Decolonising from London
An Indian psychogeography around Victorian railway spaces (1870-1914)

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A prisoner paints a landscape on the wall of his cell showing a miniature train entering a tunnel. When his jailers come to get him, he asks them "politely to wait a moment, to allow me to verify something in the little train in my picture… I made myself very tiny, entered into my picture and climbed into the little train, which started moving, then disappeared into the darkness of the tunnel. For a few seconds longer, a bit of flaky smoke could be seen coming out of the round hole. Then this smoke blew away, and with it the picture, and with the picture, my person…"¹

On January 10, 1863, Farringdon Street Station saw a large crowd awaiting the pantomime of Britain’s subterranean steam railways. These “demons” would soon transform the old metrop into a labyrinth of maps, "one laid upon another like a historical palimpsest".² As a harbinger of modernity, the Underground would dynamically restructure London’s geography and psychogeography for more than a century to come. By 1890, as the Metropolitan and District Line and the Circle Line criss-crossed the Thames and Embankment, the City and South London Railway became the world’s first ever electrified deep-level tube station. Towards the end of the Great War, Londoners had normalised the humdrum of choking and groping across mists on their way to railway stations, enduring journeys in and out a supernatural city.³ Besides makeshift shops, advertisements, buskers, beggars and delinquents that thronged the Underground, the great imperial cesspool also saw the emergence of a new but not unforeseen diaspora of Indians in Victorian London.⁴

While London’s railway network was still expanding at breakneck speed, the traffic

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⁴. The British Indian diaspora has grown manifold since Victorian times. According to the British census of 2011, the British Indian community is of 1.4 million people, while there are about 0.55 million Indians living in London, who make up nearly 7 percent of the city’s population. British South Asian community of today, largely including nationals from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan—which were one nation—was the British Indian community before 1947. British South Asians today number over 3 million, constituting nearly 5 percent of Britain’s total population. Indian employees in Britain have higher average hourly pay-scales than all other ethnic groups in the country. See "2011 Census: Ethnic group, local authorities in the United Kingdom", Office for National Statistics, 11 October 2013 (Online). Retrieved 25 April 2015; Andrew Gilligan, "It’s class, not race, that determines Britain’s have-nots", *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 January 2010 (Online). Archived on 26 November 2010. Retrieved 10 February 2011.
of Indian commodities, artworks and exhibits into the imperial metropolis carried on relentlessly. The Pall Mall Gazette of May 1886 called the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, organised that year in South Kensington, called it “a walk round the ‘colonies’”. Abounding in hookahs, ivories, carpets, paintings, illustrations and even live human specimens from the Andaman Islands, the Exhibition was described as a ‘microcosm of the Empire—a show which no other country in the world could produce’.

Not only Indian exhibits, but Indians too flocked to the epicentre of the Empire, leaving copious accounts of the examples of modernity that they saw in London. For several Indian memoirists who travelled to London since 1870s, the purpose of their journeys had been to “dwell only upon what is blameable in us and what is laudable in the English, and thus to show the contrast between England and India in as unfavourable a light to ourselves as facts will permit”. Such travelogues, in doing so, intended to highlight the utopian aspects of English society with which to pave the way for an Indian modernity. At the same time, a new Indian sub jectivity was also shaping among Indian visitors; not all would indiscriminately eulogize British public institutions.

Given the expansion of its own railways, India was a distant but judicious observer of the phantasmagorias that drove the new metropolitan logic of speed. Around London’s railways, Indians marked their own palimpsests of a new city. Railways began as an “expression of technology” that, like factories, chimneys and gas-lit streets, personified London to visitors from all over. Seen from a colonial perspective, the imperial capital was beginning to be divided between a Eurocentric consciousness, on the one hand, and an Indian psychogeography, on the other. Indian memoirists found subtle, if not always visible, stages to mark their increasing fluency in imperial mobility and desire for an independent geography, which, due to the colonial experience, was also born of divided consciousness, culture, space and time. This paper traces the evolution of Indian experiences around Victorian London’s railways spaces, in the period between the opening of the Suez Canal and the outbreak of the First World War (1869-1914), as sourced from original memoirs and travelogues of the time. The backdrop comprises four intersecting milieus: Britain’s history of immigrations; the cultural impact of London’s railways; London’s Victorian and Modernist subcultures; and the cultural biography of the Indian Railways.

Two disjointed events occurred in 1869. One was the publication of Bholanauth Chunder’s Indian railway account, The Travels of a Hindoo. Another, the inauguration of the East London Line. In 1913, Rabindranath Tagore shot to global fame after the Nobel Prize for Gitanjali, whose lost manuscript was salvaged at the Baker Street Station, the previous year. Before the onset of the Great War, in 1914, the underground railway network had expanded into a mammoth underworld stretching over 40 miles. It was therefore not surprising that Indian visitors to Victorian London made train-stations a lynchpin of their experiences. By the 1880s, imperial guidebooks and cartographers, such as Baedeker’s and Bartholomew’s, began making literary


commodities out of European cities. The Colonial and Indian Exhibition institutionally commoditised Indian culture, juxtaposing the primitivism of its indigenous tribes with Britain’s own progress. It was also around this time that the agency of representing India and London underwent a shift from imperial hands to those of colonised subjects. Considering Victorian Indian memoirs and travelogues, predominantly from that time, this paper underscores a relatively unexamined discourse in the history of the British South Asian community—of how literary imagination fostered experiences of London’s railway spaces and the metropolis itself. Subjectivities of Indian travel accounts challenge their presumed subservience to the materiality of their colonial history. I argue that Indians inhabited Victorian London not primarily as a territory but a text—a typographically imagined palimpsest that I define as Typogravia. The paper begins by briefly exploring, and theorising on, the background of London’s milieus of modernism, urbanism, multiculturalism and immigration. These are juxtaposed with the cultural impact of Victorian India’s railway age to study the overlapping effects of the imperial metropolis and the railways on the minds of travellers. This is followed by a definition of typographical imagination and Typogravia as seen in Indian travelogues, chronicles and memoirs written from the imperial metropole. Finally, it discusses how, through their various forms of cultural mimicries, Indian travellers reconstructed London’s railway spaces while renegotiating their own colonial subjectivities, which would later shape India’s modernity and road to freedom.

The process of the passage from a territorial to textual cityscape resembles the marvellous representations of the New World in diaries and journals of medieval European explorers, that Stephen Greenblatt sees as a “mimetic capital” of wonder. He adds that, like enzymes, individuals and cultures wield fabulous powers to assimilate and transform alien spaces. Seen in that mimetic discourse, Indians also recreated Victorian London as a portable space of familiarised and familiarising images. Their guides and memoirs “devoted considerable attention to the underground system and the railway line”. In Indian writings, London’s railways unfold in three kinds of mimicry—intracultural, transcultural and canonical; each of these, a tactic of camouflage and proxy inhabitation. Railway spaces enlarged the Indian literary canvas with changing architectural principles of space, time, form, function, depth and distance. Europe had already witnessed an aesthetic revolution after steam-driven velocities blurred space-time, foregrounds, lateral distances and depths, while normalising trauma and panorama in Victorian consciousness. Indian travelogues evolved with evolving European landscaping aesthetics. As the English Education Act of 1835 engineered by Thomas Babington Macaulay was exploited by colonial Indians to unionise into the Indian National Congress fifty years later, a literary colonisation of the Indian mind was cardinal to decolonising
the den of its intimate enemies from within. On one hand, the most momentous developments of Victorian London’s railways tailed the history of Indian nationalism and provincial autonomy; on the other, they framed the psychogeographical experiences of the emerging Indian diaspora.

**Milieus, migrations and Imperial Railways**

In 2010, the popular television series *Downton Abbey* (2010–2015) ushered the saga of an Edwardian English feudal family with the advent of a steam driven train into the estate of Grantham. Even before that historians had wondered what would be permanently lost if railways disappeared from literature and arts. J.M.W. Turner’s tumultuous threnody, *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844), and eight historic pages from Charles Dickens’ railway novel, *Dombey and Son* (1848), would have been certainly aborted. So would M.K. Gandhi’s extraordinary railway journeys shot by David Attenborough for his Oscar winning ensemble of 1981, about ninety years after the young Indian barrister was thrown off a first-class compartment at Pietermaritzburg Station. Railways in India were fierce battlegrounds for economic, militarist, political, cultural and nationalist assertions. Railways in London, however, offered to the colonised ego an alternate discourse and space for mimicry.


Set in interwar London, Mulk Raj Anand’s *Conversations in Bloomsbury* (1981) has poet Herbert Read, and typographers Eric Gill and Stanley Morison, discussing the tyranny of the machine world on lyrical typefaces. As Read and Gill leave for their train to Beaconsfield, Morison remarks sardonically: “Lucky folk who can go back to nature every evening!” Earlier, a cynical Anand informs: “I have christened the English I see in the tube trains of London the ‘melancholy gentlemen’”. This was not Anand himself but a mimicry—not of what the English liked saying, but what they liked to hear. Mimicry, here, is meant not merely as a formal mimesis of a precedent. It is, more specifically, a functional tactic to appropriate and supersede the precedent. In Jacques Lacan’s fundamentals of psychoanalysis, mimicry is a reptilian theatricality that is performed for the gaze of the other, by way of steering and reproducing that gaze. Anand’s antagonists—the idyllic countryside and the mechanical metropolis—mimic Rudyard Kipling’s oxymoronic refrain, “Rail me then, on my decease, / To the Hills for old sake’s sake!” They are equally reminiscent of William Wordsworth’s remonstration against the entry of the Kendal and Windermere Railway into the Lake District, back in 1844: “where, of havoc tired and rash undoing, / Man left this Structure to become Time’s prey.” Anand was no stranger to the melancholia of his contemporary and employer.


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Virginia Woolf, whose novels, Jacob’s Room (1922) and The Waves (1931), portrayed the Underground as trenches at Flanders or vast cellars churning an army of zombies.\textsuperscript{18} Twentieth-century London’s futuristic aesthetic of speed and town planning embodied latter-day philosopher Paul Virilio’s “metaphor for the subtle enslavement of the human being to ‘intelligent’ machines”.\textsuperscript{19} Something alike was attempted in that unassailable mass of sublime steam lurching apocalyptically against storm and space, that became Turner’s depiction of the Great Western Railway. In 1869, the new East London Line incorporated Isambard Kingdom Brunel’s Thames Tunnel. The colossus of industrialised vapour had guzzled a tunnelled-out section of a living ancient river. The architecture of the Thames Tunnel echoed what a German architect wrote, that year, for another European station: it was the “gigantic vestibule of a large city”.\textsuperscript{20} It piloted an age of contradictions between London’s modernity and a socially repressed underground class.\textsuperscript{21} Late-Victorian and modernist cultural legacies unfolded as a Gesamtkunstwerk—an exhibition of contesting art-forms—where manifold experiences grappled with strategies of sanitising and commodifying urban spaces.\textsuperscript{22}

Modernity and urbanism are produced through contestations between strategies of capitalism and individual tactics of experiencing spaces.\textsuperscript{23} Geopolitical and cartographical strategies of the state incessantly control social interactions.\textsuperscript{24} Challenging these forces, Michel Foucault calls our quotidian creative expressions the “little tactics of the habitat”.\textsuperscript{25} Urban psychologies grow equally out of space and time, with capitalism and its subversions triggering morphological mutations in built spaces much like genetic mutations of their uncomprehending inhabitants.\textsuperscript{26} Finally, as new cultural forgeries, appropriations and kleptomanias recreate fictional urban experiences, older spatial structures and their values disappear.\textsuperscript{27} Ashford reckons that forgotten Victorian working-class experiences and intimate traditions may be retrieved in “an image of their lost psychological landscape, a mirror world”, that he sees in literature on the Underground.\textsuperscript{28} For Victorian Indians too, London mirrored a psychological landscape of repressed mutations and spatial intimacies.

\textsuperscript{20} Quoted in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The Railway Journey..., op. cit., p. 171.
\textsuperscript{25} Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, London-New York, Pantheon, 1980, p. 149.
Clockwise: “Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833)”. Sketch by Sibnath Sastri, in 1907; “Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-1884)”. Photograph by the London Stereoscopic Company, in 1870; “Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din (1870-1932)”. Photograph by Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha’at-e-Islam, Lahore, in 1932; “Swami Vivekananda in London (1863-1902)”, in 1895; “Behramji Malabari (1853-1912)”. Photograph by G.A. Natesan and Co., in 1910s. *All of them were reformer in one sense or another.*
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Values of being “metropolitan, imperial, and thus, civilised” were never unwaveringly objective, but diversely contested in the metropole and the colony, between colonisers and colonised, precariously held in a colonial grid. To Indian eyes, the two most characteristically English commodities were the image of London and the image of the railways, forged by Victorian literature and Indian travelogues. These helped future visitors navigate in the home of “imperial culture”

Rozina Visram, Michael H. Fisher and Susheila Nasta have drawn up a daunting history of South Asian migrations to Britain since the age of Shakespeare, while Simonti Sen, Shompa Lahiri and Antoinette Burton have assiduously examined the sociology of Indian travellers, from Victorian to late-Modernist times. In 1935, about 7,200 Indians lived in Britain, in a survey by the Indian National Congress. For Fisher, the number of floating Indians in Victorian Britain was closer to 40,000. Since the 1830s, well-to-do English-educated Indians like Raja Rammohun Roy, Ardaseer Cursetjee Wadia, Dwarkanath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen, and hundreds of aspiring barristers, doctors and civil servants made a beeline for London. Following Roy and Sen, another Hindu reformer, Swami Vivekananda, visited London, in 1895, leaving a deep impact on the city. In the next decade, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, a lawyer from Peshawar, became the first Muslim missionary reformer to visit Britain, going on to found the Woking Muslim Mission that, in 1913, would restore the first British mosque built at Woking, in 1889. Together with histories of West Indian, African, Malayan, Chinese, East-European and Latin American immigrants, the overlong Indian presence in Britain radically challenges notions of a racially pure England, especially in the light of Brexit and Windrush controversies. The South Asian aspect of British history unveils a new milieu in which to study the cultural impact of the railways in Britain and the Raj. In the vast Indian subcontinent, railways led to many other kinds of migrations—economic, professional and artisanal. Ancient modes of locomotion like banjara caravans became obsolete; cash crops like tea, oil seeds and indigo superseded food-grains; weavers of Bengal, Mysore, Benares or Gujarat were forced to relocate to railway construction sites; millions of famine stricken families perished while foodstuffs were rattled off to metropolitan markets. By 1875, the expenditure on the Indian Railways had crossed a staggering £95 million.

34. Arup K. Chatterjee, The Great Indian Railways..., op. cit., p. 72-75.
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Victorian era, the Indian Railways expanded to 24,000 miles, notwithstanding over 5 million famine deaths in India, that Mike Davis includes in the sordid register of "late Victorian holocausts".36 Indian entrepreneurs led by Dwarkanath Tagore, Ram Comul Sen, Mutty Lall Seal and Babu Ram Gopal Ghose wanted native unpunctuality and superstitions "undermined by the civilising influence of steam".37 Steam fuelled a new reading culture in India, with railway booksellers A.J. Higginbotham's and A.H. Wheeler's acting as propagandists for English education. English Studies was, in fact, invented in Victorian India to civilise native subjects through a swift institutionalisation of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Byron or Keats.38 Early signs of a railway literature, set in or around Indian railroads and sold at railway stalls, made up Kipling’s plain tales. Influential Western authors like Louis Theophile Rousselet, George Otto Trevelyan, Jules Verne and Mark Twain competed with each other in making a virtue out of consuming India through first-class railway compartments. Railways also found advocates in English-educated Indians like Bholanauth Chunder, Shib Chunder Basu and Gopináth Sadáshivji Háte, tutored in the aesthetics of Anglo-American travelogues.39 Chunder’s book, The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India (1869), epitomised the birth of an imagined community and its geographical awakening. “Travelling by the Rail very much resembles migrating in one vast colony”, he wrote, “or setting out together in a whole moving town or caravan”.40 Basu added that railway travel had reinvigorated festivals and marriage ceremonies in Bengal, while Háte shared Chunder’s gratitude for the “regeneration of Bharatversh”.41 Tellingly, that phrase became the title of Háte’s book, Regeneration of India (1883). How Indian authors saw the railways also affected the ways in which Indian travellers experienced railway spaces of Victorian London.

Between Typogravia and the Tube

London’s modernity in Indian writings illuminates the place of modernity within the idea of India. In the context of imperial railways, Ian Carter sees modernity as comprising seven elements: cosmopolitanism; locomotive and cartographic evolution; disciplining social formations in an altered geography; global resource exploitation; capitalism and bureaucracy; labour division and technological excellence; and modern physical and sociocultural engineering.42 While Indian accounts of London addressed many of these elements, they were also experiments in literary expressions. Therein, London’s modernity

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42. Ian Carter, Railways and Culture in Britain..., op. cit., p. 6-7.
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operated as a palimpsest that, as Foucault argued, enabled travellers to accumulate an infinity of interpretations, and therefore, appropriations. London’s vulnerability to foreign appropriations was recognised as early as 1837. Neighbourhoods around Baker Street were branded as Little Bengal, with an issue of the Quarterly Review describing them as “that European Elysium of Asiatiks—the streets north of Cavendish and Portman Squares”. The late-Victorian forensic scientist Doctor Thorndike, remarked irately on one of his walks around Bedford Place, not far from where Rammohun Roy had once stayed: “the Asiatic and African faces that one sees at the windows of these Bloomsbury boarding-houses almost suggest an overflow from the ethnological galleries of the adjacent British Museum”.

Knowledge of the changing spaces and demography of London led to a typographical imagination of the city, back in India. Much later, in Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines (1988), an old copy of Bartholomew’s Atlas became the conjuror of London in an independent Indian household. The novel’s frustrated Indian narrator writes that for his London-based cousin, “the Underground was merely a means of shifting venue… I could not persuade her that a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one’s imagination; that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine.” Marshall McLuhan, who has written on the typographical revolution of the European Renaissance, informs that the invention of new typefaces provided “the first uniformly repeatable commodity, the first assembly-line, and the first mass-production”. In Victorian India, “London” was a mass-produced commodity accessible for mass-consumption. Thriving periodicals and print culture amplified the allegorical expanse of this invented space with its digitally repeatable sensory experiences. This unexamined aspect of London deserves a linguistic formalisation of its territorial and typographical spaces that stretched between Baker Street and Bloomsbury.

The written and re writable Indian space within London can be seen as a type of gra-via—a symbolic grove where colonial subjects could behave as active agents in imagining morphological changes in the city. If being Anglicised was an emphatic gesture of “not to be English”, Anglicised spaces were rife with opportunities for the decolonisation of the Indian mind. That typographically constructed palimpsest of London, oscillating between the colonial tourist’s wonder and the ambivalent inhabitant’s mimicry, could be rechristened as Typogravia. Vividly throbbing in the imagination of its aliens—as the interior spaces of lodgings, omnibuses, museums or railway carriages; exterior spaces such as Victoria, King’s Cross, St. Pancras or Hyde Park; or migrant spaces such as Bayswater, that was pejoratively called Asia Minor—this typographical terrain reared

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its crest from behind the concrete colon-

nades of Belgravia and Fitzrovia. Classical

expressions of London seemed to dis-

solve as do imaginary cities, to use Darran

Anderson’s metaphor, “into the horizon as

a vanishing thread”.49 In his unforgettable,

if somewhat obsequious, love for England,

Nirad C. Chaudhuri lived in an invented

London, long before he even visited the ci-

ty. No race “ever made one author, test and

symbol of literary culture” as nineteenth-

century Indians did with Shakespeare.50

For university-educated Indians, English

names and proper nouns were mnemo-

nic devices to invoke an other geogra-

phy that could override the ongoing trau-

mas of colonization. If Shakespeare was

Britain’s link to its Roman history, his li-

terary descendants were British India’s

passport to the libraries, galleries and ca-

fés of Knightsbridge, Kensington, Mayfair,

Marylebone and Bloomsbury. Names of

the royalty—Roberts, Kitchener, Buller,

Methuen, Rosebery, Burke, Hastings,

Victoria and Gladstone—contrived the

symphony of “London”.

Typogravia was not just spectacular, but

also audible. Barrister G.P. Pillai’s lan-
guid imaginings of London’s sounds jotted
down from a hotel room—of footsteps,
trotting horses, rattling carriages and hoo-
ting railway engines—prepares us for the
theatre of the dark undulations of a near-
ly forbidden Underground, and an uncer-
tain promise of knowledge as though in a
Satanic charm.

“Suddenly, you grow nervous – you are
told, all is hollow beneath your feet.
A good portion of all London houses,
of all London shops is underground.
Beneath the pavements are store-rooms

and through the sky-lights you are so-

times able to see what is within. You

see a railway station. You enter and you

feel you are going underground. You get

into a train and it steams out. Now in

light, now in darkness, less in light and

more in darkness, you travel. You choose
to remain in the train to reach the ter-

minus. But you feel you are perpetually
travelling. You find you are beginning
to see the same stations, the same por-
ters, and you realise you have been tra-

velling in a circle. Yes; these trains go in

a circle throughout London; and every
five minutes there is a fresh train. How

surprising! And these trains are under-
ground! At least one-half of London is

hollow. There is as much of the city above

London as there is underneath it. How

strange – and yet how instructive! You

may read of London all your life, but you

will never know what it is like, unless you

see it”.51

Pillai’s unrelenting use of the pronoun

“you” is a typographical tactic to ensnare
the reader into the centre of London’s divi-
ed geography and consciousness. Readers

of his book, Through Indian Spectacles

(1897), would have lost themselves in his

fictive subterranean world, because it was
not physically possible to perform his rec-

ommendation: “see it”. The impossibility of
a seeing—an act that never precluded the
mesmerism of fiction—made inevitable a
certain over-interpretation. Indian travel-

lers, for instance, saw the Tube as a tech-
nology of cryptic writing underneath the
urban terrain. “What with railways under-
ground”, wrote Malabari in The Indian Eye
on English Life (1895), “the city appears per-

forated from end to end”.52 Published two

Unknown Indian, Berkeley-Los Angeles, University of
51. G.Parameswaran Pillai, “Excerpts from London and
Paris: Through Indian spectacles”, Indian Literature, 47,
52. Behramji Malabari, The Indian Eye on English Life: Or
Rambles of a Pilgrim Reformer, London, Apollo Printing

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years before Pillai’s account, Malabari’s travelogue set the ocular tone. The streets and spectacles of the city were “impossible for the stranger to realise save with his own eyes. I happen to have read a good deal about this, but what I actually see here exceeds my anticipation”.53 Notwithstanding its assumed subservience, reading prefigured and reconfigured acts of travelling. Inhabiting Typogravia encompassed not merely sightseeing but also renegotiating one’s literacy, even if from the peripheries of an imperial discourse. Both Malabari and Pillai acknowledged their anxieties of influence from prior “reading” of London. One’s spectacles were functionally no different from another’s eyes; Malabari’s shifting eyes were grafted behind Pillai’s sedentary spectacles. Both consciously documented themselves within the act of documenting what was geographically the same but masquerading as different typographical terrains. London was read, seen and written by both as mimickers of each other, like the Underground chiaroscuro made of changing stripes of sunlight from a broken column, or the changing stripes of a chameleon on a gradually familiarizing terra incognita. Archetypes (for e.g. underworld and cacophony) and stereotypes (for e.g. crowds and landladies) in Malabari and Pillai are instances of intracultural mimicry, from within their shared culture. In encircling central London, they were also mimicking the Underground space itself, secreting its excesses that, as they say, cannot be truly known unless you see it. To the colonial mind, London’s trains were like luminescent tempters disguised as archangels, or as John Milton’s Eve would have said, “but of divine effect, to open eyes and make them gods who taste”.54 Homi Bhabha’s definition of mimicry as those ambivalences, slippages, subversions and excesses of a precedent—that peculiar simultaneity of difference and disavowal, resemblance and menace—comes as a timely reminder.55 Mimicry facilitated a “contradictory liaison” of desire between imperialism and anti-imperial ideologies, on one hand, and the transgressive aliens of London, on the other. The capital was heavily surveilled to neutralize transgressions of working-class identities, Indian lascars, Jews, Irish, Chinese, Malays, prostitutes, queers or delinquents, who were seen as “atavistic throwbacks to a primitive moment in human prehistory, surviving ominously in the heart of the modern, imperial metropolis”.56 In that panoptic, Indians were as intensely gazed at as they were gazing.57 While gazing at London’s partial totalities, their presence split the gaze of Londoners between an apparent home and the alien. “What strikes an Asiatic most, on getting out at Victoria Station”, Malabari observed “is the noise and bustle around him. Every man and woman—one might say every animal, and even some of the inanimate objects—seem to be full of life”.58 Emphasizing English life and gaze around was a tactical reaffirmation of a selfhood, to emphasize the conspicuousness that Indians enjoyed in London. In the early 1890s, Jhinda Ram, was also

55. Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture..., op. cit., p. 122-125.
58. Behramji Malabari, The Indian Eye on English Life..., op. cit., p. 27.
bewitched by the bustle around hansom cabs and omnibuses, but no sooner than he got off a train at Euston, he felt acutely conscious that “every body’s eye was turned on me, as I looked like a stranger, being dressed in my turban and enveloped in my big Multan overcoat”.

The hyperconsciousness of being gazed at refined the mimicry of the gazed. Reproducing and steering the colonial gaze upon the self was a tactical compensation for the unwavering Indian gaze on an increasingly familiar London. When Bhagvat Simhaji found himself in Bond Street, in the 1880s, he gladly admitted, “it was pleasing to me to be told that the peculiarity of my dress had made me for a time the cynosure of all eyes”. Curiously enough, he found the Thames Tunnel “uninteresting, except as a curiosity”.

In 1888, Fath Nawaz Jang, a director in Nizam’s Guaranteed State Railway, came on a deputation to London, where he was quick to observe the omnipresence of time-administration. Evidently trained in that aesthetic, Jang saw the hierarchy of time as a spatial asset, with Underground trains running every two minutes, and the stations so numerous that one was always “within five minutes’ walk of a railway-station”. Trailokyanath Mukharji’s tribute to King’s Cross station, two years before Jang’s arrival, hailed the railways as “one of the wonders of the world. The trains ran every three minutes, from 7-30 a.m. to 12-30 or 1 p.m. and every one is thronged with passengers”. The focus on time is more symbolic than realistic. Time had undergone a paradigm shift in Victorian India, with the imperial time of railways and the biblical Bradshaw replacing the proverbial unpunctuality of the East as a new standard of global “cosmic time”. Mukharji, a curatorial supervisor in the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, also recommended seeing, with all attendant ironies. “Engines puffing and whistling, passengers running in and out, guards shutting doors, faint hum of voices, all combined to create a grandeur of busy life which must be seen to be realised”. This clever juxtaposition of space and time, within a colonial discourse of wonder, is little better than a forgery. Mukharji’s notion of grandeur emerges from a transcultural mimicry that transcends colonial boundaries. His experience did not indeed require seeing King’s Cross; it could have transpired even in the suburbs of Calcutta, with access to railway periodicals of the time. An 1882 issue of Engineering News and Contract Journal described the American countryside as what intriguingly resembles Mukharji’s perspective of King’s Cross, from four years later. “The train suddenly emerged from a long stretch of forest”, the Journal goes on, “and crept slowly over a trestle-work one mile and a quarter long. The grandeur of the surroundings must be seen to be fully realised”. From Engineering News to Mukharji and beyond, a prototype of seeing writes itself, coalescing textual topogra-

64. Trailokyanath Mukharji, A Visit to Europe, op. cit., p. 34.
phy and concrete typology into a vicarious experience of inhabiting. The printed word mimics and impersonates a pre-empted world, where literature is a gesture of travelling as an imperial subject. With that transcultural mimicry, Typogravia appropriated forms and functions of other spaces into the expanding heterotopias of the metropole.

Loss and recovery under imperial eyes

Mukharji’s earnest “declarations of love” for Britain branched from the middle classes of the Bengal Renaissance that believed colonial rule had helped it reconstruct its lost links with Indian antiquity. The Europe “of Shakespeare and the steam engine” was profoundly loved and provincialized in Indian intellectual spaces.66 “The European knows more of our mountains and rivers than we do,” wrote Mukharji, “in everything he knows more than we do of our country.”67 Knowing London intimately, therefore, seemed to be one of the foremost acts of decolonisation, both of Indian mind and the imperial territory. Understanding the psychology of Indian travellers conflates two well-established principles, that of the loss and recovery of the colonised self under the gaze of imperial eyes.68 London was not just provincialized as a Typogravia, but also in more concrete spaces. The Gothic façade of St. Pancras station, designed by George Gilbert Scott and William Henry Barlow in 1868, was readapted in 1878, for the Victoria Terminus station in Bombay. Overlooking the frail natives of the colony, its Gothic eyes were intended to reproduce awe in passers-by, while its garrisoning and artillery skins safeguarded the British Empire, especially bearing in mind the shockwaves of the Great Rebellion of 1857.69

Being under the overarching eyes of imperial administrators and monuments was like being classified as a child in the imperial discourse. A natural course of aesthetics was to internalize the canonical, while repressing the will to overthrow it, like Kipling’s in Kim (1900). The homonymy of the “cannon” upon which Kim is seen, represses his imperial burden to draw a canon for himself. Indian students in London like Amritlal Roy or Syed Shah paid suit by counting British institutions like the railways as one “real blessing which we, the British subjects, enjoy under our good Queen-Empress, upon whose rule the sun never sets”.70 Underneath a glittering London were the “the dark, damp, smoke-laden tunnels” that repelled Malabari. English crowds made his dark Asiatic aesthetics stand out, while Underground commuters appeared to him as anaesthetized and engineered to travel all the way to Edinburgh or Dublin, as if consensually

67. Trailokyanath Mukharji, A Visit to Europe, op. cit., p. 135.
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descending into a hell, if a continuous tunnel existed in between.\(^7^1\)

T.B. Pandian, who was in London in 1897, betrothed Pillai’s “spectacles” and Malabari’s “eyes” in a book he called *English Pictures from an Indian Camera* (1897). The steam and chimneys of London did not nauseate him. He was even enchanted by the “persistent manner in which Pears Soap, Beecham’s Pills, Enos Fruit Salt, Holloway’s Ointment, Cadbury’s and Fry’s Cocoa, to say nothing of various brands of beers and spirits” were publicised to global eyes, with advertising bills covering railway compartments, railway lines and station walls.\(^7^2\) Pandian’s wonder at seeing human advertisements is at odds with the horror that Charles Dickens felt on seeing human subjects sandwiched between advertising pasteboards before rows of specious shops.\(^7^3\) Lala Baijnath’s more modestly titled *England and India* (1893) found that advertisements blocked “all light from omnibuses and railway carriages”. Every morning he witnessed “unfortunate specimens of humanity walking along the gutters in rows of sixes or sevens, with a board in front and a board behind”.\(^7^4\) Regardless of their subjectivity and difference, Indian travellers framed London in the same hierarchy of seeing—spaces, settings, spectacles and characters—that modernity demanded from literature. Like artworks and advertisements on the Underground, changing facets of modernity as seen in these travel accounts also constitute a Gesamtkunstwerk. If, as Nandy argues, the colonial experience overwhelmed and damaged British society, a lot of it affected the sensorium of London. Malabari saw in it the metaphor of a “train laid for the destruction of the town” and went about seeking policemen, clergymen, railway porters, cab drivers and East Enders to find alternate ways of “doing London”\(^7^5\).

By Malabari’s time, two Indian Londoners had sat in the House of Commons—Dadabhai Naoroji and Mancherjee Bhownagree, Mohandas K. Gandhi, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and a host of other Indians had qualified as barristers from the city. Among the most renowned of them, W.C. Bonnerjee, had even built a Victorian mansion in Croydon, which he called Kidderpore, after a street in Calcutta. In forms of curries, artefacts, furnishings and other commodities—that one saw around the time of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition—Typogravia penetrated into several aspects of London society. It would have been easier for Malabari and later travellers to chart out independent journeys in London, than Pothum Janakummah Ragaviah, an Indian woman who came to the city with her husband in 1872. She was the first known Hindu woman to publish an English account of her European travels, what became her *Pictures of England* (1876). Ragaviah’s experience on a London train rivals the landscaping aesthetics in at least two accounts written on Indian railway travelling—Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873) and Rousselet’s *India and its Native Princes* (1875). For Rousselet, the Great Indian Peninsular Railway—penetrating the tunnels of the Western Ghats and vertically dividing the landscape

\(^7^1\) Behramji Malabari, *The Indian Eye on English Life…*, op. cit., p. 184–


\(^7^5\) Behramji Malabari, *The Indian Eye on English Life…*, op. cit., p. 44–46.
between the Konkan range and moon-lit branches across little dak bungalows—was a tool to summarize an unfathomable India. For Verne, the pepper, nutmeg, clove and coffee plantations, and steam curling up around palm trees across picturesque houses was a stereotype for railway travelling in the plains. Whether as a mimicry of Eurocentric templates or as allusions to an aesthetic zeitgeist, Ragaviah’s journey on the Great Western Railway teases the roots of a canon, that is also disavows. Hers is a rare instance where an Indian in London actually travels in a train.

“As we were nearing Waterloo Station we crossed several bridges, and directing my view towards the innumerable turrets and high houses, the whole town seemed to be in a blaze, the cause being attributable to gas-lights with which the streets are lighted, as I afterwards learnt to be the case. We left our train and engaged cabs, drove through several streets, arriving at last at the Haxels Exeter Hotel, in the Strand. The brilliant lights even surpassed a bright moonlight night [...] the true meaning of the word ‘Fairy-land’.”

Rousselet’s viaduct bridges and Verne’s hamlets on the Gangetic plains find appropriate equivalents in Ragaviah’s shades of darkness and light, the otherworld of turrets and chimneys and a civilized Strand. Much more striking is the resemblance to Gustav Doré’s iconic engraving, Over London by Rail (1872). Doré’s incriminating gaze on London’s social inequality is itself reminiscent of Dickens’ depiction of a railway journey undertaken by Dombey, after the loss of his son. Dickens saw the railways as “the remorseless monster, Death!”’, rummaging through a city of ashes, deserted cottages, factories, cathedrals, estates, gardens and pools, all turned into an empty moorland. Doré’s railway engine appears to ply a telescope to observe “an infinite stretch of phantom veil enveloping the Lilliputian population of a vast metropolis.” The little gardens in the backyards of overcrowded Tudor houses where people huddled together for warmth, and the hunger and poverty, which Doré captures, are shockingly swept under the “blaze” that Ragaviah saw, or refused to look beneath. While she fleetingly retained Turner’s bewilderment, Dickens’ cadence and Doré’s chiaroscuro, her pictures from the railway carriage are not of people or places, but of other pictures. They reproduce in us a desire to teleport into the scene at hand. She saw “countless people”, but wished that there was silence and darkness instead, the carte blanche for fabricating her own spaces.

Ragaviah’s journey imbricated archetypes of a cosmic passage, where London’s railway corridor lay in a timeless liminal space, functionally quarantined from the polite business of the metropolis. It also trained the reader for an architectural modernity, like The Building News of October 1866, which noted that the most casual observer would have been “struck with the great changes of outline”, the roofs of gigantic hotels and turrets rising sharply above the “skyline of its humbler

77. Pothum Janakummah Ragaviah, Pictures of England: Descriptive of Her Visit to Europe, Madras, Gantz Bros, 1876, p. 46.
neighbours”. Victorian London’s sublimity was a consequence of vertical hierarchies of space, where the railways and the Underground were at the lowest, inducing parallels with the Christian cosmos. Although not a naturalised Londoner herself, her passage from Waterloo to Strand appropriated the naturalised Londoner’s expression of a transition from darkness unto light. A sort of this canonical mimicry would later be seen in Gandhi—sauntering past Piccadilly, dressed in starched Gladstone collars and a silk top, seeking out theosophists and vegetarian restaurants around Bloomsbury and Holborn. Ragaviah embarked on the canonical train of Turner, Dickens and Doré not necessarily to see London intimately, but to intimate it to herself and her readers. “Pictures” by Ragaviah and later travellers, constituted a Typogravia where the colonized mind could convalesce; where under the guise of obeying the command of commodity capital, they occupied an autonomous space. Late-Victorian London offered itself as a laboratory to the likes of Gandhi, where his theosophy, vegetarianism, naturopathy and critiques of industrial revolution were explorations in an alternate West. Considering that Gandhi’s first lodging was at a four-storeyed house in West Kensington overlooking the District Line, and his satyagraha campaigns would later turn the Indian Railways into theatres of nationalism, the absence of railways in his unpublished Guide to London (1893-94) and The Story of My Experiments with Truth (1927), make them all the more conspicuous. It could have been a deliberate elision, given how disastrous the railways had been for the Indian economy. Throughout the 1880s, the Indian Government imported British railway wagons, implements and technology worth £3 million, annually. Until 1948, 91 percent of broad-gauge and nearly 80 percent of metre-gauge locomotives for India were exported by Britain. Less than 3 percent of broad-gauge and 11 per cent of metre-gauge locomotives—only about 700 locomotives—were manufactured in India. 14,000 locomotives were purchased from Britain, creating an additional fiscal deficit for a colony that was turned into “a captive market for British-made engines”. Trade and human welfare deficits of British India, and other colonies, subsidised London as the “centre of light and learning, but now on an unprecedented scale”. Seeing how the railways promoted advertising in London, Gandhi later used Indian railway compartments and platforms to mobilise the nation for satyagraha and swaraj.

Being around London’s railway spaces, as in London itself, was a virtual recovery of selfhood, and an opportunity to tackle the overarching imperialist strategies back home. Unlike the “mobile incarceration” of colonised railway spaces in India or “alienated consumption” on Tube Stations, railway experiences of Indians in London shaped their travel accounts as therapeutic and pedagogic activities. The first model Tube map was designed by Harry Beck in

86. Manu Goswami, Producing India, New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2004, p. 102-106; David Ashford, London Underground…, op. cit., p. 13-34.

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1931, during the time of the Second Round Table Conference, and two years before the Government of India Act that laid down the tenets of India’s provincial autonomy. What was later designated as Zone 1 of the London Tube map (and some parts of Zone 2) practically doubles up as the literary map of London, marking milieus of kings, queens, executions, taverns, and the haunts of Shakespeare, Pope, Dryden, Burke, Blake, Dickens, Wilde, Chesterton, Woolf—if also implicitly of Ragaviah, Mukharji, Jang, Malabari, Pillai, Pandian and Gandhi. While the loss and recovery of Indian selfhood, in London, was largely psychological, an incident from before the Great War made it physically manifest.

In 1883, Háte remarked that railways in India had brought its variegated geography and cultures into a “happy contact”. Three decades later, a happy accident on the London Tube brought India on the cultural map of the twentieth-century. On a visit to London, in 1912, Rabindranath Tagore meant to give the English translation of Gitanjali to William Rothenstein, to see if he could persuade William Butler Yeats to write its preface. While travelling from Dover to London in June, Tagore misplaced the attaché containing the manuscript on his way to Rothenstein’s Hampstead residence. The office of “lost property” at the Baker Street station came to his rescue. The manuscript was returned safely to Tagore, he gave it to Rothenstein, whence it was presented it to Yeats, whose eminent introduction to Gitanjali catapulted its author into immediate celebrity. The London India Society published an anthology of 103 poems, republished as Gitanjali by Macmillan in March, next year. Eight months later, Tagore was a Nobel laureate and “a global phenomenon”. The Underground had impressed its cryptic epigraph on the modern bible of Eastern wisdom that would mollify an entire generation of Europeans through the years of the war. In 1931, in a letter to Rothenstein, Tagore wrote: “It was an accident for which you were also responsible and possibly most of all was Yeats”. Unlike other accidents, this one redeemed the intertwined souls of a wrecked continent and a colony.

The eavesdropping colony

While Indian travelogues aesthetically overlapped with the larger Victorian canon, their palimpsestic London acquired an independent life. Discourses and diegetic journeys in Typogravia, although shaped by the ubiquity of railways in the metropolis, were informed by a subconscious desire for freedom, mobility, and ambivalent tactics of the habitat. London was provincialised both deliberately and as a consequence of “the unfulfilled promise of national sovereignty at the heart of the imperial project”.

Railways were extremely significant to the metropolis from the vantage of the “London sublime,” as seen in the works of Turner, Dickens and Doré, among others, that transported its spectators into a chasm overlooking the infernal din, smoky railway tracks and sooty tur-

Top: “Over London by Rail”. Engraved by Gustave Doré, for Gustave Doré and William Blanchard Jerrold’s, *London, a Pilgrimage* (1872). Pothum Ragaviah’s description of a train journey to Waterloo station bears a striking resemblance to the possible view from the train that Doré’s engraving depicts; Bottom: “Sketch of Kings Cross Station”, from *Illustrated London News*, 1852. *All the above images are courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*
rets against the foggy outline of a railway bridge.\(^{91}\) If, as Burton says, Indian tourists turned into tour-guides in London, they also turned into early architects of a diaspora that circled their railway experiences, like the Underground circling the city. Indians rewriting the monumental signifier of “London” in intelligible archetypes and stereotypes was significant enough; more so was their mimicry of established conventions of reportage and literary expressions, as tactics of adaptation to little niches within the metropole.

The limits of that erstwhile Indian London—now a South Asian diaspora—have been pushed beyond the frontiers of \(\text{Typogravia}\) into Tower Hamlets, Southall, Wembley, Hillingdon and Tooting. Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi vegetable vendors, cash and carry proprietors, travel agencies and fish merchants, condiment and cutlery sellers, copper and bronze merchants, incense sticks and bangle sellers, priests and restauranteurs, have kept on effecting morphological transformations in South Asian parts of London.\(^{92}\) With more than twenty-five British South Asian members in the House of Commons, a British Indian life peer in the House of Lords, a British South Asian mayor of London, and umpteen South Asian restaurants and celebrities in the centre of London life, it is imperative to for postcolonial scholarship to examine how an anticolonial or South Asian turn was witnessed and represented by the emerging diaspora, back in the nineteenth-century.

In 2010, a startling discovery by the National Human Genome Research Institute, in Maryland, busted the myth of human genetic control in successive generations. Accordingly, the human genome comprised only 25,000 human protein-coding genes hanging on to a cliff in sea of foreign bacterial genes.\(^{93}\) The finding remains controversial, but it can be an efficient model to understand Foucault’s thesis on how marginalised spatial tactics battle against the body politic of capitalism, or Greenblatt’s notion of how, like enzymes, new cultures alter the morphology of homogenous cultures. Intracultural, transcultural and canonical mimicries seen in Victorian Indian travellers were not simply throwbacks to the intended strategy of imperialism, that of testing their urban and literary adaptability. More prominently, they were tactics to resist a grand imperial narrative with its imposed metropitan ideals of railways and modernity. Not unlike a colony of bacterial cells, travellers like Ragaviah, Mukharji, Malabari, Pillai, Pandian or even Gandhi, had all eavesdropped on London’s diurnal and sociopolitical realities, while precariously indwelling its \(\text{Typogravia}\). Not unlike Herman Hesse’s prisoner, every now and then, they made themselves invisible enough and climbed on to a little train disappearing into a long tunnel of their own making, which opened into the tracks of freedom.


Illustrations of exhibits from the Colonial and Indian Exhibition from the *Pall Mall Gazette: An Evening Newspaper and Review*, May 1886. Clockwise: Indian Gate; Man at the Bazaar; Man at Kaffir (pagan) Village; Indian Pavillion; Leopard and Elephant in an Indian Jungle.
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