminate to other parts of the world, she asserts the presence of other voices—gendered voices that demand rights based on liberal citizenship of the queen's empire. At the same time, Hardevi's account of "vernacular" Queen Victoria draws our attention to the need to understand Indian as well as Western modernity as shaped by cross-cultural encounters and cultural translations, rather than exclusively through and within national boundaries.

NOTES

1. Hardevi, *London Yatra*. Translations from Hardevi's *London Yatra* and *London Jubilee* are mine. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
2. Banerjee, *The Mortal God*, 52.
3. Banerjee, *The Mortal God*, 76.
4. Sarala Devi (1872–1945) was the daughter of Swarnakumari Debi (Rabindranath Tagore's sister) and editor of *Bharati*, a monthly journal, from 1895. In 1905 she married Ram Bhuj Dutt Chaudhari, an Arya Samaj Congress member, and moved to Lahore. She was the keeper of Hindustan Printing Press, Lahore. Kamala Sathianadhan was a writer and editor of *The Indian Ladies Magazine*, published in Madras from 1901 to 1918 under her editorship, and later from 1927 to 1938. The periodical published articles on women's education, social reform, and political activism, and was influential in constructing a gendered middle-class identity by negotiating conservative and progressive opinions. It was also a conscious attempt to build transregional print networks among women.
5. Bhandari, "Print and the Emergence," 269.
6. Bhandari, "Print and the Emergence," 269.
7. Mir, *The Social Space of Language*, 61.
8. *Indian Magazine*, no. 220 (April 1889).
9. Burton and Hofmeyr, *Ten Books*, 2.
10. Burton and Hofmeyr, *Ten Books*, 4.
11. Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press*, 9.
12. For more on this idea, see Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press*.
13. Codell, "The Empire Writes Back," 18.
14. The works of Michael Fisher, Shompa Lahiri, Simonti Sen, Satadru Sen, and Ruvani Ranasinha are important in the context mentioned. See Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism*; Lahiri, *Indian Mobilities*; Sen, *Migrant Races*; Sen, *Travels to Europe*; Ranasinha et al., *South Asians*.
15. Lahiri, *Indian Mobilities*, 83–84.
16. Lahiri, *Indian Mobilities*.
17. For more on this, see Malhotra, "Miracles for the Marginal?" and Malhotra, "Print and Bazaar Literature."
18. Ram, *My Trip to Europe*, 3.
19. Burton, "Epilogue."
20. Devee, *Autobiography*, 108.

21. For more on this, see Mantena, “Popular Sovereignty and Anti-colonialism.” Mantena sees the late nineteenth century as a historical moment when imperial citizenship and the liberal promise of equality, education, economic prosperity, and self-government, through which British rule in India was legitimized, came under strain. Late nineteenth-century anticolonial critique came from a “clash between a retreating imperial liberalism and Indian liberal assertion” (305), as exemplified by Dadabhai Naoroji’s drain theory, which critiqued economic exploitation of India and nonfulfillment of the promise of economic prosperity within imperial institutions (*Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*). See also Banerjee, *The Mortal God*, 202. When talking about Sunity Devee, Banerjee describes this tension between liberal expectations and critique borne out of their nonfulfillment thus: “this imperial patriotism remained in tension with subtle—and deliberately personalized—expressions of discontent at colonial rule” (202).
22. Codell, “The Empire Writes Back,” 189.
23. *Bharat Bhagini* 14, no. 1 (January 1902).
24. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 7.
25. “Child Marriage in India,” 420.
26. Term used by Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations*, 33, cited in Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel and Postnational Identity*, 19.

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