

Original Paper

The Politics of Travel: The Travel Memoirs of Mirza Sheikh

I'tesamuddin and Sake Dean Mahomed

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Received: February 8, 2020 Accepted: February 17, 2020 Online Published: February 24, 2020

doi:10.22158/selt.v8n1p66

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/selt.v8n1p66>

Abstract

*Representation of the East in 18th century western travel narratives was an outcome of a European aesthetic sensibility that thrived on imperial jingoism. The 18th century Indian travel writings proved that East could not be discredited as “exotic” and “orientalist” or its history be judged as a “discourse of curiosity”. The West had its share of mystery that had to be unravelled for the curious visitor from the East. Dean Mahomed’s *The Travels of Dean Mahomed* is a fascinating travelogue cum autobiography of an Indian immigrant as an insider and outsider in India, Ireland and England. I’tesamuddin’s *The Wonders of Vilayet* is a travel-memoir that addresses the politics of representation. These 18th century travelographies demystify “vilayet” in more ways than one. They analyse the West from a variety of tropes from gender, to religion and racism to otherness and identity. This paper attempts a comparative analyses of the two texts from the point of view of 18th century travel writing and representations through the idea of journey. It seeks to highlight the concept of “orientalism in reverse” and show how memoirs can be read as counterbalancing textual responses to counteract dominant western voices.*

Keywords

Oriental, Sake Dean Mahomed, Sheikh I’tesamuddin, Vilayet, Travel, Memoir

1. Introduction

The period from 1700-1830 brought a new dimension to the very ethos of travel writing. As Elizabeth A. Bohls opines, “...the medieval paradigms of pilgrimage and crusade gave way to new modes of engagement with observed experience and curiosity about other cultures” (p. xiv). It was the age of modern tourism that saw a shift from chivalric adventure to venture capitalism and imperial expansion. This period also saw the rise of travel writers in the form of diplomats, merchants, explorers, scientists,

and colonizers. It also saw the appearance of the utilitarian traveler- a traveller who was a “native” but who managed to circumnavigate in a relatively unconstrained manner constructing an anodyne personae of sorts. It can be inferred that 18th century Indian travel writings proved that East was no longer to be discredited as “exotic” and “orientalist” or its history be judged as a mere “discourse of curiosity”. The West too had its share of mystery that had to be unravelled for the curious visitor from the East. Thus it can be argued that rendering the foreign familiar was an agenda of travel writings by travellers from the East to the West. It has been discerned that most travelogues and travel writers of this period exhibited a certain self-consciousness and sensibility that gave a definitive shape to their encounters in foreign lands. Their negotiations with people, locale, society, customs and language is a mediation between observed sights and felt experiences. The responses elicited by these variables is the “interplay” between the observer and the observed. Representation of the East in 18th century Western travel narratives was an outcome of a European aesthetic sensibility that thrived on imperial jingoism- a compilation of complex and diffused images advertising an Orientalist idea of the East. Indian travel literature to 18th century Britain “related to human curiosity and to a travel writer’s desire to mediate between things foreign and things familiar, to help us understand that world which is other to us” (Blanton, 2). Moreover as Casey Blanton posits in *Travel Writing: The Self and the World* (2002), these travelogues also deal with the “traveler’s own philosophical biases and preconceptions and the tests those ideas and prejudices endure as a result of the journey” (p. 5). I’tesamuddin’s *The Wonders of Vilayet* is one such travel-memoir that addresses the politics of representation. Though I’tesamuddin does not qualify as a “colonial subject”, his memoir demystifies *vilayet* in more ways than one. It analyses a variety of tropes from gender, to religion and racism to otherness and identity. Dean Mahomed’s *The Travels of Dean Mahomed* is a fascinating account of an Indian immigrant as an insider and outsider in India, Ireland and England. The book throws open for the wide-eyed Easterner, the world of the West which was as mystifying as a fantasy world. Dean Mahomed’s travelogue cum autobiography confidently presents the real India for the West. Both the writers through their writings highlight the concept of “orientalism in reverse”. These texts also show how memoirs can be read as counterbalancing textual responses to counteract dominant Western voices. Kipling’s palpable politics of empire was challenged through the politics of travel. Both I’tesamuddin and Dean Mahomed can be seen as cultural interlocutors involved in unraveling the West for the East and the East for the West. The disparity between the power structure of the West and the East is persistent and is visible in their dealings with the English and vice versa. Perhaps the only difference between the two is that one is more Indocentric in his attitude and chooses to come back while the other harbours a more syncretic attitude towards the zeitgeist of the times and decides to stay back. But both can be seen as wielding the power to narrate about their nation at large and society in particular. These writings posed a challenge to the images constructed by West for their consumption and also became powerful modes of resistance to European cultural domination. The writings of I’tesamuddin and Dean Mahomed are, “informed by a clear and direct desire to apprise a certain public of what was experienced during the travels” (*Other*

Routes, Khair, p. 24). Thus these writings are more secular and multicultural in their approach, in the sense they thwart the imperialist agenda of laying claim to a “historically insular all-white England” (Fisher, p. 17). It can be argued that both the narratives mediate a consciousness that monitors the journey, judges, thinks, confesses, changes and even grows. Because both deal with actual, lived experiences and not abstract, yet compelling images of an East that was “oriental”, “decadent”, and “superstitious” constructed in “pretravel” narratives that seduced the white West populace. For as Edward Said says in *Orientalism* (2001), “...culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element” (p. xiii). Both I’tesamuddin and Dean Mahomed reflect their society’s repository of the best knowledge and philosophy which acts as a palliative that neutralizes the capitalist, degenerating and brutalizing side effects of Western modernization. Both successfully paint a very fluid picture of India and Britain, one that is not monolithic and deterministic. In their dealings with the English both come across as politically and intellectually refined. Both basically present a pluralistic vision of themselves, as travellers- Indian, Bengali and Muslim, albeit from the perspective of a disenfranchised minority. And the reason for this lies in the fact that both use their personal experiences and reflections to extrapolate and put before their readers a factual account of their travel. Their writing is devoid of fantastical descriptions, unreliable data and egotistical narrative style. Michael H Fisher in *Counterflows to Colonialism* (2004), substantiates this thought by saying that educated Indians who travelled, “...resisted British dominance, pursued their own agendas, and sought to reshape British rule according to their own values, although usually from a position of subordination” (p. 14). Thus being in Britain gave them the power to socialize with the Britons and to address them directly in their own ways and in their own terms. I’tesamuddin is aesthetically aware of the sights and sounds of London- “There is no city on earth as large or beautiful, and it is beyond my powers to describe it fittingly” (p. 55). He goes to appreciate the various landmarks he comes across- “Among them the most imposing is St. Paul’s Cathedral. Its splendid design and excellent construction defy description, and must be seen to be appreciated” (p. 57); and no writer (be it precolonial, colonial or postcolonial) can resist overlooking the comparative and associative overtones that illustrate such writings- “The bazaars and streets of London are spacious and well-planned. Examples of such streets can be seen now-a-days in parts of Calcutta” (p. 67).

Dean Mahomed is simply astounded by the range of impressions encountered in Cork,

Cork would have been the first major European city he encountered. At one level, much would have seemed strangely familiar from his life in Calcutta. Both cities rose out of swampy, low-lying land along a river (although hills surrounding Cork differed from the flat deltaic lands around Calcutta). Architecturally, Calcutta and Cork shared the same mercantile orientation that favoured a mix of practical commercial ware-houses and neo-classic public buildings set among prosperous bourgeois homes. Indeed, both cities contained many of the same families and values characteristic of the burgeoning commercial classes of British empire (p. 202).

Thus the politics of travel lies in the fact that travellers from the East did not polemicize their views

about the Western ‘other’ unlike the Western epistemology that advertised a heavily exotic, erotic and antiquated image of the East- a polarized geophysical and geopolitical construct that oscillated between Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “...Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover! / A savage place! as holy and enchanted...” and Rudyard Kipling’s “happy Asiatic disorder”.

2. Method

And the first tenet on which the politics of travel rests is appropriating language. Most Eastern travellers from this time explicitly interpreted the West through their native tongues. The Hindustani dialect served as a tool to destabilize the power structure. They did not use the language of the Center to unriddle its mysteries; rather the use of the marginalized languages gave the traveller a legitimacy and a voice to address and question the discourse of power. The very use of the word *vilayet* warranted the purpose of the Easterner. *Vilayet* was the proverbial generic term for a foreign land; especially (a name for) England, Britain, or Europe. Britain was always *Vilayat* - the metonymic and Indocentric term for the white/foreign “Other” that was more often than not the locus of fancy for the man of East. By the use of the word *vilayet*, I’tesamuddin though unconsciously acknowledges Britain as a major or dominant administrative province in the context of the age of high imperialism but also reduces its position as the signifying authority, linguistically. *The Wonders of Vilayet* shows how the East fought passivity by actively usurping the dominion of language and territory of the whites. Through his profuse use of words in the Hindustani dialect, I’tesamuddin has his own interpretations for words that are foreign to him- the English are *firinghees* (a term of disparagement akin to the word *mlechcha* or a debased foreigner). English dancers are beautiful like *houris*, the police chief is *kotwal*, performers with antics are *habshi*, monetary denominations are interpreted as *asharfi*, English shows and spectacles are *tamasha*, colleges like Oxford are like a *madrasah*, a royal court is *darbar* and a royal meeting is a *majlis*. It is interesting to note that I’tesamuddin exoticizes the West through language.

It is “discourse of curiosity” in reverse. As Harish Trivedi vindicates, “I’tesamuddin wrote his account of the West in Persian, then the language of the Indian ruling elite, from the perspective not of an immigrant who must adapt to survive but rather of a passing visitor who needs make no concessions whatever” (p. 171). I’tesamuddin’s *The Wonders of Vilayet* serves as a good example of “a product of serious cultural thinking about comparative societies and multiple natures in human nature” (Elizabeth A Bohls, p. xxi),

...I merely wish to say that each nation has its own peculiar customs and practices, and so the food of one country will be pleasant to the taste of its natives, but to foreigners it may be unpalatable. We should remember in particular that between your manners and customs and ours there is the difference of East and West (I’tesamuddin, p. 140).

Eighteenth-century travel writing included a lot of impersonal description as well as first-person narration. And I’tesamuddin makes profuse use of the first person to reinforce his stance as a traveller who is certainly not ‘the other’:

The English had never seen an Indian dressed as I was. They considered me a great curiosity and flocked to have a look. The friendliness of the English and, more particularly, the sight of their lovely women dispelled the sorrow of solitude and cheered me greatly. They continued to stare at my clothes and countenance, while I gazed at their astonishing loveliness. How ironic that I, who had gone there to enjoy a spectacle became a spectacle myself. (p. 53)

The use of first person gives the narrative veracity, authenticity and a legitimacy that had never characterized earlier travel writings. The confessional tone and the assertiveness of the narrator helps him build a rapport- a connection with the reader. I'tesamuddin is not just a bystander who observes things from the sidelines. He anchors his dealings with the English and the sights and sounds he experiences in the moment. It is a tacit reflection of the ownership of his time in Britain. There is no doubt that he is in possession of his mental acumen and conveys all that he perceives with a certain credibility. In contrast the language of the colonizer is more inclusive and nebulous in nature- "We are faced with a crisis. If you rise to meet it you will help preserve our sovereignty and add to the nation's glory" (p. 108). When Captain Swinton wishes to take Mirza Sheik I'tesamuddin with him on a tour of Europe, he invites him explicitly saying, "I intend to travel, and would like to take you with me. We shall visit the different countries of Europe, where the experience of seeing many curiosities and spectacles will be instructive for us both" (p. 138). But the Mirza deduces an ulterior motive behind the Captain's words and prudently observes,

Actually, the true reason behind Captain Swinton's invitation was that ignorant people, seeing me in my Indian gentleman's costume, would take me for a nobleman perhaps a Nawab's brother and would infer that since Captain Swinton had brought me as a travelling companion he must have risen to great eminence in Bengal. (p. 138)

It would be interesting to note at this juncture that Mirza Sheik I'tesamuddin's idea of *vilayet* or foreign land was "the emporium of beauty, where women of surpassing loveliness are common, and wealthy and virtuous ones are not hard to find" (p. 79). He glamourizes and sexualizes the West. And his resistance to Europe's wonders and charms lies in his religious faith and identity- "I would much rather live in poverty in my own country than in affluence in yours, and to me the dusky Indian women are dearer than the fairy-faced Firinghee damsels" (p. 138). His staunch Muslim personality becomes his social and cultural talisman. He takes pride in his ancestry, as Prophet Mohammed's descendants and his obsession with halal food. And he strongly supports his ethos when he says, "It goes directly against the principles of Islam to sacrifice religion for the sake of the world" (p. 138). Thus he is able to counteract his effeminacy in dressing and other habits and Swinton's scathing remark that "The Bengalis are notorious among Indians for their folly and stupidity" (p. 141), with an equally caustic retort, "There is no country in the world where there are no stupid and ignorant people. In fact they are the majority" (p. 85).

One cannot help but notice the conflicting images that are projected by both the East and the West. If the East is-

These Indians shut themselves up with their women in the zenana and become effeminate in their ways, flirting as if they were women. They wear churidar trousers, churidar turbans, bright kurtas, that end in a flared skirt such as women wear, apply perfume to the breast, antimony on their eyes, henna on their palms, stain their teeth with missee, and keep long hair, which they groom with scented oils and tie into a knot. (p. 125)

Then the West is,

The English...spend their time in studious and creative pursuits. They engage in researches in science, medicine and technology, make scholarly studies in fields like history and philosophy, seek means to improve efficiency of factories and machinery, and write books so that mankind may benefit from their discoveries... (p. 126)

It would be interesting to deviate a little from the point under discussion to see how Europeans who visited England during this time wrote about the life and times of England. Paul Hentzner, a 17th century lawyer from Brandenburg, who wrote about his visit to England in his *Travels in England, 1958* writes,

The English are grave like the Germans, lovers of show; followed wherever they go by whole troops of servants, who wear their masters' arms in silver fastened to their left arms and are not undeservedly ridiculed for wearing tails hanging down their backs. They excel in dancing and music, for they are active and lively, though of a thicker neck than the French; they cut their hair close on the middle of the head, letting it grow on their side; they are good sailors and better pirates, cunning, treacherous, and thievish; above 300 are said to be hanged annually at London: beheading with them is less infamous than hanging; they give the wall as the place of honour; hawking is the common sport with the gentry (Mancall, p. 390).

Hentzner's observation and description is both meticulous and perceptible. He writes what he sees and doesn't 'fit' his opinion to make his narrative fanciful for the western audience. It is quite factual and matches what others from non-European continents wrote about England. In fact his prose is shorn off any grandiose manner of projecting the English. It is clinical and precise. Incidentally both I'tesamuddin and Hentzner- geographically apart, belonging to slightly diverse zeitgeist and social milieus, harbor similar views regarding England's attitude towards slaves and slavery. If I'tesamuddin writes, "In England everyone is free; no one can lord it over another, and there is no such thing as master and slave..." (p. 107) then Paul Hentzner states about the English that, "They are powerful in the field, successful against their enemies, impatient of anything like slavery..." (Mancall, p. 390). The degree of verisimilitude in both the writings proves the argument that colonial discourses did repudiate from bestowing rational agency to colonized people. The two descriptions also vindicate that travel and writing about places is about the gaze of power. The Europeans used it to erase and rewrite about other non-European ethnicities, thus freezing them as stagnant cultures for ages. The non-Europeans on the other hand, used it to question Eurocentricity, cultural dominance and historical marginalisation.

I'tesamuddin is also the typical ambivalent tourist who tells a lot about himself and his home culture, as

about the places and cultures he visits. He admires the English for their scientific temper, technological progress, their physical prowess and endurance and feels ashamed and sorrowful of the "...Indian gentry who are engrossed in writing poems in Persian and Hindi in praise of a mistress' face, or of the wine, the goblet, or a bawd" (p. 126). But he rationalises and grasps the fact that intellectual and technical superiority is no match for aesthetic sensibility and nobility, which "is not measured by worldly wealth but consists in acquiring knowledge, in leading an upright life, and in obeying the laws of Allah and his prophet" (p. 141). It would not be inappropriate to mention Dean Mahomed's preoccupation with Islam and his nuanced understanding of his faith,

The Mahometans are strict adherents to the tenets of their religion, which does not, by any means, consist in that enthusiastic veneration for Mahomet so generally conceived: it considers much more, as its primary object, the unity of the supreme Being, under the name of Alla: Mahomet is only regarded in a secondary point of view, as the missionary of that unity,... (Dean Mahomed, p. XIV)

Both I'tesamuddin and Dean Mahomed posit a very pan-Islamic world view towards their religion. They are unencumbered by the pseudo trappings of their faith as they are able to discern between the idea of a supreme being and a human missionary. Both challenge the superfluous idea of Islamophobia that was being circulated in the Western world.

I'tesamuddin comes across as an aesthetically informed and cosmopolitan traveller, who is culturally mobile and receptive. *The Wonders of Vilayet* is replete with snippets of historical anecdotes, advice to the readers on do's and don'ts and is premised upon verifiable facts. I'tesamuddin is an acute observer, a judicious narrator using a sober and unornamented prose style, thereby shaping the global consciousness of the subsequent colonized traveller. The fact that he apprehends the West as a "spectacle" goes on to show that he has successfully and eclectically subverted the West's claims to cultural and political hegemony.

3. Discussion

Edward W Said in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) states that "...all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (p. xxix). This is the crux of Dean Mahomed's Travels, which generated speculations regarding representations, history, language, culture and capitalist modernity. Through his knowledge of Eastern medicinal and culinary techniques he challenged the paradigmatic limits of Eurocentric Enlightenment. Based on his observations of the English society and turning his "curry roots" into a survival strategy, Dean Mahomed opens the "Hindostani Coffee House" in 1810. An idea ahead of its time, this coffee house catered to the expectations of the affluent English clientele, "He sought to appeal and cater not to the numerous Indians then living in London but rather to the same type of men who had been his patrons in the past: Europeans who had worked or lived in India, men he called 'Indian gentlemen'" (p. 257). At a time when taverns and coffee houses were becoming popular, the

Hindostanee Coffee House provided authentic Indian cuisine and ambience to its European patrons. It served Hookah with real Chilm tobacco along with “Indianised” English food.

Dean Mahomed prepared a range of meat and vegetable dishes with Indian spices served with seasoned rice. He constructed bamboo-cane sofas and chairs on which the patrons would recline or sit. He adorned the walls with a range of paintings including Indian landscapes, Indians engaged in various social activities and sporting scenes set in India. One observer reported “Chinese pictures” as well, so he may have drawn upon Asia generally rather than India alone. In a separate ensuite smoking room, he offered ornate hookahs with specially prepared tobacco blended with Indian herbs. (p. 257)

This was quintessentially “oriental” and “exotic” for the English. They revelled in the charms of the “other” and its world. The Hindostanee Coffee House, which was Dean Mahomed’s establishment, was advertised in the Times newspaper in the following way,

HINDOSTANEE COFFEE-HOUSE, No.34 George-street, Portman Square- MAHOMED, East-Indian, informs the Nobility and Gentry, he has fitted up the above house, neatly and elegantly, for the entertainment of Indian gentlemen, where they may enjoy the Hoakha, with real Chilm tobacco, and Indian dishes, in the highest perfection, and allowed by the greatest epicures to be unequalled to any curries ever made in England with choice wines, and every accommodation, and now looks up to them for their future patronage and support, and gratefully acknowledges himself indebted for their former favours, and trusts it will merit the highest satisfaction when made known to the public. (p. 258)

This advertisement not only made an appeal to elite patrons but it also reflected, “Dean Mahomed’s continuing public orientation towards Europeans who had traded or ruled in India...” (p. 258).

It would not be wrong to say that the “politics of location” operates here, where the traveller does not innocuously “discover” a place, but rather constructs through a conscious and concerted effort, what Homi Bhabha states in *The Location of Culture* (2014),

...those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in between” spaces provide the terrain of elaborating strategies of selfhood- singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (p. 2)

Dean Mahomed’s memoir *The First Indian Author in English, Dean Mahomed (1750-1851) in India, Ireland and England*, one of the earliest accounts of England by an Indian, toys with this idea and many others to bring to life his view of England. The 19th century is seen as the intellectual renaissance for immigrants and the colonized. The “journeys of migration” as Homi Bhabha calls it, wrought a profound change in the way England was perceived. Dean Mahomed was a subaltern in the East Indian Army and later a practitioner of “oriental” medicine (therapeutic massage and herbal steam bath) in London and the seaside resort of Brighton. Published in Cork in 1794, *The Travels of Dean Mahomed* presented as a series of epistles is a fascinating account of an Indian immigrant as an insider and

outsider in India, Ireland and England. Dean Mahomed was a brilliant entrepreneur who marketed “brand India” in the land of Gora Sahibs successfully,

The people of India, in general, are peculiarly favoured by Providence in the possession of all that can cheer the mind and allure the eye, and tho’ the situation of Eden is only traced in the Poet’s creative fancy, the traveler beholds with admiration the face of this delightful country, on which he discovers tracts that resemble those so finely drawn by the animated pencil of Milton. You will here behold the generous soil crowned with various plenty; the garden beautifully diversified with the gayest flowers diffusing their fragrance on the bosom of the air; and the very bowels of the earth enriched with inestimable mines of gold and diamonds. Possessed of all that is enviable in life, we are still more happy in the exercise of benevolence and goodwill to each other, devoid of every species of fraud or low cunning (p. I, p. 15).

Dean Mahomed’s experiences in imperial England weaves a rich tapestry of racial, national, colonial and post-colonial identities to form an enriching idea of England. The book refuses to adopt the 18th century travel narrative idiom by not titillating the readers with descriptions of the strange customs of foreigners. Sake Dean Mahomet (that was how he spelt his name), not only set up a bath house offering “oriental” massage to the affluent Londoners but also ended up by giving the world a name for a hair-cleaner-“shampoo” originally *champi* in Hindi. It is a classic example of transculturation-destabilizing the colonizer’s language by incorporating an Indian word into the English speaking lexicon. It is believed that the word and the concept of shampooing came into widespread usage in the West through him. Dean Mahomed, through his shampooing technique, assimilates and integrates himself within the larger group of the White society while retaining his own self-identity. He re-invents himself and re-invents the idea that shampooing which was regarded as an invigorating and luxurious massage in India was actually a most surprisingly powerful remedy in England. Later, Dean Mahomed and his wife Jane transformed the conventional vapour bath to a unique experience of an Indian form of bath,

To create his “Indian Medicated Vapour Bath”, Dean Mahomed apparently simply modified the apparatus described in Cochrane’s vapour bath with the addition of alleged Indian elements...Dean Mahomed used a wooden framework, painted to resemble bamboo, in place of Cochrane’s whalebone. Into the vapourizing chamber, Dean Mahomed placed various substances which he identified as exotic “Indian herbs”, known and obtained from India exclusively by himself. Otherwise, he used the same type of conventional white flannel cloth, chair with foot-stool. Thermometers, and “flesh and bath brushes”, that several other bath house keepers routinely employed. (pp. 275-276)

In more ways than one, Dean Mahomed had to manoeuvre himself, within the limits of his environment to recreate himself and define India for the Westerners because the image of India that was prevalent during those days was that of the “exotic” variety. Thus his “particular self-location as an artless Indian writing for a sophisticated European audience” (p. 224), is strategic. He is a “Native” but he is not a

marginalized other. For Dean Mahomed, the challenge was to present a more “authentic” image of India. He very artfully plays with the word “exotic” to show his audience an image of England that literally thrived on this exoticism of its colonized territory for survival. It was the ornamentation in Mahomed’s Bath that made them so exotically appealing. He absolutely played with the psyche of his patients and gave them what their contracted minds had envisioned the East as,

...Dean Mahomed combined in the minds of his patients: oriental and classical Grecian exotica, almost religious faith in his method, his scientific medical professionalism, and the patronage of the elite. This combination made Dean Mahomed’s Bath the epitome of fashion in Brighton for nearly two decades. (p. 280)

And,

Mahomed’s Baths opened for its visitors with a splendid vestibule, on the north of the building, off the fashionable King’s Road. Dean Mahomed directed that the walls of this entrance room be covered with a mural of “Moguls and Janissaries...represented in rich dresses and the Muses, as they should be in plain Grecian attire”. (p. 280)

It certainly paints a very different picture of the cosmopolitan idea of England. Dean Mahomed launches as it were a psychological attack on the mind of the West. But it is not with a vengeance; he does it in a subtle manner. It is interesting to note that Dean Mahomed drew from classical European antiquities, examples to support his bathing theory,

BATHING is coeval with the remotest periods of antiquity. Homer mentions the uses of private baths, which baths possessed medicinal properties, and were enriched by the most fragrant perfumes. In the eastern part of the world, it has ever been known and esteemed, and is continued in a variety of forms, to the present period. It is not distinctly stated by any author, I believe, that the Romans directed their attention in particular to the actual cure of disease by impregnated waters, nor did they, that I can collect, imagine any virtue to result from steam immersions, or anything beyond the simple application of water. (p. 285)

This reference to medical bathing in Greek literature, gives Dean Mahomed an edge over others. He proves that the idea of shampooing is not just an insipid fad of the East and that it is serious business and had been a popular form of treatment even in ancient European civilization. Dean Mahomed was indeed a revolutionary in his own way. He brought about a radical change in the white man’s perception of the East and its people. Through his promotional techniques, advertisements and testimonials, he proved that Indians were a civilized race, aware and self-conscious and not an ignorant bunch of “snake charmers”:

To the Hindoos, who are the cleanest and finest, we are principally indebted for the Medicated Bath, in cases of disease and bodily infirmity. Many complaints to which we are subject, arise from languid circulation, and for an inactive state of the animal functions, and which in many instances resist the use of medicine, and beget consequences the most fatal and protracted; the native practitioners of India are aware of this, and Shampooing has always proved a most salutary

and effective remedy with them. (p. 286)

In 1793, Dean Mahomed decided to publish a book to explain himself and his understanding of India to the elite of Ireland. Up to this point of time in history, no Indian had written, let alone publish, a book in English, either in India or in Britain. Dean Mahomed, the shampoo surgeon, proprietor of London's first curry house, seller of vaporous curative dreams represented the actual India against a backdrop of ruthless colonial power. He proved that he was no seller of voluptuous, exotic oriental fantasies. Dean Mahomed is the perfect example of one who was not only Indian in blood and colour and English in his taste, but Indian in his thought, morals and intellect. Imperialism didn't erode his identity. Dean Mahomed was envisaged as a modern medical innovator and an initiator of a social fashion that one was supposed to follow while in Brighton. Travels and Dean Mahomed allow us an "access to these transitional years in the history of India, Ireland, and England within the burgeoning British Empire" (p. 323).

4. Conclusion

Both I'tesamuddin and Dean Mahomed firmly establish themselves as pluralistic travellers in the context of the 18th century. They are the precursors of the modern day tourists with their detach perspectives who through their travelogues "are engaged in delivering time/space-specific facts and events to audiences in intelligible ways" (Lisle, p. 33). Thus these are travellers for whom "the act of telling their story was as important to the journey as actual participation on it" (Mancall, p. 13). Their travel memoirs are very contemporary in their make-up, because they participate "most profoundly in the wider debates of global politics through its structuring tension between colonial and cosmopolitan visions" (Lisle, p. 5). A certain degree of heterogeneity underlies their writings. As travellers they seize their identity and recognize its power to articulate the idea of the other, in their terms. They are more than just passive onlookers. Their engagement with the Britons is very cognitive in nature. The enchantment, the wonder, the curiosity, of the imperial West is all dissected from a very dialectical perspective. Though there are evidences of palpable anxieties, insecurities, difficulties and ambivalences, the interpretations and representations of the East and West are not too compartmentalized. Their gaze is an enquiring one and offers in the words of Pramod K Nayyar, "a fair measure of textual, epistemological and aesthetic understanding of the 'wonders' of England" (p. 37). The polarization of the East and the West does not create a rupture in the writing, rather it accentuates the cultural diversity of both. I'tesamuddin and Dean Mahomed prove the ideology of travel as a "means of laying claim to the world, imaginatively in the first instance, but also politically" (*Other Routes*, Ghosh, ix). Both the travellers navigate the cultural topography of *vilayet* from two aspects- globally and locally, quintessentially laying the foundations of the politics of travel, ergo heralding the beginning of new breed of culturally heterogeneous travellers.

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Note(s)

Note 1. Chapter Five, “The World of Colonial Ireland” (1784-c. 1807), from *The First Indian Author in English: Dean Mahomed (1759-1851) in India, Ireland, and England* by Michael H Fisher.

Note 2. “Kubla Khan or, A vision in a dream. A Fragment” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1816.

Note 3. Chapter IV, *Kim*, Rudyard Kipling, p. 56.

Note 4. *Vilayat*- Early 19th century; earliest use found in Mary Sherwood (1775-1851), children’s writer and educationist. From (i) Urdu vilāyat (also regional bilāyat) and its etymon (ii) Persian vilāyat inhabited country, dominion, district (in India used specifically with reference to Europe or Britain) from Arabic wilāyat-, wilāya province, specific semantic development of wilāya sovereignty, rule from the same Arabic base as walī. Also used to refer to a foreign land; especially (a name for) England, Britain, or Europe, from South Asian context.

Note 5. Mirza Sheik I’tesamuddin’s *The Wonders of Vilayet or Shigurf Nama-e-Vilayet* or *The Wonderful Tales about Vilayet* was originally written in Persian. An early, but faulty translation of the book came out in the year 1827. Its authentic and accurate translation came out in the year 2001. It has been translated by Prof. Kaiser Haq, renowned academic and poet from Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Note 6. *Champi*- The Hindi word *champi* means “a massage”, more commonly- a massage of the head.