



INDIAN
TRAVEL WRITING
IN THE
AGE OF EMPIRE,
1830-1940

PRAMOD K. NAYAR

BLOOMSBURY

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Introduction

Travel and Self-fashioning in the Age of Empire

The chief value of travel in foreign countries ... is to enlarge one's ideas, to make them broad enough for approximation with the ideas of other nations—to make one cosmopolitan, in a word; cosmopolitan, not necessarily in habits and manners, but in sentiments, sympathies and aspirations.

—A.L. Roy, *Reminiscences English and American* (1888, emphasis added)

The myth that it was Europeans who travelled and discovered various peoples and places of the world has been demolished quite effectively with critical studies of travel writing by non-Europeans in the last few decades. Writing about the knowledge production by non-European and imperial travelling subjects, Paul Smethurst says:

Mobility is the *sine qua non* of travel writing, and travel writers, having been granted mobility as imperial subjects, then assume the authority to narrate. The duty of imperial travelling subjects is then either to explore and extend the empire, or survey and reconfirm its territories and the 'within-bounds' of the places and peoples of empire. They fit experience and anecdotal evidence to existing structures, maintaining order by acting as intermediaries between the world of experience and accumulated knowledge—between the empirical and the imperial. (2009: 7)

Smethurst, therefore, sees the travelling imperial subject as 'fitting' into the imperial structures, reinforcing, mediating and translating it.

Work done on native travellers and presences in colonial England by Sukanya Banerjee (2010), Simonti Sen (2005) and Antoinette Burton (1996) has treated the Indian travellers as fitting the category of imperial citizens, and whose writings embody a certain ‘guest discourse’ (Codell 2007). Elleke Boehmer’s *Indian Arrivals* (2015), examining the writings—travel, poetry, memoirs—produced by Indians in England in the 1870–1915 period, documents how the Indians were influential in English culture, as the metropolis began to engage with the ‘imperial periphery’ that had folded into its everyday processes and practices.

Others such as Javed Majeed (2007), however, argue that a mobility-driven identity is disruptive of the colonial mobility regime founded on the native-as-travellee (that is, the native is the one the Westerner travels *to*, to see and record as the object of the travel), the Westerner-as-traveller, the native traveller as labour, convict, soldiers of the Empire, among others. Mobility itself is an empowering condition for the colonial subject, and travel writing ‘informs the development of global citizenry literacy because, as cultural texts, they recount an engagement in, and with, cosmopolitanism’ (Johnson 2010: 80). Consequently, they ‘transform themselves (variously, temporarily, and often unstably) from objects of metropolitan spectacle to exhibitors of Western mores ... [and] in doing so ... unsettle the boundaries of empire and remake power relations in imperial culture’ (Burton 1998: 3). Elleke Boehmer has proposed that the Indian travellers

did not see themselves as secondary or belated in relation to it [the Empire]. Rather, they mapped and decoded the city’s [London’s] streets with reference to a ready-made index of pre-existing images, geographical coordinates and spatial terms acquired as part of a colonial education and from the pages of colonial newspapers. (2015: 83)

From a different perspective, Sumathi Ramaswamy details the introduction and expansion of geographical knowledge embodied in the globe in Indian school textbooks, in English as well as in local languages. Ramaswamy’s meticulous work shows us that,

with all the chronic ailments of the English educational mission in India, ‘geography was the one subject to which the [Indian] child was invariably introduced’ (2018: 33). In many cases ‘cartographic evangelism’—Ramaswamy’s term—was linked to and embedded in Christian proselytizing—resulting in, she notes, local, vernacular efforts (such as Durgashankar Pathak’s in nineteenth-century Benares) to incorporate native (Hindu, Islamic) cosmologies with the European one (139–140).

That the Indian ‘eye’—a trope in many Indian travel texts of the period—was capable of observing and commenting on English life itself was a marker of subjecthood that was not entirely constituted by the Empire. Antoinette Burton has argued that we consider:

[The] Indian traveller as an ‘I’, a self—as the subject or see-er ... rather than as merely the object of colonial rule. If the capacity to represent the western city conferred a certain kind of person—or subjecthood—on Indians, it also enables them to claim a kind of collective identity as well. (Burton 1996: 43)

Jayati Gupta argues along similar lines in her work on Indian travellers: ‘the act of travel could transform a colonial subject into a “citizen of the world” ... a new form of sharing and understanding that sustains the underlying rationale of becoming transnational.’ (2008: 66). Gupta sees even domestic tourism narratives set in India, such as Bholanauth Chunder’s, as embodying an interesting tension and vision ‘of burgeoning nationhood as well as the potential of global expansion’ (65). It was a cosmopolitan rather than a ‘Hindoo’ vision, argues Gupta (65). More importantly, travel, including travel through Europe, was an exploration of the interiority of the colonial subject, and Gupta finds an intense self-awareness in these Indian narratives. That this ‘awareness of the self is problematized by the plurality of selves’ (67) is a part of the cosmopolitanization of the Indian and colonial subject. Such cosmopolitan travellers were hybrids, argues Julie Codell, and as they traversed Europe, they reversed the Grand Tour’s generic conventions:

Western travel narrative naturalized 'ideal' travelers—male, privileged, and autonomous agents, possessing leisure and means to satisfy their wanderlust. Indian travelers fit this profile but were not on quests for self-discovery, which occupied Western authors. They wanted to see Britain and Europe firsthand, judge what their colonizers told them, discover what colonizers did not say, and transmit information to other Indians. They negotiated conventions of travel literature in resistance to *and* in compliance with generic expectations, creating hybrids that drew on guidebooks (in an age of guidebooks), local histories, autobiography, and ethnography.

Hybridity fit their reversed Grand Tour throughout Great Britain, one of their many reversals of generic features, such as the Western smorgasbord descriptions of sights, tastes, and sounds. Most Western travelers explored the 'unexplored'—places Europeans had not been before, which they tried to dominate through heroic claims and notions of the 'other' as exotic, inferior, quaint, erotic, and picturesque. Indian travelers played with these conventions by applying them to the over-explored, over-discovered Western metropole, reversing the hierarchy of periphery and center, and recalling the aristocratic eighteenth-century Grand Tour of Europe. (2007: 174, emphasis in original)

This means, their travels deterritorialized them as Indian or British, or Anglophile Indian or Indian Briton, or Bengali-Indian-Briton, or other hybrid possibilities (175).

This book, written in the wake and influence of such studies, also envisions a different kind of imperial-subject traveller. It studies works by a variety of Indians, shipbuilders such as Jehangeer Nowrojee and Hirjeebhoy Merwanjee, who went to England to study their profession; princes and kings on a leisure tour through Europe (the Rajah of Kolhapur, and Jagatjit Singh, the Raja of Kapurthala); those who spent some time as students in England (Rakhal Das Haldar and Romesh Chunder Dutt); journalists who were also on a leisure trip to Europe (G.P. Pillai); officials of the civil services or judiciary in India or those employed in specific projects like the Colonial Exhibition (Lala Baijnath and A.L. Roy) and others. Some, such as Jagatjit Singh, went on a round-the-world tour, including in their journey, Australia, New Zealand, Ceylon, Japan, the USA, besides Europe (Rabindranath

Tagore has separate travelogues on Russia, the Middle East, Japan, South East Asia and Euro-America). Others, such as Dutt, explored England, primarily, although they would take a short trip to Paris or visit Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Norway. In most cases, though, England as the centre of the imperial world was the key site of travel.

The imperial-subject traveller arrives in England eager to see the land. His, and in many cases, her, enthusiasm for the land of the 'master', as some term England, is palpable. The traveller is awestruck at London's crowds, busyness, museums and countryside. When travelling through Europe, they pay particular attention to the natural landscape but also the people and cultural practices, dress and museums. The imperial-subject traveller also travels aware of European history and identifies monuments and memorials. The traveller negotiates the physical and cultural landscape of these nations armed with information in the form of historical knowledge and a considerable number of literary sources for the places visited. However, beginning the journey as an awestruck imperial subject, seeking nothing more than a sight of England, the Indian traveller slowly alters his—the majority of travellers examined here are men, with a couple of exceptions—identity. The Indian traveller refuses to be in just a state of wide-eyed wonder at both familiar England—familiar because most of the Indians come to England already well read about the country—and 'new' England—new because this is often their first physical encounter with England/Europe. Therefore, the Indian traveller engages with England/Europe in fascinating and diverse ways. This book is a study of the Indian travellers' forms of engagement.

It identifies four key modes through which the Indian traveller engaged with Europe and the world. By 'modes' I imply 'manner' and 'measure', a 'way' but also suggestive of 'fashion' and 'style'. The term, I believe, captures both form and content, carrying with it the nuance of specific processes and methods. 'Mode', then, signals in this book

the forms of *narrative* (objective travelogue, subjective descriptions) and *experiential* (intellectual, affective) engagement with the places they travel through, the conventions of writing adopted, and the political and cultural discourses that inform the writing. It assumes that narrative and its discourses are constitutive of the identity of the traveller and the very experience of travel. It tracks, through the exploration of these modes, the several kinds of identity that the Indian traveller constructs for himself.

Thus, it demonstrates how the Indian traveller often defies the sole category of the 'imperial subject' and presents himself, via an engagement with England, Europe and the world, in particular identities. He is a nationalist cosmopolitan whose moral cosmopolitanism determines the way he perceives the English social order. He is an aesthete who is also interested in the natural as well as built-up landscape and its inhabitants embedded in an unequal society. He is a connoisseur of the exotic, but one whose attention is repeatedly drawn to the foreign-exotic within England's 'national' identity. He is enchanted by England, but transforms this enchantment into an informed one, and thereby refuses to be a wide-eyed native in the imperial capital. He examines England and Europe's history but not ascribing any superior valence, instead exploring it through its entanglements with the rest of the world. In short, the book shows the Indian traveller as remarkably well-equipped to deal with colonial and imperial cultures when, through these four modes, he sets out to alter his bestowed identity as an imperial subject and that of England as an imperial power.

The book opens with the travellers' aesthetic engagement with Europe and the world. In this, the first core chapter, it argues that the imperial subject, steeped in the conventions of the picturesque, employs it to reconstruct the England/Europe he encounters. First, the travellers insist on paying attention to social stratification, along with attention to the natural landscapes. Then, the imperial-subject traveller also includes maps, topographical data and statistics into

his account when describing buildings, parks, open farmlands and homes—a variant the chapter identifies as the ‘enumerative picturesque’. The Indian traveller also departs from the traditional picturesque’s emphasis on the rural and the countryside in order to dwell upon the imperial centre, industrial cities and manufacturing sites in England, European cities and America, and thus invokes an ‘engineered picturesque’. Documenting variety, difference and wonder in the form of statistics, the traveller compresses and packages the lands he visits and travels through into an enumerative narrative. The chapter also examines the travellers’ interest in and focus on the deprived classes and the lower rungs of the social order within Europe and England. With this, the Indian traveller generates a ‘subaltern picturesque’.

Through the construction of an ‘Occidental exotic’, the Indian travellers appropriate a method of exoticization in order to creolize Europe/England. I argue in this chapter that the traveller, even when paying attention to European history, art or places, reconstructs England as a space of the cultural Other. Exoticism here serves as an aesthetics of diversity, and in the process, the traveller deterritorializes an English countryside or European history by pointing to the presence of a non-English or non-European Other within it. Through this, the traveller overturns the ethnocentrism of the traditional European exotic and instead demonstrates its ethno-diversity. In the process, even as he admits to a sense of enchantment at the wonder that is Europe, the Indian traveller recalibrates this enchantment as an ‘informed’ one. Exoticism and enchantment then serve as modes of self-fashioning, whereby the traveller does not emerge as one overwhelmed by Europe but as one in control of the negotiations with European sights and in the *representations* of those sights in the form of his travelogue.

In the continuing engagement with the multiple cultures, ethnic identities and their material and symbolic presences within Europe’s major cities, the Indian traveller exhibits a vernacular

cosmopolitanism. Here, mediating between his sense of national identity and burgeoning nationalism, the traveller also extends his interest in Europe's subaltern Others to invoke a 'subaltern cosmopolitanism'. Appropriating both the sentimental and the moral dimensions of this cosmopolitanism, the traveller engages with Europe in a wholly different manner, as the chapter shows.

The final chapter examines the Indian traveller's portraits of 'connected histories' across Europe. It shows how the traveller asserts a different order of interpretation that gestures at the making of 'epistemic communities'. Mediating between the global and the national in the form of a dialectic—what Ngūgī wa Thiong'o termed the 'globlectic'—the Indian traveller thereby positions himself, yet again, at the cosmopolitan moment. Further, this traveller appropriates the traditional rhetorical device of ekphrasis to address the ruins, artwork and architectural sights he sees in Europe but modifies it in challenging and interesting ways. Positing a transnational ekphrasis that is mainly of the historical rather than the artistic kind, the chapter demonstrates how the Indian travellers' attention to the inequalities and their attendant brutalities that are inscribed into, say, Roman ruins, constitutes a politically edged historical-critical ekphrasis by the imperial subject.

In the conclusion, I suggest that antinomies constitute the self-fashioning of the traveller, rather than contradictions. Both the imperial-subject self and the nationalist-cosmopolitan self coexist within him. This is a productive tension because it enables the traveller to find re-enchantment in Europe but one that qualifies the enchantment through an attention to social inequalities or brutal histories of Europe embodied in its memorials and ruins. The antinomic self is a form of transculturation.

There are interconnections and overlaps across some of the features—thematic, formal—of the travel texts discussed here. Exoticism is a part of the aesthetics of travel writing and the globlectic imagination contributes to the cosmopolitan sensibilities of the

traveller. Subaltern picturesque accounts do speak with subaltern, moral cosmopolitan approaches to the English or European people and places in the analyses of these texts. The chapters, therefore, are at once distinct and supplement each other intentionally. What I have tried to do, despite these anastomosing connections, is to draw out specific strands within each chapter's focal point, whether this is about the picturesque or the interest in tangled histories.

★

These four modes are integral to the self-fashioning of the imperial-subject traveller. The cosmopolitan whose cosmopolitanism emerges from affective and moral investments in the European poor or the English working classes, the vanquished in battle or the memories of the victims of ancient carnages and social inequality, is a complex figure indeed. There is no 'detachment' that characterizes such a cosmopolitanism. Rather, it is a cosmopolitanism rooted in the complicated position of being an imperial subject but also a member of the social elite in India, of being an imperial subject but also one who is well-versed in Western history, literature and politics and intensely aware of his own country's similarities with older colonies and oppressed nations. As an aesthete, the Indian traveller does not accord undiluted aesthetic power to the picturesque or the sublime, choosing, instead, to appropriate it in ways that demonstrate his affective spin, founded on an attention to political and social realities in England, upon the aesthetic. Reading a ruin for its chequered violent history enables the traveller to erode the English or European 'national sentiments' towards its rulers, heroes or military triumphs. Treating the exotic as a way of presenting a multicultural, multi-ethnic Europe allows the Indian traveller to represent himself as an alert outsider, appreciative of but not mesmerized by cultural difference.

These identities are to be *inferred* as emerging from the discourses and narrative modes adopted by the travellers. There are few direct

representations of the self in these texts, although some attention is paid to proxemics and comportment of their embodied selves and that of their neighbours and fellow travellers in some of them. *The modes explored in this book are forms of self-fashioning by imperial subjects who would not be reduced to that subjecthood or subjectivity.*

Their selves—which Stephen Greenblatt defines as ‘a sense of personal order, a characteristic mode of address to the world, a structure of bounded desires’ (1980: 1)—are shaped in the ‘formation and expression of identity’ (1) when they engage with England and through specific modes, some of which this book explores. While the fact of being imperial subjects limits the autonomy with(in) which the Indian traveller can fashion a *different* self/identity, it does not hinder it endlessly or totally. Travel, and informed travel at that, marks the clearing of a space wherein, through specific modes of addressing England or Europe, the traveller asserts an identity as a nationalist cosmopolitan, aesthete or morally committed global citizen. Travel, in other words, proffers an alternative mode of perceiving, forming and expressing one’s identity in the contexts of being in the imperial capital as a colonial subject, encountering the Englishman/woman on *his/her* own terrain, and of being an intensely self-aware subject who opts to turn the spotlight—the travelling gaze—upon the English, for a change. Attending to social inequalities or the melancholic history of oppression embedded in ruins in the form of the travel account invites us to read the account as an instantiation of the discursive art of self-fashioning.

The representation of the self in these travel accounts is complex and layered. We see, for instance, the traveller oscillating between wonder and informed wonder, admiration for English mercantile, imperial or industrial successes and empathy with those who paid the price or did not benefit from these successes. This produces for our consumption an alert imperial subject, whose engagement with the Empire is imbued with a healthy scepticism towards its triumphs and an awareness of the material realities beneath the picturesque

properties, exotic exhibits or treasured ruins. The traveller experienced the social pressures of being an imperial subject but did not allow himself to be decimated by them. Assigning to himself the task of interpreting England, the traveller in the process transforms (fashions) himself as a critical observing eye, a subject of observation rather than the object of (imperial, white, racialized) observation of the European travelogue. When this interpretation was inflected by nationalist concerns, moral and sentimental views of humanity, an interest in 'the human condition', it enabled a self larger than the imperial-subject one.

This is not to say that the Indian traveller escapes the 'colonized native' tag in its entirety. Given the fact that his travel was made possible by the mobility regimes of the Empire, his own social status (privileged, socially connected, upper caste and upper-class Indian male, in most cases), such an escape is unthinkable. Hence, we see expressions of wonder at England, gratitude towards English benevolence, and an acceptance of English modernity and location at the top of the evolutionary scale, all of which point, or implicitly signal, an imperial-subject identity. Yet, what these travelogues also demonstrate is the impossibility of reducing the Indian traveller to this identity—and this is entirely the result of a very effective set of self-fashioning modes, in terms of the discursive constructions of the cosmopolitan, humanitarian or aesthetic self.

Self-fashioning, then, is the refusal to submit to an assigned identity, appropriating a set of discursive strategies—modes—that then create a different identity of the traveller, one that we can trace in their many-layered texts.

Colonial Subjects and Their Dislocated Aesthetics

I also paid a visit to St. Paul's Cathedral ... It is also a large stone structure with towers and a lofty dome, greatest of all the landmarks of London. On entering it I was struck with the vastness of the internal space, the part under the dome being quite a maze of lofty grand arches ... Their [the walls'] dirty grey look, caused probably by the soot deposited by the smoke of the London chimneys, was very disappointing. The walls of St Pauls in Calcutta look far cleaner and nicer, notwithstanding all the dust and damp of a tropical climate.

—N.L. Doss, *Reminiscences, English and Australasian* (1893: 49)

Indian travellers, particularly those travelling in the second half of the nineteenth century, demonstrating evidence of considerable reading in English literary and other texts, appear to have assimilated the cultural codes and grammar of a specific aesthetic when viewing the countries they travelled to, especially England. The picturesque, which reigned during the late eighteenth and through the nineteenth centuries in England, found strong resonances in the transatlantic world's travel texts and landscape writing as well (Bramen 2002). 'The picturesque mode', writes Silvia Marchetti, 'while it emerged and consolidated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was not only cosmopolitan in reach, but also incredibly lasting over time' (2009: 402). The aesthetic serves the Indian traveller with a framework within which to view the places he was travelling through.

I draw my informing assumption for reading these accounts from Tim Fulford's work in *Landscape, Liberty and Authority* (1996). Fulford argues that discourses of landscape—a 'representation which claims simply to describe nature, but also to writing which uses the motifs and scenes of landscape-description in the course of critical and political arguments'—conferred a certain authority upon their writers (1). Fulford writes: 'within the polite and tasteful description of a scene in which natural (and national) order could be viewed was a struggle for authorial power' (1). Among these descriptions and accounts Fulford discerns the debate over taste, especially among the propertied classes where

the ability to distinguish and possess shared standards independent of self-interest (standards of aesthetic value or taste) in agreement about the beauty or sublimity of landscape seemed not only a mark of the viewer's gentlemanliness but a criterion for the exercise of legitimate social and political power. (3)

The larger concern in this chapter, building on Fulford's reading, is the appropriation of aesthetic modes when describing natural and built European/global landscapes by the imperial-subject traveller who, by definition, lacks social and political authority in the imperial capital. The thesis forwarded here is that such aesthetics, suitably modified, enabled a self-fashioning in and offered a measure of authority to the imperial-subject traveller. To this end, I examine the appropriation of the picturesque aesthetic in Indian travel writing in the nineteenth century. Admittedly, in the Indian travellers, the 'commanding view' would not afford them, in England or in Europe, either 'paternal authority' over the land or 'official and institutionalized supervision, by which the poor are as much controlled as relieved' as was the case in the traditional English picturesque (Fulford 1996: 10). However, I argue, landscape aesthetics did give the colonial travellers a chance to 'transform themselves (variously, temporarily, and often unstably) from objects of metropolitan spectacle to exhibitors of Western

mores ... [and] in doing so ... unsettle the boundaries of empire and remake power relations in imperial culture' (Burton 1998: 3).

The picturesque was not a unified aesthetic within England or in its transatlantic form, and variants such as the metropolitan picturesque, the antiquarian picturesque, the engineered picturesque have been identified by commentators. The picturesque, argues Denys Van Renen, had an endless capacity to subsume various cultural practices, besides indigenes, animals, plants, and terrain into itself so that it effectively constrains 'our ability to disentangle natural processes from cultural ones' (2015: 167). Van Renen argues a case for 'the breathtaking power of the picturesque to disarticulate widely divergent natural and socio-cultural processes'. The picturesque as an aesthetic was concerned with, of course, the representation of landscapes in pictorially attractive modes and the 'improvement'—a key term in the discourse of the picturesque—of the land so that it approximated a picture. But this was also an aesthetic deeply concerned with the question of perception. Rosemary Hill notes that at least one dominant strand of thought within the picturesque debate, in the work of Richard Payne Knight, for example, argued that 'aesthetic experience was dependent on the beholder, on memory, association, and context' (Hill 2014: 123). That is to say, the picturesque as an aesthetic mode did provide for considerations of the observing eye, the contexts of observations and the various cultural factors and practices that informed perception. It meant that the subject-self of the observer would inform, but equally would be informed by the aesthetic. Aligning Van Renen's and Rosemary Hill's recent readings with Fulford's examination of the discourse of landscape, I suggest that the aesthetics of reading the lands they were travelling in was central to the self-fashioning of the imperial-subject.

While the picturesque was, traditionally, aligned with nationalist ideas and geocultural specificity, it was also possible to expand its terms to include other lands. Will Mackintosh speaks of this 'capaciousness' of the picturesque:

For Gilpin, the beautiful described that which was well formed and human-scale; the contemplation of the beautiful was essentially a humanizing and pleasurable experience. By contrast, the sub-lime was characterized by a combination of astonishment and terror, and necessarily turned the viewer's thoughts to the almighty and the eternal. And the picturesque balanced the two in pleasing harmony. Gilpin's definitions were profoundly vague and contextual, especially compared to the philosophical rigor of Burke. But the vagueness of the picturesque was precisely its power; in its popular usage, it could be applied to any appealing landscape and was a sufficiently capacious concept to describe the cultural ambitions of many and diverse travelers on both sides of the Atlantic. (2014: 91)

Acquainted with the English aesthetic and poetic traditions, the imperial-subject traveller appropriated this capacious mode of landscape description for his own purposes, as Mackintosh claims was the case with the American picturesque writers.

The picturesque, as employed by the colonial subject offers us interesting new trajectories in landscape description and tourist accounts. N.L. Doss's passage for instance, while focusing on the splendour and majesty of its built environment, is also marked by an attention to the stained nature of these buildings, or their inadequacies. Others, such as Jehangeer Nowrojee and Hirjeebhoy Merwanjee, in the process of praising the London parks, which are, in the true picturesque tradition, 'inclosed in by iron railings with handsome gateways', note that 'more wealth, more respectability, more beauty is to be seen collected in one spot than is to be found congregated in any other part of the world', thereby noting the social stratification in English society even as they appreciate the landscape (1841: 100). With this, Nowrojee and Merwanjee set themselves up as men of taste and authority, with a clear humanitarian-social concern for the poor in the landscape.

The Indian travellers did pay attention to, and write about, England and Europe's natural picturesque in ways that clearly imply a knowledge of the grammar of such writings. Here, for instance, is an account of the natural picturesque:

We kept ascending an eminence for four miles, when we came to a magnificent prospect from the top of what is called Blue Bell Hill ... From the top of the hill Mr Baldock pointed out to us a bungalow, or a countryhouse, erected by an intimate friend and relative of his ... And as some of our happiest hours in India are spent in bungalows, this, and the extensive and varied view, and the strong gleam of sunshine, gladdened our hearts ... The view from Blue Bell Hill, all the way to the Kitscottie House, is very pleasing; there was not, it is true, any of the grand features of picturesque scenery. There are, however, a long range of hills which bound the view; and in the bottom, the river Medway, which takes an immense number of circuits, and which adds much to the beauty of the view. Corn fields, green meadows, orchards, hop gardens, here were all blended together, and formed a varied scenery. (Nowrojee and Merwanjee 1841: 291–292)

Immediately after this, they would describe ‘one of the prettiest pictures that can be imagined, embracing the picturesque bridge, the old fashioned church, and the village—all surrounded and shut in by beautiful green verdure, form a scene of quiet ...’ (293). That Nowrojee and Merwanjee are able to say that the scene lacked the ‘grand features of picturesque scenery’ implies an awareness of the aesthetic and landscape discourse of the time.

Romesh Dutt when travelling through Ireland pays particular attention to the natural scenery:

We took a long drive in a car, and then had a ride through one of the wildest valleys that I have ever seen, the ‘Gap of Dunloe’. It is not quite so bleak and barren as the vale of Glencoe in Scotland, but the mountains are quite as high and the whole scene is quite as wild and picturesque. Emerging from that valley we came to the lakes and took a boat. The scenes through which we then passed defy all description. Enough be it to say that it is the wildest and the most picturesque scene that can be made up of mountains, rivulets, lakes, islands, creeks, promontories, and wild vegetation. The lakes being surrounded on all sides by high mountains, every loud sound was echoed most distinctly. (1896: 76–77)

These are classic instantiations of the picturesque, complete with the ‘prospect view’ (Barrell 1992), the boundaries and the harmonious

variety, with the wild included as well. Immediately after the above passage on the picturesque Dutt would invoke the sublime as well, speaking of 'Llanberis Pass ... which in its aspect of bleak sublimity yields to none else that I have yet seen' (80). Dutt would employ the language of the picturesque in describing Sweden, Norway and other parts of Europe too (158, 188, 200 and elsewhere). Others such as Baijnath would also take recourse to the language of picturesque aesthetics when speaking of European cities and the countryside. P.C. Mozoomdar would employ the aesthetic to describe Niagara (1884: 88), Emerson's village of Concord (103), the city of Washington (110), and so on. T.N. Mukharji speaks of Edinburgh as 'one of the most picturesque towns ever built by man on the face of the earth' (1902: 271) and uses the term 'picturesque' to describe Perth (275), Oxford (303) and Florence (375).

My interest here is not limited, however, to the extent to which the Indian travellers fit into and employ the idiom and grammar of the natural or civic picturesque with a focus on people and their lives, with attention to constructed buildings, city spaces and social settings (rather than just landscape and topography, see Andrews 1994), or the sublime, as invoked in the passages from Dutt and Nowrojee and Merwanjee. Rather, I wish to examine what I take to be their major reformatting of the aesthetic itself, to serve the purposes of self-fashioning. This chapter proposes that Indian colonial subjects, when employing the picturesque in England, Europe or other regions, often modified it considerably. In the hands of the colonial travellers, different signifiers entered the picturesque narrative about England/Europe, from steel and concrete structures signifying engineering and human culture rather than nature, to England's deprived poor, signifying the ugliness (rather than the valourizing in the traditional mode) of the picturesque.

Three modifications, with attendant and appropriate signifiers and rhetorics, of the picturesque may be traced in the travel writings.

First, the travellers' insistence on paying attention to social stratification, urban poverty, tainted buildings, obscurity of vision and political economy, aligned with a sense of race-differentials (of being