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Translated Liberties: Karsandas Mulji's Travels in England and the Anthropology of the Victorian Self

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ABSTRACT

Through an analysis and historical contextualization of Gujarati writer Karsandas Mulji's *Travels in England* (1866), this article makes two interrelated arguments. First, Indian liberals' efforts to translate notions of liberty exposed the gap between liberalism's subtractive and additive projects, its abolition of customary constraints on the subject and its imposition of new constraints. Second, Mulji's travelogue suggests the complexity of anthropology in post-1850s India, when an amateur form of social science persisted alongside the emergence of the ethnographic state. As an amateur ethnologist, Mulji drew freely on source material from Henry Mayhew to Samuel Smiles to present England as a moral template for India. His turn to self-help or self-improvement literature, moreover, suggests the global scope of a mid-Victorian ethical culture that set the stage for the ethical concerns of anticolonial thinkers like M.K. Gandhi.

If the history of liberalism once appeared to scholars as a narrowly North Atlantic affair, it has now begun to assume a much more global face, with Caracas, Calcutta, and Port-au-Prince emerging as integral players alongside Paris, London, and Philadelphia.¹ It has also become increasingly clear that the history of liberalism extends well beyond intellectual history narrowly construed. Liberalism was not only a set of writings by major political theorists intent on reordering the state. It was also a set of cultural attitudes and aesthetic forms, an ethical program for reordering the self.²

* I would like to thank the participants in the 2017 University of Michigan–Thyssen Foundation workshop on “Global Cultural Encounters,” hosted by Kira Thurman and Stefan Hübner, who, along with the blind reviewers for *Modern Intellectual History*, helped me to substantially reframe and improve the argument of this essay. I would also like to thank Thom Dancer, Daniel Elam, Caroline Levine, Daniel Majchrowicz, and Aileen Robinson for sharing their own research, commenting on mine, or just generally offering words of enthusiastic encouragement. Finally, I owe particular thanks to Yurou Zhong, who read several drafts of this article and patiently listened to me as I thought through several others.

1 For examples of the rich recent historiography, see C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge, 2011); Glenda Sluga and Timothy Rouse, eds., Forum on “Global Liberalisms,” *Modern Intellectual History* 12/3 (2015).

This was true in the colonies as well as the metropole. Nineteenth-century Indian liberals, as C. A. Bayly observes, “thought they were initiating a new code for living one’s life, a new way of being human.” Like their British counterparts, they sought to free themselves from constraints of custom, tradition, and local particularity in order to institute a new form of radically autonomous human subjectivity.³ In doing so, however, these Indian liberals were confronted with liberalism’s own stubborn particularity. Rather than somehow standing above culture, liberalism appeared in India as paradigmatically English.⁴ Indian thinkers, consequently, sought to indigenize liberalism by refracting it through Indic traditions.⁵ They also, along the way, threw the contours of the Victorian liberal self into especially sharp relief.

This article explores this Indian anthropology of Victorian selfhood through sustained attention to a single text: Karsandas Mulji’s *Inglaṇḍmām Pravās* [*Travels in England*] (1866).⁶ Although little known today, Karsandas Mulji (1832–1871) was a prominent social reformer in Bombay in the 1850s and 60s. As a journalist, essayist, and writer of nonfiction prose, he is significant within the history of modern Gujarati literature for the “simple” and “easy” style exemplified by *Travels in England*.⁷ The book recounts Mulji’s 1863 trip to Britain, offering an account of his sea voyage, a tour of London’s major sights and attractions, and a description of English society that, at times, verges on the ethnographic. Where early chapters survey London’s streets and shops, its parks, buildings, and principle tourist sites, later chapters seek to document the “social states and habits of the people,” the “etiquette and usages of society,” and the “general character of the British nation.” In these last sections in particular, Mulji offers what amounts to an apologia for British rule, insisting that Britain’s ascendancy over India is due to its technological, economic, and cultural superiority. *Travels in England* proved sufficiently popular to go into a second edition in 1867, with eventual translations into both Marathi and Urdu.⁸

In what follows, I use Mulji’s travelogue to make two interrelated arguments about the cultural location of ethics, or the practice of the self, during this period.⁹ First, Mulji’s effort to

2 Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago, 2010); Amanda Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism* (Chicago, 2016).

3 Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 132–3.

4 It did not, however, therefore always further the aims of empire. See Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, 2010), and Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History* (Berkeley, 2014).

5 Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*

6 Karsandas Mulji, *Inglaṇḍmām Pravās* [*Travels in England*], ed. Bholabhai Patel (Gandhinagar, 2001 [1866]). In this article, citations from *Travels in England* refer to the 2001 edition. All translations are mine, with the exception of chapter titles, which Mulji gives in both Gujarati and English.

7 Jayankrishan Harikrishan Dave, *Gujarātī Sāhitya kā Itihās* (Lucknow, 1963), 129–36; Umashankar Joshi, Anantray Raval, and Yashvant Shukla, *Gujarātī Sāhityano Itihās*, vol. 3 (Ahmedabad, 1978), 166–8.

8 Joshi et al., *Gujarātī Sāhityano Itihās*, 167; Mulji, *Travels*, vi; Daniel Majchrowicz, “Travel, Travel Writing, and the ‘Means to Victory’ in Modern South Asia” (unpublished Ph.D thesis, Harvard University, 2015), 6.

9 In this article, I use the word “ethics” in a broadly Foucauldian sense to refer to embodied practices for the cultivation of the self and its habitual dispositions. Compare the definition in Anand Pandian and Daud Ali, eds., *Ethical Life in South Asia* (Bloomington, 2010), 2.

translate liberal ideals of freedom or individual autonomy into Gujarati frames with particular clarity a tension that had been internal to liberal thought. It was arguably only in the colonies, and perhaps especially India, that the conflict between philosophical liberalism (which stipulated rules of governance that were arrived at deductively, without reference to received historical fact) and tradition (or the accretion of historical custom) assumed its fullest form.¹⁰ Indian social reformers, who were caught between the need to preserve cultural and religious difference as the markers of national identity, and the desire to align themselves with universalist norms, were thus able to express the contradictions of liberalism with a precision not possible in the metropole.¹¹ These contradictions come through especially clearly in relation to the key liberal concept of liberty or freedom. Many Victorians understood freedom to entail not only political freedom but also freedom from what J. S. Mill called the “despotism of custom.” Victorian travel writing was one site where the desire to escape from custom took shape, personified by the cosmopolitan figure of the mobile traveler. The notion that the liberal individual stands above culture becomes difficult to sustain, however, if freedom is thought to be itself cultural—an attribute of England or, more broadly, “the West” that needs to be exported to the rest of the world. If freedom is an English custom, it is an external constraint placed up the subject rather than (as is usually presumed) the absence of such constraints. The liberal individual is, in other words, not the natural condition of the human person once all external constraints have been removed; it is rather the product of historically and culturally contingent processes of subjectivation.¹² In place of the free subject liberated from all external constraints, then, a new ideal emerges—the subject who consciously applies external forms of discipline to the self, in full knowledge that it is only via constraint that subjectivity can emerge as such.¹³

Second, Mulji's *Travels in England* offers a substantially different point of entry onto the history of anthropology in India in the 1860s than do the developments more commonly highlighted by the extant scholarship. During the very period in which the ethnographic state (to recall Nicholas Dirks' term) was emerging, Mulji signaled the continuing life of an earlier mode of anthropological knowledge that had been decidedly amateur, informal, and diffuse in its mechanisms. It is not that this amateur anthropology was somehow “benign” or inert in its ideological effects.¹⁴ It was often avowedly political and, in its way, as interventionist in its approach to Indian customs as were the state-sponsored knowledge forms of official ethnography (indeed, the two had developed in tandem). This amateur ethnology did, however, represent a distinctive cultural sphere during this period and one that is a necessary supplement to research on the taxonomic regimes of the state. To register my intervention with the pertinent Foucauldian vocabulary, Mulji signals the extent to which colonial anthropology operated in the mode of “ethics” as much as the mode of “discipline”—thus pushing colonial anthropology closer to the intellectual terrain later occupied by M. K. Gandhi

10 Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's The History of British India and Orientalism* (Oxford, 1992); Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Thought* (Chicago, 1999).

11 Compare the argument in Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton, 1993).

12 Compare Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA, 2007).

13 This being at least one possible reading of the project explored in Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York, 1997), 253–80.

14 The term “benign” is Bayly's. See *Recovering Liberties*, 105.

and other anticolonial thinkers. In the 1840s, Mill had proposed a science of “ethology” that would examine how particular societies’ customs shaped the formation of “character” or *ethos*.¹⁵ I am, in a sense, approaching Mulji as an ethologist of the English, whose work, accordingly, blurred the line between ethnology and ethics.

The article has a third, more implicit, methodological argument. Rather than pursuing the above arguments across a number of different texts, here I take a single text and trace the multiple histories that intersect within it. By doing this, I hope to reveal levels of complexity that might not otherwise become visible. As Javed Majeed has noted, nineteenth-century Indian travel writing lacks the literary sophistication of twentieth-century texts by figures like Jawaharlal Nehru and Muhammad Iqbal. Victorian travelogues’ approach to problems of subjectivity is, on the face of it, much less fraught.¹⁶ While this may be true at the level of literary form, I will suggest, it becomes a less plausible claim if we consider the uneasy intersection of genres in texts like Mulji’s *Travels in England*. The complexity and sophistication of such a text derives more from its contextual relationship to other texts, and its uneasy blending of genres, than from its innate literary qualities.

A list of the English-language books that Mulji consulted while writing his *Travels* suggests the complexity of the intellectual space that it occupies. These include not only travelogues like Jehangeer Nowrojee and Hirjeebhoy Merwanjee’s *Journal of a Residence of Two and Half Years in Great Britain* (1841) and tourist guides like John Murray’s *Handbook for Modern London* (1851) and William Howitt’s *Rural Life of England* (1854), but also journalistic classics like Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861–2), etiquette and self-improvement books like *The Habits of Good Society: A Handbook of Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen* (1859) and Samuel Smiles’ *Self-Help* (1859), and reference books like William Chamber’s *Information for the People: A Popular Encyclopedia* and John Debrett’s *Peerage of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, plus periodicals ranging from London’s *Westminster Review* to Calcutta’s *Friend of India*. Nor does such a list exhaust the field of potential connections. Mulji’s *Travels* participated in a mid-Victorian ethical culture that swept up the philosophical ethics of Henry Sidgwick and T.H. Green alongside etiquette books and evangelical sermons, stretching transnationally from Aristotle to *akhlaq*. In what follows, I gesture to this transnational scene by highlighting one index of it: Mulji’s use of Smiles’s *Self-Help*, the widely circulated self-improvement manual that played a conspicuous role in debates about modernization from Egypt to Japan.

The following discussion organizes these several threads into a survey of four different genres of writing that impinge on *Travels in England*: the travelogue, the political tract, the ethnographic gazetteer, and the self-improvement manual. Along the way, there is a substantial excursus on the concept of character in the Victorian period. The article concludes with a schematic discussion of how Victorian selfhood lived on into early twentieth-century Indian anticolonial thought. If Mulji helps us to better appreciate the historically specific contours of Victorian selfhood, I suggest, perhaps he can also help us to better understand the apparent resonance between the Victorians and figures like Gandhi.

15 John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* (London, 1961 [1843]), 567.

16 Javed Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel, and Postnational Identity: Gandhi, Nehru, and Iqbal* (New York, 2007).

Mobile Subjects: English, India, and the Colonial Travelogue

The first and most obvious of the genres that intersect in *Travels in England* is that of the travelogue. Here, rather than approach the travelogue via well-established motifs of cultural contact, I instead work to situate it within the intellectual history of global liberalisms. As is well known, travel writing was an important site for articulating the cultural implications of colonial rule. In English, the genre had implicitly contrasted the global mobility of European travelers with place-bound “natives.”¹⁷ As colonial writers took up this genre, it became an important means not only of reversing the racialized tourist gaze, as in trips by Indians to London, but also of laying claim to an embodied form of transcultural, global subjectivity.¹⁸

Less frequently noted in the scholarship is the extent to which the imperial subject of the Victorian travelogue resonated with a certain notion of liberal subjectivity. Travel writers participated in the world of Victorian liberalism insofar as they strove for a principled distance from their intimate environs, cultivating a practice of embodied abstraction that was important to Victorian liberal concepts of citizenship and public virtue.¹⁹ Indian travelogues, as part of the broader literary field of liberalism, offered a narrative enactment of this break with local particularity.²⁰

Mulji was not, of course, the first person from India to visit London, nor was he the first traveler to write about his experiences. Indians had been visiting and living in Britain since the seventeenth century, and the first book written by an Indian in English (in 1794) was in fact a travelogue.²¹ The period after the 1860s did, however, produce an unprecedented explosion of travel writing. This surge was partly due to a corresponding increase in travel; with trains and steamships replacing bullock-carts and sailboats, traveling was simply easier. It was also related to the efflorescence and commercialization of vernacular literature more generally after the 1850s.²² The handful of Gujarati students who traveled to Britain earlier in the century had, tellingly, opted to write in English.²³ Only in the 1860s did similar titles begin to appear in Gujarati. Early

17 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (London, 2008), 8; Majeed, *Autobiography*, 10–11; Arjun Appadurai, “Putting Hierarchy in its Place,” *Cultural Anthropology* 3/1 (1988), 36–49; James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge MA, 1997).

18 Antoinette Burton, “Making a Spectacle of Empire: Indian Travelers in Fin-de-Siècle London,” *History Workshop Journal* 42 (1996), 126–46; Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley, 1998); Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel, and Postnational Identity*, 12–13.

19 Hadley, *Living Liberalism*; Amanda Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now* (Princeton, 2005), 17.

20 Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 150–3

21 Michael H. Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travelers and Settlers in Britain, 1600–1857* (Delhi, 2004); Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race, and Identity, 1880–1930* (London, 2000); Dean Mahomet, *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*, ed. Michael Fisher (Berkeley, 1997).

22 Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (Ranikhet, 2008).

23 The extant travelogues from this period are Ardaseer Cursetjee’s *Diary of an Overland Journey from Bombay to England and of a Year’s Residence in Great Britain* (1840) and Jehangeer Nowrojee and Hirjeebhoy Merwanjee’s *Journal of a Residence of Two and Half Years in Great Britain* (1841). See Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism*, 30–2, 339–51.

Gujarati-language travelogues include Dosabhoy Framjee's *Gareṭ Barītan Khātenī Musāpharī* (*Travels in Great Britain*, 1861); Mahīpatrām Rūprām's *Inglaṇḍnī Musāpharīnā Varnan* (*Description of a Trip to England*, 1862); and the anonymously published *Amerikānī Musāpharī* (*Trip to America*, 1864), written by a "Parsi gentleman." Between the 1860s and the early 1900s, many more Gujarati men and at least one woman published accounts of their travels to Europe, America, Iran, China, and Japan.²⁴

In the history of Gujarati literature, this period is known as the "age of reform" (*sudhāarak* *yug*). Stretching from 1852 till 1885, it centered on the poets Narmadshankar Lalshankar (1833–1886) and Dalpatram (1820–1898) and pointed toward the slightly later rise of the modern Gujarati novel.²⁵ Literature, for reformist writers, was a pedagogic instrument. It was a means of national uplift, a tool for remaking readers as virtuous citizen-subjects. Different types of literature, moreover, were thought to shape character in different ways. The travelogue, at least in the colonial context, seems to have been most closely associated with freedom and independence: it positioned the mobile individual as the paradigm of subjectivity and worked to cultivate this mode of subjectivity in its potential readers.

Of course, the "notion of freedom" plied by colonial travelogues was both raced and gendered. If mobility was understood as the province of men, with femininity defining the immobility of "home," liberty was understood as, in some sense, white: colonial travelogues aligned freedom with British parliamentary liberalism and contrasted it with the alleged unfreedoms of non-traveling "natives."²⁶ Mulji's *Travels* enacts these distinctions quite clearly. As he continually reminds his reader, Hindu tradition prevents travel; British modernity requires it. Mulji himself (with his wife back home in Bombay) becomes a figure for the passage between these two domains. Thus, in narrating his April boat ride across the English Channel, he recalls a pleasant breeze: "It came into my heart that I was taking my first breath of the cool wind of a free land [*svatantrabhūmī*]."²⁷ To disencumber oneself of place may be what makes a person free. But, for Mulji at least, freedom is not itself placeless: it is rooted in English soil.

Framed in this way, Mulji's narrative account of his trip assumes a particular significance. It highlights Mulji's mobile individuality. We hear about his traveling companions, his seasickness, and his maritime ennui.²⁸ We follow him in his miscellaneous enthusiasms for things ranging from flying fish to the city of Marseilles.²⁹ We become accustomed to his hobbyhorses and pet

24 Dosabhoy Framjee, *Gareṭ Barītan Khātenī Musāpharī: Travels in Great Britain* (Bombay, 1861); *Amerikānī Musāpharī* (Bombay, 1864); Sitamshu Yashaschandra, "From Hemachandra to *Hind Swaraj*: Region and Power in Gujarati Literary Culture," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley, 2003), 567–611, at 596. One might compare the history of the Urdu travelogue, for which the 1860s were also a pivotal decade. See Majchrowicz, "Travel, Travel Writing, and the 'Means to Victory,'" 41–4.

25 See Mansukhlal Jhaveri, *History of Gujarati Literature* (New Delhi, 1978), 84–5; Dave, *Gujarātī Sāhitya kā Itihās*, 129–36; Joshi et al., *Gujarātī Sāhityano Itihās*, 166–8.

26 Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham NC, 1996), 136.

27 Mulji, *Travels*, 60.

28 Ibid., 38–9.

29 Ibid., 44–5.

peeves—perhaps above all around questions of caste (thus, when visiting the Hindus of Aden, he approvingly reports that they take water from Muslims and drink from leather flasks, because the necessities of desert life trump the ritual conventions of caste).³⁰ The book is about England. But it is also about Mulji. Throughout, we get the particular experience of a single traveling individual—this being a necessary effect of the genre, but one that had specific cultural and political implications in the late nineteenth century.

These implications extended well beyond the literary text. Travelers' tales helped fuel London's incipient tourist industry, which, during the 1860s, was rendering the city as a visual spectacle open to bourgeois consumption.³¹ Mulji, part of this moment, frames his book around the question, "What in this country is worth seeing?"³² To tour London, he says, is to tour the world, and even people who were born there have not seen everything.³³ Mulji made a valiant effort to visit the city's principle "spectacles" (*tamāśo*) and attractions, including most of its major museums—where traces of empire abounded. At the Crystal Palace, he saw ethnological displays of objects of the "primitive peoples" (*jaṅglī māṇaso*) of Africa, America, and Australia.³⁴ In the Tower of London, he noticed that Ranjit Singh's Kohinoor diamond had been incorporated into the Crown Jewels.³⁵ At the East Indian Museum, he saw Tipu's tiger.³⁶ Of the British Museum, he offered what remains sage advice: "Even if you stay for a whole day, you cannot see the entire museum."³⁷ Mulji was particularly thrilled with the reading room, marveling at the rounded dome, appreciating the silence of his fellow readers, and perusing a potpourri of rare items that included a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita* written on tree bark.³⁸ London's urban infrastructure was just as dazzling. Wandering by foot, Mulji admired the city's statues and fountains.³⁹ When he tired, he rode on top of an omnibus to take in more sights, including the gas lamps that lit up the streets every evening. Nor did sights stop at ground level: Mulji rode London's newly opened underground train half dozen times.⁴⁰

Travelers' tales also reinforced the ideological and institutional structures of empire, most pertinently those of colonial pedagogy. As Mulji notes in his introduction, "Traveling in a civilized

30 Ibid., 43.

31 Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, 2000), 57-9; John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London, 1990).

32 Mulji, *Travels*, 2.

33 Ibid., 106.

34 Ibid., 135.

35 Ibid., 122.

36 Ibid., 115.

37 Ibid., 106-13.

38 Ibid., 112-13.

39 Ibid., 77.

40 Ibid., 71.

country [*sudharelā deś*] is an important and necessary part of a superior education.”⁴¹ To support this claim, he enlists other, more authoritative voices— most significantly that of Bartle Frere (then governor of Bombay Presidency) who, in April 1864, gave a speech praising the benefits of foreign travel at Bombay University’s graduation ceremony. Mulji quotes the speech at length. He also recommends that his readers emulate David Livingstone, that paragon of imperial mobility, who had visited India in 1865.⁴² As these rhetorical moves suggest, travel—despite its cultural associations—was never entirely free. Not only was it underwritten by the institutional and economic structures of the British Empire. It was also shaped and constrained by the very genre through which it was narrated. By choosing to write a travelogue that he so closely associated with the project of English education, Mulji acceded to British rule in the very moment that he laid claim to liberty.

Translating Victorian Liberalism

To explore this paradox further, we turn to the next of the genres that intersect in *Travels in England*: the political tract or newspaper editorial. Mulji’s travel narrative is wrapped in extended editorializing about the virtues of British culture. These sections directly invoke many of the ideals of Victorian liberalism—and thus also, by implication, present the work of the Indian vernacular travelogue as not only narratively enacting liberal ideas, but also translating those ideas in more expository form.

As Mulji explains in the introduction, “the contemporary time is one of reform and freedom” (*hālno vakht sudharāi ane svatantratāno che*). “It is for the sake of freedom that war has been going on in America for four years. In Europe, how many wars have happened for the sake of freedom! For the sake of freedom, people are willing to throw down their lives.” India, he insists, should learn to live in its “era” (*jamāna*) by accepting the “necessity of becoming free” (*svatantra*).⁴³ With this temporal framing, Mulji situates his travelogue within the broader currents of global liberalism and its historical metanarratives. In much the same way, perhaps, that earlier revolutionaries had understood their actions for freedom to be determined (somewhat paradoxically) by historical necessity, so too does Mulji present the dawn of freedom as a natural force that propels human actors.⁴⁴

In making these claims, Mulji was continuing work he had been engaged in since the mid-1850s. He was particularly concerned to limit the authority of the religious leaders, or Maharajas, of the Pushtimarg, the sect of his own community in Bombay. Founded in the sixteenth century, the Pushtimarg had, by the nineteenth century, come to be the object of frequent criticism for the alleged sexual misconduct of the Maharajas. Mulji joined this chorus by challenging the very idea of a hereditary priesthood and recommending an adjusted social order in which bourgeois men like him would ensure that priests did their proper job of instructing the people in ethics and religious

41 Ibid., 10.

42 Ibid., 170-2.

43 Ibid., 33-4.

44 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York, 2006 [1963]).

scriptures.⁴⁵

Mulji's attacks on the Pushtimarg had propelled his trip to London. In 1860, he published a newspaper article accusing the Maharajas of sexual misconduct with female devotees. One of these leaders decided to sue Mulji for libel. When the case went before the Bombay Supreme Court in the spring of 1862, the city's newspapers gave extensive coverage to its lurid mix of sex, power, and religion. The court ultimately ruled in Mulji's favor, holding that his accusations were both true and in the public interest. While this ruling brought him satisfaction, it did not endear him to traditional caste elites, who remained loyal to the Pushtimarg. At trial's end, his reformist friends feted him, but he was otherwise shunned. His friends thus arranged for Mulji to leave the country, with the merchant magnate Karsandas Madhavdass hiring him to extend his cloth trade to England. Mulji planned to set up residence there, but poor health forced him home far sooner than expected. Leaving for England in March of 1863, he returned to Bombay in September. Homecoming, moreover, was hard. Because Mulji refused to undergo traditional purification rituals, he was officially excommunicated by caste authorities, which made his financial situation precarious. To make ends meet, he took odd jobs, as well as continuing to write in both Gujarati and English.⁴⁶ When his friends asked him whether his trip was worth the subsequent hardships, Mulji responded by saying that he endured his sorrows with patience, but the fact that he had "made a large and proper journey" remained "the greatest of my great joys."⁴⁷

By framing *Travels in England* as a paean to freedom, Mulji signals its continuity with his earlier critiques of the Pushtimarg. In both cases, he presents traditional caste authorities as the principle enemies of freedom.⁴⁸ Ritual restriction on travel over the "black waters" was, Mulji argued, akin to other forms of bondage. "So long as a man cannot move about according to his own will, then he can be said to be in a state of slavery."⁴⁹ Taken literally, this may well be a dubious claim: the subcontinent does have a history of slavery, as Rupa Viswanath has shown, which during the late nineteenth century was in the process of being disavowed and erased via the "spiritualization" of caste.⁵⁰ The global economics of slave labor, moreover, bore directly on life in Bombay in the mid-1860s, when the city's elites found themselves suddenly awash in wealth, thanks to the spike in demand for Indian cotton during the American civil war. Mulji, like so many liberal thinkers before him, turns attention away from these very real struggles to take the slave as a conceptual figure, a foil for bourgeois liberty.⁵¹ He asks his reader to imagine that "some tyrannical

45 For further discussion, see J. Barton Scott, *Spiritual Despots: Modern Hinduism and the Genealogies of Self-Rule* (Chicago, 2016), 119–49.

46 For Mulji's biography, see Mahipatram Rupram, *Uttam Kapoḷ: Karsandās Mūljī Caritra* (Ahmedabad, 1877) and B. N. Motiwala, *Karsondas Mulji: A Biographical Study* (Bombay, 1935).

47 Mulji, *Travels*, 275.

48 The power of Bombay's caste authorities was, however, diminishing at this time. See Amrita Shodhan, *A Question of Community: Religious Groups and Colonial Law* (Calcutta, 2001).

49 Mulji, *Travels*, 33–34.

50 Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India* (New York, 2014).

51 For further exploration of liberalism's relationship to the history of slavery, see Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History* (London, 2011).

king has locked you in your house and will not let you go outside the house.” You would come to say that “compared to living in this state of slavery it is better to die.”⁵² To refuse this bondage is to be in keeping with the temper of the age. Mulji urges his readers to throw off their “shackles” and join the new era that is about to dawn: “The dark night of this frightful time has passed and the sun of reform has begun to rise. So rise, brothers; rise and become awake.”⁵³

While this rhetoric may seem a straightforward adoption of liberal conceptions of individual autonomy and progressivist Whig history, the precise texture of Mulji’s Gujarati implies a more complex project. Throughout the 1850s and 60s Mulji wrote in both English and Gujarati, and his literary output during this time can be productively understood as an effort to think creatively across the hiatus separating the two languages, with the very process of translation working to denature and call attention to the historical particularity of certain Victorian liberal norms.⁵⁴

Take, for example, Mulji’s efforts to translate the word “public” from English into Gujarati. In an 1858 essay on Bombay’s “Want of Public Spirit and Independence [*āp-akhtyārī*]” Mulji explicitly positions its title virtues as something that the British have and Bombay lacks.⁵⁵ Gujarati even lacks words for them, prompting Mulji to experiment with neologisms, such as “*jāher hīmat*” for “public spirit.” *Jaher* is a slanted translation of the English *public*. Where “public,” at least etymologically, denotes that which is constitutively open as well that which is “of the people,” *jaher* (from the Arabic *zahir*) renders only the first of these meanings. In other writings, Mulji experimented with translations of “the public” that included both *jaher* and *loko* (“the people”) in order to convey a fuller sense of the term.⁵⁶ I explore the implications of this translational difficulty for public sphere theory elsewhere.⁵⁷ Here, suffice it to say that transposing some of Victorian liberalism’s core concepts into Gujarati was less straightforward than it might have at first appeared.

In *Travels in England*, the notion of the public recedes into the background. Instead, liberty becomes the paramount English virtue that Indians should emulate. The English, Mulji tells us, have such zeal for freedom that they risk their lives and leave loved ones behind to battle against tyrannical kings. They are “known throughout the world for their liberty” and “contempt for the state of slavery.”⁵⁸ India, by contrast, is sorely lacking in these qualities. Not only did it submit to the tyrannical “foreign rule” (*partantrapanaṃ*, i.e. dependence or heteronomy) of Muslim kings. It

52 Mulji, *Travels*, 33.

53 Ibid., 36.

54 Cf. Ajay Skaria, *Unconditional Equality: Gandhi’s Religion of Resistance* (Minneapolis, 2016).

55 Karsandas Mulji, *Nibandhmāla: Saṃsār Sambandhi Visayo* (Bombay, 1870), 95–8. Note that here Mulji translates “independence” (the English word is his) in a Perso-Arabic register of Gujarati rather than the Sanskrit register he would later use in *Travels in England*.

56 Karsandas Mulji, trans., *Maharāj Laibal Kes, tatha Eni Sāthe Sambandh Sakhnār Bhāṭia Kanspiresi Kesno Riport* (Bombay, 1862), 176.

57 See J. Barton Scott, “How to Defame a God: Public Selfhood in the Maharaj Libel Case,” in *Imagining the Public in Modern South Asia*, ed. Brannon Ingram, J. Barton Scott, and SherAli Tareen, special issue of *South Asia: The Journal of South Asian Studies* 38/3 (2015): 387–402.

58 Mulji, *Travels*, 234–5.

still submits to the injustices of caste.⁵⁹ Mulji sees English education—the Macaulayan system of which he was himself a product—as the solution to this problem. It will disseminate the “genuine idea of English liberty” until every householder rejects the “slavery” of caste. Once “this kind of zeal for liberty comes to our countrymen,” he writes, India will “break the tyranny of caste and open the door of reform.”

Again, while this might seem like straightforward mimicry of English norms, the work of translation suggests a subtler project. At times, Mulji prefers a translation (*chutapanum*) that, like “liberty,” stresses release from constraint. At other times, he prefers a translation (*svatantrapānum* or *svatantratā*) that, like “self-government,” stresses autonomy or self-control. (It is this latter sense that Gandhi later emphasized with his notion of self-rule or *svarājya*). These translational complexities become more apparent if we look at the other term at the heart of Mulji’s book: “reform” or *sudharāi*. Reform was the byword of the age, in Bombay and well beyond.⁶⁰ It perhaps fitting, then, that it is the first word in the body of *Travels in England*; “liberty” (*svatantratā*) is the second.⁶¹ In his 1862 *Pocket Dictionary of Gujarati and English*, Mulji defined the verb *sudhārvum* as follows: “1. To amend; 2. To improve; to ameliorate; to reform; to civilize.”⁶² The word retains this semantic range in *Travels in England*, where it sometimes indicates discrete reforms and at other times a broader imaginary of civilizational development. (Gandhi used it in the latter sense in his critique of “modern civilization”). Reform and liberty, I would suggest, operate in tandem in Mulji’s thought: where the one emphasizes the subtractive project of liberalism, its abolition of customary restraints on the subject, the other emphasizes liberalism’s additive project, its refashioning the subject according to a new set of norms.

These two ideas converge on a third key term in the constellation of Mulji’s thought: *gun*, a word that can be variously translated as “quality” or “virtue,” but that in the context of *Travels in England* might be best rendered in terms of the Victorian notion of “character.” Mulji insists that it is English character and not English science that is the secret to English success. As he explains,

Because of these virtues [*gun*], the people of England have spread their greatness over the earth. Because of these virtues, a small country like England is considered very powerful. Because of these virtues, England has advanced in wealth, knowledge, and technical skill. Because of these virtues, England rules over Hindustan’s thriving territory and large population.

India needs to learn England’s common “common qualities” or virtues (*sāmānya gun*) before it can compete with it in other domains.⁶³ Mulji’s invocation of character here is significant. It serves—or so I will suggest—to resolve the apparent impasse between custom and freedom, external constraint and individual autonomy. It also anticipates Mulji’s use of Samuel Smiles later in *Travels in England*. As Smiles opined, “The crown and glory of life is Character.”⁶⁴

59 Ibid.

60 See Scott, *Spiritual Despotism*, especially Chapter 3.

61 Mulji, *Travels*, 1.

62 Karsandas Mulji, *A Pocket Dictionary, Gujarati and English*, 2nd ed. (Bombay, 1868).

63 Mulji, *Travels*, 224.

64 Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, Oxford World’s Classics, ed. Peter W. Sinnema (Oxford, 2002), 314.

Culture, Custom, Character

The “English national character” was developed into a “serious and respectable category of self-analysis” between the 1850s and 70s, taking over from an earlier, quasi-ethnological notion of “civilization.”⁶⁵ While this category, by interlacing a theory of human nature with a theory of civilizational progress, recalled eighteenth-century British discourses on virtue and civilization, character talk in the mid-Victorian period was distinctive in its emphasis on bourgeois traits such as hard work, self-restraint, and “manly” independence.⁶⁶

The rise of character as Victorian ideal was linked to increasing urbanization: the teeming lower classes of the newly industrialized cities were seen as morally corrupt, a danger to the health of the body politic.⁶⁷ It was also linked to the colonies. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was a broad tendency to view the colonies a site of moral corruption, as in the trial of Warren Hastings. By the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the colonies were more often seen as “spaces for the transformation of character,” a proving ground where Britain’s manly virtues could shine through.⁶⁸ This emphasis on character as a defining feature of Englishness remained an important feature of public life through the First World War and beyond, often in complex relationship with concurrent developments in both imperialism and liberal political thought.⁶⁹

Mulji holds an interesting place in this story, in that he seeks to document the English character from the outside, in a semi-ethnographic mode. As we have seen, he presents the English nation’s human virtues or qualities—in a word, its people’s character—as the secret to England’s worldly success. He then attempts to delineate the precise traits of this character through first-hand observation as well as by consulting a range of published sources—etiquette manuals, tourist guides, and (as I discuss in some depth below) Samuel Smiles’ 1859 bestseller *Self-Help*.

Tempting though it might be to claim that Mulji situates English character within the broader field of English “culture,” this would be a mistake. Not only does Mulji not use the word “culture” or a Gujarati translation of it. In 1866, the modern anthropological culture concept had yet to emerge as such; E. B. Tylor’s *Primitive Culture*, usually taken as the key transitional text in this regard, was published five years later, in 1871. It was not until the 1880s, as Andrew Sartori explains, that the culture concept first appeared in Bengali.⁷⁰ In the 1850s and 60s, “civilization” was still the

65 Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, 2006), 59. For discussion of how ideas of Englishness changed in the early twentieth century, see for example Julia Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics: The Social and Political Thought of Ernest Barker* (Cambridge, 1994).

66 Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850–1930* (Oxford, 1993), 104–7.

67 Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton, 2007), 52.

68 Ibid., 141–2.

69 Julia Stapleton, *Christianity, Patriotism, and Nationhood: The England of G. K. Chesterton* (Lanham, 2009).

70 Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago, 2008).

more common term for parsing human difference, as attested by Mulji as well as contemporaneous figures like Syed Ahmad Khan.⁷¹ “Culture” still mostly implied the older, humanistic notion evident in Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), which (with its close links to the German *Kultur*, as well as *Bildung*) indicated human development or self-cultivation.⁷² Mulji’s *Travels in England* pivots between several of these interrelated concepts, including “civilization” (*sudharāi*) and “custom” (*cāl* or *rivāj*), as well as “virtue” (*gun*), and “disposition” (*svabhāva*). His terminology signals how both “culture” and “civilization” could cue notions of character. If character was, in Smiles’ words, the “moral order embodied in the individual,” it found its mirror image in civilization—which, as George Stocking observes, “was self-improvement writ large.”⁷³

Mulji’s approach to these terms further suggests an implicit opposition between culture (as individual self-development) and custom (as a constraint on the individual), which was more broadly characteristic of the period. One sees this quite clearly in Mill’s *On Liberty* as well as Mulji’s *Travels*. What Mill calls “the despotism of custom” resonates strongly with Mulji’s claim that there is “tyranny” (*julmī*) in the intimate bonds of caste and family.⁷⁴ As Mill suggests, “social tyranny” can in fact be “more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since... it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself.”⁷⁵ Both Mulji and Mill transpose the rhetoric of political revolution into the domain of the social, presenting the fight against custom as central to the liberal project writ large. For Mulji, “custom” (*cāl* or *rivāj*) never quite emerges as a central term of analysis; he is more likely to criticize social structures under the rubrics of “superstition” (*vahem*) or “caste discrimination” (*jāti-bhed*). But there is a strong sense, as in Mill, that these structures are the chief force standing in the way of liberty.

Since the 1850s, Mulji had been working to articulate a reform project that stressed the connection between social structures and character. Thus, for example, in a collection of essays addressed to a bourgeois female readership (*Sansār Sukh* [1860]), he sought to dispel superstitions and other practices that would produce bad habits (*tev*) of a kind that would, over time, sediment into bad dispositions or characters (*svabhāva*).⁷⁶ Similarly, his critiques of the Pushtimarg had interleaved critique of despotic power with critique of moral corruption. Across this body of writing, Mulji was in keeping with what Collini describes as the nineteenth century’s “intensified awareness of the role of habit” in shaping human nature.⁷⁷

71 On notions of civilization, see George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York, 1987). On Syed Ahmad Khan’s reading of English books about civilization, including Gibbon and Buckle, see Avril A. Powell, *Scottish Orientalists and India: The Muir Brothers, Religion, Education, and Empire* (Woodbridge, 2010), 206–8.

72 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (New York, 1983 [1958]); Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 33–40.

73 Smiles, *Self-Help*, 314; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 217.

74 J. S. Mill, *On Liberty and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge, 1989), 70.

75 Mill, *On Liberty*, 8.

76 Scott, *Spiritual Despots*, 137–8.

77 Collini, *Public Moralists*, 97.

One clear point of contact between Mulji and this broader intellectual scene would have been Elphinstone College, where he studied English. Since its beginnings in the 1830s, English education in India had been less about language per se than about the formation of character. This had a particular significance for the history of religion in the nineteenth century. The rise of literary pedagogy, as a substitute for biblical education in India and eventually also in Britain, was related to a broader shift toward secularism on the part of the British state, which was increasingly coming to define citizenship around a notion of “Englishness” rather than around Anglican Christianity. The Victorian state allowed religious minorities (Jews, Catholics, Dissenters) full participation in political life, while also asking them to emulate much the same notion of Englishness that was being simultaneously promoted in India under the auspices of Macaulayan education. Englishness, however, could only replace religion as the basis for the formation of national character if it was rendered in moral terms. Consequently, Englishness and English literature came to mediate and be mediated by discourses on virtue: Englishness, rather than religion, became the ideal around which character was formed.⁷⁸

The strong normative force of “Englishness” within post-Macaulayan India helped to underline a tension internal to liberal theorizing around character and custom. Was a person’s character the passive product of external circumstances, or was it something a person could actively control? As Collini explains, the space between the two senses of character (as cultivated virtue and received disposition) became the ground for an “unresolved tension between voluntarism and determinism.”⁷⁹ The result was what Duncan Bell describes as an “intricate dialectic”: character is shaped by circumstance, even as it is that which allows one to cope with circumstance.⁸⁰ This problem was central to Mill’s proposed discipline of ethology. “At the threshold of this inquiry,” he wrote, “we are met by an objection which, if not removed, would be fatal to the attempt to treat human conduct as a science. Are the actions of human beings, like all other natural events, subject to invariable laws?”⁸¹ It also, arguably, unsettled efforts to demarcate philosophical ethics from its ethological counterpart. As Sidgwick explained, where ethology studies the actual, ethics studies the ideal; it addresses “what ought to exist, not what does exist.”⁸² In practice, however, the line between the “is” and the “ought” was much murkier than this tidy distinction would imply. “Character,” insofar as it referred simultaneously to both extant customs and imagined ideals, could be used to substitute the one for the other, tipping the actual into the ideal and vice versa.

Travels in England, I will suggest, lands precisely in this zone of conceptual indistinction. It seeks to document how particular customs form character in particular ways, thus aligning itself (although not by name) with Mill’s ethology. At the same time, rather than keeping to mere description, the text grants normative force to its ethological account of the English. It thus appears as something like a normative ethnography, an ethnography that converts empirical description into

78 See Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York, 2014) and *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, 1998).

79 Collini, *Public Moralists*, 96–9.

80 Bell, *Idea of Greater Britain*, 53.

81 Mill, *System of Logic*, 547.

82 Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (London, 1874), 1.

a prescriptive account of what should be. This intercutting of the descriptive and the prescriptive, the ethological and the ethical, owed much to the ideological structures of English in India. But it also, as I explore in the next section, resonated with the cultures of social science at mid-century.

An Amateur Ethnologist

This brings us to the third of the genres that intersect in *Travels in England*—the ethnography or gazetteer. As is well known, the history of the modern discipline of anthropology is closely intertwined with the history of empire.⁸³ Mulji's travelogue attests to this entanglement and, suggestively, reverses the anthropological gaze so that England rather than India becomes the object of ethnological inquiry. At the same time, the travelogue also demonstrates the complexity of ethnology's relationship to state power in the mid-Victorian period. Anthropology would not begin to emerge as a properly institutionalized university discipline until the 1880s. At mid-century, it remained largely the preserve of gentleman-scholars, erudite amateurs whose learned societies produced knowledge that was much more diffuse and informal than that of their academic successors.⁸⁴

India of the 1860s attests to both faces of Victorian anthropology. On the one hand, the 1860s were a key moment for the emergence of what Dirks has termed the "ethnographic state," generating a profusion of ethnological gazetteers designed to provide "[a]ccurate and accessible information regarding India" after the 1857 uprisings.⁸⁵ W. W. Hunter commenced work on his *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (1881) in 1869, pointing the way toward the eventual standardization of the form by the 1890s.⁸⁶

As important as these developments were, however, they were not the entire story. Mulji's *Travels in England* suggests some of the ways that the earlier, amateur form of anthropology persisted in India even as the ethnographic state took shape. The social science that emerged around the 1830s was not a recondite scholarly exercise, but rather, as Lawrence Goldman explains, "part of popular culture, capturing the imagination and participation of thousands of non-specialists attracted to the fashionable and modish science of the day."⁸⁷ It was also firmly international, a network of voluntary associations with nodes not only in western Europe and North America, but also in the colonies—including, for example, efforts at Social Science Associations in both Bombay

83 For a classic treatment, see Talal Asad, ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London, 1973). For a more recent effort to narrate this history in a way that integrates empire with other concerns, as well as suggesting the complexity and diversity of anthropology's politics in the colonial world, see Henrika Kuklick, ed., *A New History of Anthropology* (Malden, 2008).

84 Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*; Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885–1945* (Cambridge, 1991).

85 Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, 2001); William Wilson Hunter, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. 1 (London, 1881), vii.

86 Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 150; Peter Gottschalk, *Religion, Science, and Empire: Classifying Hinduism and Islam in British India* (New York, 2013).

87 Lawrence Goldman, *Science, Reform, and Politics in Victorian Britain: The Social Science Association, 1857–1886* (Cambridge, 2002), 294; Henrika Kuklick, "The British Tradition" in *A New History of Anthropology*, 52–78, 300.

and Calcutta by the 1860s.⁸⁸ Although not a member of the Bombay branch of that society, Mulji was active in the 1850s in the Students' Literary and Scientific Society affiliated with Elphinstone and two of its splinter groups (the Dyan Prasarak Mandli and the Buddhi-Vardhak Hindu Sabha), nodes in the city's interlinked network of scholarly, religious, and political associations, many of which were explicitly designed to disseminate scientific knowledge to non-specialist audiences.⁸⁹

The kind of ethnographic portrait of England that Mulji offers in his travelogue feels poised between these two traditions. He represents England via knowledge forms (population statistics, religious taxonomies) that were becoming important to the ethnographic state; but he does so in an *ad hoc* fashion that feels more in keeping with the amateur ethos of mid-century.⁹⁰ Thus, in his account of English religions, Mulji tries to clarify theological doctrines that he thinks his readers are likely to find confusing, and he domesticates English religion by explaining how distinct groups in London (Germans, Frenchmen, Swedes, Danes, and Jews) build churches for their own castes and communities (*jāt*), just like people in Bombay do.⁹¹

To suggest that mid-century amateur anthropology persisted in India into the 1860s without being subsumed by the ethnographic state is a means of revising C. A. Bayly's notion of "benign sociology." By Bayly's account, Indian liberalism developed a distinctive current of social scientific thought between the 1840s and 70s. Some thinkers in this tradition, like Dadabhai Naoroji, marshaled the resources of political economy to critique colonial rule. Others, like Bholanauth Chunder and B. N. Malabari, produced quasi-ethnographic texts. This sociological liberalism was, in Bayly's telling, "benign" (and thus distinct from the knowledge-forms of the ethnographic state) in its lack of systematicity and calls for "good government and social reform."⁹² "Benign," however, seems too weak a word here, if taken in the sense of "not causing harm." It is not that this tradition was somehow ideologically inert. It was, rather, actively reformist. Moreover, the moral reformism of these late-century intellectuals had clear connections to the colonial state's own early-century interventions against customs like widow burning. In this, Indian social science was not so different from British anthropology, which was similarly connected to earlier efforts at religious and moral reform (Tylor, descended from Quakers, called anthropology a "reformer's science").⁹³ Rather than contrasting a benign Indian sociology with the ethnographic state, then, it seems more productive to trace how these two distinct, but not therefore separable, modes of anthropology (either one of which might have plausibly presented itself as "benign" or well-intentioned) developed in tandem in both Britain and India during the Victorian period.

To get a clearer sense of how mid-century social science lived on in India in the 1860s, we can consider Mulji's use of Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*. Mayhew had originally

88 Goldman, *Science, Reform, and Politics*, 321–4; George Woodyatt Hastings, ed., *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science: Belfast Meeting, 1867* (London, 1868), 417.

89 Christine Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India: Politics and Communities in Bombay City, 1840–1885* (London, 1972), 55–6; Motiwala, *Karsondas Mulji*, 18–20.

90 For Mulji's use of numbers to map London and the relative distribution of its various classes, see *Travels*, 66, 153, 156.

91 Ibid., 95–6.

92 Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 150–9.

93 Quoted in Kucklick, *Savage Within*, 7.

written his account as a series of articles for London's *Morning Chronicle* in 1849-50, drawing on earlier research by amateur statistical societies. These articles were revised and republished in book form in 1851-52 and then again 1861-62; it seems likely that it was this last edition that found its way to Mulji.⁹⁴ In a manner characteristic of his period, Mayhew blurred the lines among journalism, politics, and statistical science. He also drew on ethnological ideas developed by contemporaries like J. C. Pritchard in order to depict the London poor as demonstrating that multiple strata of human development could exist side-by-side even in civilized society.⁹⁵ London's poor, Mayhew averred, were even less known to the public than "the most distant tribes on earth."⁹⁶ In its way, Mulji's career echoed Mayhew's in its easy admixture of journalism, activism, and amateur scholarship.

In addition to extracting selections from Mayhew's text, Mulji also reproduced some of Mayhew's images. These engravings represent the London poor via a series of occupational types—the street sweeper, the potato seller, the chimney sweep, etc. [Figure 1].⁹⁷ Mayhew's collaborator

Figure 1. "Black Fish Seller [The Oyster Stall]." Karsandas Mulji, *Travels in England*, 2nd ed. (Bombay: Dafter Ashkara Press, 1867), 360. Courtesy of Forbes Gujarati Sabha.

94 Eileen Yeo, "Mayhew as a Social Investigator," in *The Unknown Mayhew: Selections from the Morning Chronicle, 1849-1850*, eds. E. P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo (London, 1971), 51-96, at 52-3; Raymond A. Kent, *A History of British Empirical Sociology* (Aldershot, 1981), 22; Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, ed., Henry Neuburg (New York, 1985), xi.

95 Yeo, "Mayhew as a Social Investigator," 86-7.

96 Quoted in Kent, *History of British Empirical Sociology*, 51-2.

97 Mulji, *Travels*, 181-200.

Richard Beard made the daguerreotypes on which these engravings were based; because technologies for publishing photographs did not yet exist in the early 1850s, Mayhew and Beard published woodcuts of the images instead (the original photographs have since been lost).⁹⁸ Resituated in *Travels in England*, these images echo the photographic project that the British colonial state was establishing during these very years. In 1861, the colonial government began collecting ethnological photographs of Indian castes and tribes that, starting in 1868, were published in John Kaye's eight-volume study of *The People of India*. Similar titles would follow in the decades to come. The visual composition and representational logic of these photos is similar to Mayhew and Beard, in that their close attention to the particularity of individuals is combined with a tendency to reduce those individuals to social types or categories [Figure 2].⁹⁹

Figure 2. "Brinjara and Wife." J. Forbes Watson and William Kaye, eds. *The People of India*, vol. 3 (London: India Museum, 1868).

Even as they anticipate the visual forms of the ethnographic state, however, Mulji's images remain firmly embedded in a far less technical set of concerns. As Mulji explains, he decided to

98 Alma Davenport, *The History of Photography: An Overview* (Albuquerque, 1991), 42; Anne Humphreys, *Henry Mayhew* (Boston, 1984), 113.

99 Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago, 1997), 24–44.

include Mayhew's images in his book only after he arrived home in Bombay. People kept asking him whether all castes in England, including the low ones, are fair-skinned (*goro*); yes, he replied, but the lower sections of society do look different than the upper sections. To present these differences, "I include here pictures based on photographs of people of some different occupations."¹⁰⁰ Here, the visual production of class intersects with the visual production of race: these images, when republished in *Travels in England*, work to visually disarticulate whiteness from wealth.

This framing of Mayhew and Beard's woodcuts indicates one signal use of ethnology for Mulji: it is a means of exploring and defining the ethos of different class groups. Mulji is inviting Bombay's bourgeoisie to emulate its English counterpart and thus, by extension, to distance itself from non-bourgeois groups in both countries. In Britain of the 1850s, the gazetteer had principally been a genre for middle-class edification, and not state administration.¹⁰¹ In the 1860s, this situation was rapidly changing; but, as *Travels in England* indicates, the emergent knowledge-forms of the ethnographic state did not entirely displace, even in India, the earlier uses of ethnological writing.

For Mulji, ethnology is an instrument of bourgeois pedagogy. *Travels in England* appeals to a quintessentially middle-class aspiration for self-improvement, presenting its Gujarati readership with a glimpse into the bourgeois amenities of the imperial capital. Mulji stresses the size of English houses;¹⁰² catalogues common domestic objects (curtains, sideboards, pianos, "moon lamps");¹⁰³ explains popular leisure activities, (sewing, chess, billiards, golf);¹⁰⁴ describes the custom of leaving calling cards;¹⁰⁵ and distinguishes among distinct types of social gatherings (dinner parties vs. tea parties vs. the kind of party where you play charades).¹⁰⁶ Some passages seem designed to help middle-class Gujarati men navigate English social norms (shake the hand of other men when you meet them, and lift your hat to women).¹⁰⁷ Others seem interested in cultural difference for its own sake (in "our country" [*āpnā deś*] people enjoy the tastes of multiple dishes mixing together; not so, in England, where dishes are served sequentially).¹⁰⁸ Elsewhere in his writings Mulji develops a bourgeois form of Hinduism; here, he details a more secular set of practices for governing the

100 Mulji, *Travels*, 182.

101 Michael Hancher, "An Imagined World: *The Imperial Gazetteer*," in Julie F. Codell, ed., *Imperial Co-Histories: National Identities and the British and Colonial Press* (Madison NJ, 2003), 45–67.

102 Mulji, *Travels*, 157.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid., 166–8.

105 Ibid., 214–15.

106 Ibid., 211, 215–18.

107 Ibid., 214.

108 Ibid., 212. Gujarati differentiates between two first-person plural pronouns. Where one "we" (*ame*) specifically excludes the addressee, the other "we" (*āpñe*) specifically includes the addressee. Mulji uses the latter in referring to India. He thus, by force of pronoun, implicitly includes anyone reading his book in his sense of imagined community. Even so, Mulji's mode of address does tend to conflate this in-principle open-ended community with the sort of person who spends their free time reading books in Gujarati—which is to say, the middle classes of cities like Bombay and Ahmedabad.

bourgeois self.¹⁰⁹

It is via class that *Travels in England* circles back to character: bourgeois mores are the means by which ethnology verges into ethology and on into ethics, ethology's normative counterpart. Mulji's account of England is strikingly intimate; at one point, he goes so far as to describe different methods for bathing.¹¹⁰ This intimacy reaches its apex in his discussion of English etiquette—a word that Mulji introduces in English before translating it into Gujarati as *vivek* (i.e. discrimination, discretion, politeness). The polite habitus of the English, he stresses, is taught from an early age. “From childhood, they learn cleanliness and tidiness. They learn from childhood to demonstrate politeness [*vivek*] in every word. The children of gentlemen [*grihast*] learn politeness in sitting and standing, politeness in eating and drinking, and politeness in speaking and walking. In England, this is considered the first and most important ornament of learning.”¹¹¹

The English, as described by Mulji, inhabit their homes and their bodies in a way that reinforces their sense of being discrete, self-enclosed individuals.¹¹² For example, they maintain a sense of modesty (*maryādā*) in the home through simple behaviors like keeping interior doors closed—especially the doors to their own rooms. If you want to open the door to someone else's room, you have to knock first and wait for a reply.¹¹³ English people likewise remain fully clothed at all times, even when sleeping, just in case a servant bursts in.¹¹⁴ Many more rules govern bodily comportment when in company. It is considered inappropriate to scratch your nose or ear with your finger if you are sitting with other gentlemen, and it is similarly impolite to scrape your teeth, scratch your body, or sneeze loudly without a handkerchief. English women have to abide by additional restraints on their behavior.¹¹⁵ If this embodied sense of being a buffered individual is a prerequisite to liberalism's celebration of individual freedom, then the political relevance of such practices becomes clear.¹¹⁶ To extricate the individual from the despotism of custom (or, perhaps more precisely, to create the buffered individual by instituting new customs), one first must intervene in society at the most capillary level—which is to say, in terms of etiquette, as a means of governing daily life. Etiquette is a technology of the self. It is thus a crucial tool for the social reformer keen to reshape the self and thus, by extension, society.

Mulji's forays into English etiquette, then, are integral to his ethological inquiry in that they reveal the microscopic processes whereby the English character is formed. Mulji's turn to English etiquette also, arguably, suggests the extent to which his bourgeois social science remained an

109 Cf. Brian Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism, or Faith of the Modern Vedantists: Rare Discourses from Early Colonial Bengal* (New York, 2008).

110 Mulji, *Travels*, 165–6.

111 Ibid., 173.

112 In this, Mulji would seem to anticipate Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford, 1994 [1939]).

113 Mulji, *Travels*, 164.

114 Ibid., 164–5.

115 Ibid., 205–6.

116 Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

amateur's discipline that verged promiscuously into social reform, literary writing, philosophical ethics, journalism, and other modes of intellectual practice. This set of intersections—of bourgeois self-cultivation, English national identity, and ethological inquiry—comes through even more clearly if we turn to the last of the genres that will be considered here: the self-improvement manual.

Ethics and Empire: The Circulation of Self-Help

At the juncture of ethics and ethnology in *Travels in England* are Mulji's extended citations (in English, with accompanying Gujarati translation) from a single text: Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* (1859). *Self-Help* is the main source for Mulji's chapter on "The General Character of the British Nation," which is structured as a list of English virtues—industry, activity, emulation, perseverance, enterprise, energy, courage, self-respect, liberty, benevolence—that Mulji's Indian readers are meant to imitate.¹¹⁷ There is no small irony in Mulji's use of Smiles here. Self-improvement literature is necessarily aspirational: it pits what you are against what you could be; this is the structuring condition of the genre. *Self-Help* thus necessarily implies that its readers lack the virtues that it prescribes to them. In taking up the text, however, Mulji changes its modality. Whether wittingly or not, he converts Smiles' prescriptions for the English into descriptions of the English, turning this self-improvement manual into an ethological account of English manners and mores.

A runaway Victorian bestseller, *Self-Help* sold a quarter million copies between its publication in 1859 and Smiles' death in 1904. Although it is sometimes said that Smiles invented the self-help genre, this is not entirely true: self-improvement societies and self-education literature had been a staple of middle-class British culture for decades.¹¹⁸ Smiles did, however, catapult self-improvement to newfound prominence by relabeling it (he apparently took the term "self-help" from Ralph Waldo Emerson) and by rearticulating its relationship to broader political and economic forms.¹¹⁹ To quote Eric Hobsbawm, Smiles "hymned the virtues of capitalism."¹²⁰ Or, as his contemporaries framed much the same allegation, he promoted the pursuit of wealth for its own sake. Smiles, for his part, bristled at such claims. As he vociferously clarified in later editions of *Self-Help*, as well as in books like *Character* (1871), *Thrift* (1875), and *Duty* (1880), his real aim had been to promote the formation of "character" and not the pursuit of riches.

Propelled by the currents of empire, *Self-Help* traveled the globe, with would-be modernizers looking here for the secrets to British success. The Khedive of Egypt had quotations from *Self-Help* inscribed onto the walls of his palace and claimed they were better than the verses of the

117 Mulji, *Travels*, 225–34. One of these extracts is a quotation from F. Buxton that Mulji must have taken from Smiles, although he does not cite him directly. See Smiles, *Self-Help*, 220.

118 Kenneth Fieldan, "Samuel Smiles and Self-Help," *Victorian Studies* 12/2 (1968), 155–76; Anne Baltz Rodrick, "The Importance of Being an Earnest Improver: Class, Caste, and 'Self-Help' in Mid-Victorian Britain," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 29/1 (2001), 39–50.

119 R. J. Morris, "Samuel Smiles and the Genesis of Self-Help: The Retreat to a Petit Bourgeois Utopia," *Historical Journal* 24/1 (1981), 89–109, at 95; T. H. E. Travers, "Samuel Smiles and the Origins of 'Self-Help': Reform and the New Enlightenment," *Albion* 9/2 (1977), 161–87.

120 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848* (New York, 1996 [1962]), 186.

Qur'an.¹²¹ Meiji government officials, meanwhile, camped out overnight to get their hands on Nakamura Keiu's translation of the book into Japanese.¹²² By the early 1880s, a Calcutta Brahmo Samaj publication was extolling "the value of self-help" and Britain's "spirit of enterprise" and "self-reliance."¹²³

Mulji's translations from Smiles are part of this transnational history. I do not know where he first came across *Self-Help*. It could quite plausibly have happened either in London or Bombay. It makes perfect sense, however, that he would have been drawn to the book. Mulji had been experimenting with adapting English-language genres into Gujarati since the 1850s, often using these English genres to heighten his moral critique of Hindu Bombay. He translated Protestant sermons and tried his hand at original compositions in the same vein. He also translated substantial portions of Robert Dodsley's *The Oeconomy of Human Life* (1750-51), a conduct manual and volume of didactic morality that has been reckoned the most widely reprinted book of the eighteenth century.¹²⁴ Mulji's easy pivot from Dodsley to Smiles suggests a rough equivalence between those two texts; Smiles is a sort of Victorian Dodsley. It also suggests a shift in register for Mulji, a turn away from eighteenth-century notions of virtue and good conduct and toward Victorian notions of character.

Mulji's use of Smiles highlights several peculiarities of Victorian character talk. First, although it purported to be pristinely English, character took empire as one of its chief testing grounds; indeed, one might go so far as to suggest that without empire there would have been no English character as such.¹²⁵ Thus, while it might appear that Mulji, by enjoining English character on Indians, was imposing metropolitan norms on the colonies, it is probably more accurate to say that character was already a contrapuntal property, forged between colony and metropole.

Second, as noted above, Mulji converts Smiles' normative prescriptions for the English into ethnographic descriptions of the English. In doing so, he calls attention, however inadvertently, to a constitutive instability in Smiles' text, as perhaps in the discourse of character more generally. The "spirit of self-help," Smiles insists, "has in all times been a marked feature in the English character, and furnishes the true measure of our power as a nation."¹²⁶ But, of course, the very existence of the book belies Smiles' claim, in that, as a didactic text, *Self-Help* is addressed toward its readers' perceived shortcomings. The text thus articulates a doubled and somewhat contorted position: self-help (or self-reliant independence) is an innately English virtue that the English largely lack. In bringing Smiles to Bombay, Mulji further compounds this confusion.

121 Asa Briggs, "Centenary Introduction," in Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Conduct and Perseverance* (London, 1958), 7-34, at 7.

122 Earl H. Kinmoth, "Nakamura Keiu and Samuel Smiles: A Victorian Confucian and a Confucian Victorian," *American Historical Review* 85/3 (1980), 535-56.

123 David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 195 and n. 14.

124 Scott, *Spiritual Despots*, 129-30.

125 For consideration of how ultra-imperialist thinkers looked to the colonies to sustain British character, see Peter J. Cain, "Empire and the Languages of Character and Virtue in Later Victorian and Edwardian Britain," *Modern Intellectual History* 4/2 (2007): 249-73.

126 Smiles, *Self-Help*, 20.

Third, character talk signals a constitutive contradiction within the liberal ideal of individual autonomy: self-rule could only be attained through submission to external constraint. Liberal thinkers often finessed this problem by writing it into a theory of education, with the child coming to serve as the chief figure for the dependent subject en route to autonomy; this figure could then be extended to other kinds of subjects deemed childlike (women, the colonized) and thus not ready for self-rule. As Susan Mendus suggests, however, the idea that any subject could free itself entirely of external support was a fiction that was difficult to sustain.¹²⁷ Even adult liberal subjects were the objects (and necessarily so) of pedagogic and disciplinary programs designed to bolster their sense of subjective autonomy.

For the Victorians, one might say, liberty or self-reliance as an aspect of English character was something one aspired to, rather than something that one had. At the very least, it was something that one had never quite attained. This constitutive incompleteness made room for figures like Mulji. Rather than imitating an Englishness that was self-identical, his *Travels*, as an ethical guide for bourgeois Bombay, simply exposed the internal gaps in a notion of Englishness that never quite coincided with the English.

The Victorians and the Anticolonial Self

This last, of course, brings us to the now-classic question of cultural mimicry as a problem of colonial subjectivity, and the vaunted ability of the mimic to destabilize colonial ideology.¹²⁸ To focus too narrowly on this particular problem, however, obscures the broader historical field that shaped the practice of the self in late nineteenth-century India. By situating Mulji in relation to the transnational circulation of ethics, we get a fuller sense of the modes of selfhood available to bourgeois colonial subjects like him.

We also, by extension, get a fuller sense of the archive of possible selves that was carried over from the Victorian era into the early twentieth century. Recent scholarship has done a great deal to highlight the experiments in anticolonial subjectivity that were prominent at that time, with Gandhi's appropriations of Indian ascetic traditions simply the most visible manifestation of a far more pervasive trend—what Shruti Kapila calls a “culture of the self”—that established the politics of subjectivity as a core concern of anticolonial thought.¹²⁹ One notable feature of the anticolonial moment was its frequent recourse to Victorian literature. Whether with Gandhi and John Ruskin, Shyamji Krishnavarma and Herbert Spencer, or Har Dayal and John Stuart Blackie, anticolonial intellectuals breathed new life into Victorian texts by using them as pivots for rethinking liberal selfhood and, by extension, British colonial rule.¹³⁰

127 Susan Mendus, “Liberty and Autonomy,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 87 (1986–7), 107–20.

128 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

129 Shruti Kapila, “Self, Spencer and *Swaraj*: Nationalist Thought and Critiques of Liberalism, 1890–1920,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4/1 (2007), 109–27. The rich and voluminous recent scholarship on Gandhi can be fruitfully approached via Faisal Devji and Ritu Birla, eds., “Itineraries of Self-Rule,” *Public Culture* 23/2 (2011), 263–480.

130 For Krishnavarma, see Kapila, “Self, Spencer and *Swaraj*,” as well as Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Shyamji Krishnavarma: Sanskrit, Sociology, and Anti-Imperialism* (New Delhi, 2014). For Har Dayal, see especially J. Daniel Elam, “Echoes of Ghadr: Lala Har Dayal and the Time of Anticolonialism,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 34/1 (2014), 9–23.

Even as anticolonial thinkers reinvented the Victorians however, they were also, arguably, constrained by their Victorian inheritance. One method of measuring this constraint is to compare Gandhi to Mulji. Gandhi was not, as far as I know, familiar with Mulji's work. Nonetheless, there is a clear line to be drawn between these two Gujarati writers who came from similar caste backgrounds and traveled to England within twenty-five years of one another—Mulji in 1863, Gandhi in 1888. The historical disjuncture between the two is considerable. Where Mulji was an English-lover (or *angrez-bhakti*), Gandhi was a staunch anticolonialist.¹³¹ This distance is evident from their respective translations of the word “liberty.” Mulji uses translation to pull India closer to the English; for Gandhi, this project was anathema. In his oft-quoted metaphor, Indian nationalists seeking self-government in the style of Canada or South Africa “want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger.” They “would make India English,” which is not self-rule (*svarājya*) at all.¹³² The distance between Gandhi's *svarājya* and Mulji's *svatantratā* is, in this regard, profound.

Nonetheless, there are also clear continuities between Gandhi and Mulji and thus, by extension, the broader Victorian milieu. In the following paragraphs, I explore this continuity by suggesting a comparison between Gandhi and Smiles. I do this in order to frame an open-ended and somewhat speculative question about the shifting political valence of “self-rule” as it moved from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century and on into the early twenty-first. The resonances between Gandhi and Smiles are notable. Like Smiles, Gandhi stressed duty, morality, good conduct, and “[c]haracter-building.”¹³³ His insistence that self-rule requires us to “obtain mastery over our minds and passions” draws remarkably close to Smiles' insistence that “[o]ur habits or our temptations are not our masters, but we of them.”¹³⁴ Or take the following passage:

It may be of comparatively little consequence how a man is governed from without, whilst everything depends on how he governs himself from within. The greatest slave is not he who is ruled by a despot, great though that evil be, but he who is in thrall of his own moral ignorance, selfishness, and vice. Nations who are thus enslaved at heart cannot be freed by any mere changes in masters or institutions.¹³⁵

The words are Smiles'. But the sentiment is quintessential Gandhi. As he argues in *Hind Swaraj*, a mere change in government will not make India self-ruling; true self-government is an internal affair, pertaining to the “self-control” of the individual.¹³⁶

I am not claiming that Smiles influenced Gandhi. Rather, I am simply suggesting that both Smiles and Gandhi drew on the Victorian-liberal rhetoric of character to articulate their respective ideas of self-help and self-rule. That they invoked this rhetoric toward different ends is indisputable. Even so, I wonder whether scholarly efforts to disencumber Gandhi of his inheritances might not sometimes go too far. Gandhi routinely disclaimed ownership of his ideas, preferring instead to

131 Bholabhai Patel, “*Sampādakīya* [Editorial],” in Mulji, *Travels*, vii–ix, at ix.

132 M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony Parel (Cambridge, 2009), 27.

133 Ibid., 100.

134 Ibid., 65; Smiles, *Self-Help*, 193.

135 Smiles, *Self-Help*, 18.

136 Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 116.

send his followers to other sources and authorities (Ruskin, Tolstoy, Thoreau, etc.). By his own account, he was simply a node in a network of behavioral citation, a cipher that could serve as a model for others. His aim, as he put it in his *Autobiography*, was to reduce the self (particularly his own self) to zero.¹³⁷ It is thus arguably very much in keeping with Gandhi's own thought to ask whether certain citations of Gandhi might quote him in a way that pulls closer to some of his Victorian sources.

The Victorian rhetoric of individual responsibility has had a checkered post-Victorian history, providing an ideological justification for neoliberal economic policies in Britain and elsewhere.¹³⁸ How might Gandhi be situated within the long historical arc linking Victorian laissez-faire to neoliberalism? When do different Gandhianisms (which are never quite reducible to Gandhi) reproduce the Victorian rhetoric represented by Smiles? Exploring such questions might help to clarify the easy invocations of Gandhi by India's neoliberal state, advertising firms, and other twenty-first century institutions.¹³⁹

While Gandhi cannot be reduced to the overlapping histories from which he emerged, neither can he be easily extricated from them. As Smiles mused, "There is something solemn and awful in the thought that there is not an act nor thought in the life of a human being but carries with it a train of consequences, the end of which we may never trace.... Man is a fruit formed and ripened by the culture of all the foregoing centuries."¹⁴⁰ These accreted histories remain open for reactivation in the present, often in unexpected ways.

137 M.K. Gandhi, *Autobiography* (New York, 1983), 454.

138 As part of her vaunted return to "Victorian values," Margaret Thatcher proclaimed Smiles one of her favorite authors; her mentor Keith Joseph even brought out his own edition of *Self-Help* in 1986 to encourage British entrepreneurship. While the neoliberal appropriation of the Victorians should not lead us to conflate these two historically distinct periods, it is easy to see the affinity between Smiles' moralizing mistrust of "over-government" and Thatcher's Protestant neoliberalism. For Smiles and Thatcher, see Alex Tyrrell, Review of Adrian Jarvis, *Samuel Smiles and the Construction of Victorian Values*, in *Victorian Studies* 41/3 (1998), 536–8, as well as Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, ed. George Anthony Bull, Library of Management Classics (London, 1986). For Thatcher and Protestantism, see Eliza Filby, *God and Mrs. Thatcher: The Battle for Britain's Soul* (London, 2015). For a consideration of how neoliberal self-help departs from its Victorian predecessor, see Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *The New Way of the World: On Neo-Liberal Society*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London, 2013 [2009]), 255–99.

139 See, for example, William Mazzarella, "Branding the Mahatma: The Untimely Provocation of Gandhian Publicity," *Cultural Anthropology* 25/1 (2010), 1–39.

140 Smiles, *Self-Help*, 299.