

Abstract only

**“If they would run in Dihlí as they do here, it would
be a perfect paradise”: Inclusion Through
Familiarity in Mohan Lal’s Travelogue (1831-1834)**



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Abstract

This thesis explores how Munshi Mohan Lal (1812-1877), who was born after the British conquest of Delhi (1803) and during the period of the Delhi Renaissance, navigated Persianate Asia. Through a study of the first edition of his travelogue, I situate Mohan Lal in the period of colonial transition and intellectual shifts to gauge his worldview. I unpack how travel made possible peculiar forms of familiarity in this milieu, arguing that this led to a form of ‘inclusion’ based on Persianate modes of knowledge. Mobility for actors like Mohan Lal was enabled by British imperial networks, but equally drew on older forms of Persianate connectivity. This meant that though he was travelling with an imperial retinue and accessed places because of their networks, the way he encountered and described the people and spaces he came across drew on Persianate sensibilities. By accommodating European knowledge in existing Persianate frames, he exemplified a new-age cosmopolitanism that could comfortably place European knowledge in existing frames and make connections accordingly. This thesis studies the forms of familiarity this early nineteenth century cosmopolitanism made possible, and how these facilitated inclusion into a pre-existing globalised imagination. This mode of inclusion transcended ethnic, religious, geographic differences and continued to thrive while the Persianate geocultural world contracted and the European expanded. In doing so, I hope to understand the shared means through which he rendered what he encountered ‘familiar’, and the ways in which this familiarity promoted inclusion into a fluid geocultural cosmopolis. Consequently, I argue that not only did he represent the last generation of munshis to embody Persianate modes of familiarity, but also belonged to a brief era where Persianate frames continued to inform worldviews despite increasing Europeanisation.