

**Journal of Educational Research & Social Science Review  
(JERSSR)**

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**The Postcolonial Subjectivity and Colonialism: A Critical Reading of Travelogue of**

**Sheikh Dean Mohammad**

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**Abstract**

*This study discusses the travelogue of Sheikh Dean Mohammad with reference to the travelogues produced by the non-western writers in the age of colonization, especially that of India and aims to explore the extent to which the writer underwent the process of cathecting. The study employs the lens of assimilation as suggested by Fanon. The writer in this context attempts to align himself with his master and gazes at his people with the same eye. But while doing so, the text by Dean Mohammad becomes less a representation of his own people's aspirations and culture and more a vigorous portrayal of the colonizer's point of view about the colonized. The researchers have reviewed the selected chunks of text of Dean Mohammad under the lens provided by the theory of assimilation by Fanon within the parameters of the Qualitative approach and Descriptive method of research. The analysis of the text done so has revealed that the Travelogue by Dean Mohammad has been written more in the fashion of the master colonizer than the representation of the indigenous people.*

**Keywords:** Travelogue, Colonialism, Cathect, Othering, Assimilation, Colonial Gaze

**Introduction**

Migrations have been a part of human life for ages and the colonising eras boosted this beyond limits, regardless of the fact whether the migration was by choice or by force. Travels and travelogues are a part of these explorations into the world. Quite recently there is renewed interest in the travel studies to re-explore what the traveller explored and narrated his experiences in his travelogue. This study also intends to read the text of Mohammed's travelogue written about his experiences of travel from India to London at a time when India was a colony of the British Empire and about his experiences in London, the colonial master's metropolis. The dual nature of Mohammad travelogue makes it even more interesting because of the space difference: while in India, he experienced how his master visualized him as an Indian and how an Indian would view and imitate his master and secondly, he experienced the share of the space in the heart of the British Empire. While doing so, he could assume double personality, while he becomes the postcolonial subject and looks at his own lot as 'others' and also when he is looked upon by the white master as an 'Other'.

**Literature Review**

Travels and travelogues of different nature and hues date back to the times when Iliad, The Ramayana, The Tempest and The Ancient Mariners were written as most of these were the historical and religious travels of the protagonists. It has extended itself to the religious pilgrimages in modern times to the imaginative and fictional travelogue of Wells (Exotic India, 2014). Exotic India further suggests the significance of the travels in the colonial and postcolonial eras because this makes us understand the explorations made by the traveller into the values of life of the colonial master and his imperialistic desire to erect for him a colonized empire. So, as a result, the travelogue about the colonial and post era reflects and portray "The 'willing consent' of the ruled based on the internalization of colonial values at the deeper psychological level offers us instructive lessons for understanding colonial travel, then as well as now" (Exotic India, 2014). Grass and Pasolini, according to Holland and Huggan, suggest even further when they maintain that these travelogues are

an opportunity for the interaction of the colonizer and the colonized and while at the same time affords the opportunity to the colonizer to hide his constant imperialist desires (Holland & Huggan, 2003, p. 05). Lindsay also supports a similar point of view when she declares that the critical readings of the postcolonial travelogues have been mainly about the metropolises and the life of the imperialist. According to her, "In many ways such endeavours simply bolster hegemonic conceptions of the Empire, rather than shed light on corresponding sources in the modern period or in the former colonies themselves". (Lindsay, 2015, p. 30)

The experience of Mohammad is shared by Olaudah Equiano and Abu Talib and Kambalposh also, but the experience of Mohammad is different with the reference to the underlying themes exercised by him. Both of these writers narrated their experiences only without any intention of securing some status of the postcolonial theory because of the absence of the type of interaction that Mohammad had with the colonial master but the text of Mohammad was designed to study his own gaze towards his own people (the others) when he assumed assumption into the place and time of his imperial master. According to Fisher (2013), Dean Mahomet even after being a dark-complexioned person, did not hide his identity and did not project himself as orient and rather appeared in his text as a man who believed in his being an anglicised Indian. This view of Dean Mohammad Travelogue is opposite to the introduction provided by Equiano (1791) as he appeared an advocate of his own people as well as his master and wanted to raise the compassion of his master for his people. Abu Talib, too, according to Chatterjee (2020) gave a slightly different point of view about his travelogue that it was neither in the support of his own people nor about the enhancement of British Image but was simply to provide the world with a critique of British society and culture. So, the previous travelogues were less a representation of the indigenous and were more propagation of the British Empire.

Dean Mohammad on the other hand had a clear notion about the socio-political differences between his people's culture and that of his master but for the sake of his travelogue, he assumed the role of an interlocutor and discussed not only his own master but also his people. Fisher (2013) points out that the main purpose of the text of Dean Mohammad seems to highlight and project the cultural differences between the ruler and the ruled in his country of origin. But, to understand Dean Mohammad better, he should be taken as a postcolonial subject who imitates his master in his capacity of being a postcolonial subject and attempts to understand him so that he may voice his own people in a befitting manner and for this purpose, he adopts many disguised roles for himself. Holland & Huggan say,

The most frequent strategy, however, is to assume a variety of disguises. In their self-presentation, travel writers are often extremely elusive, shifting roles with the same facility as they move from place to place. Now the pedagogue, now the clown, now the traveller, now (even) the tourist. They manage, thus, to benefit from alternative temporary privileges, one moment taking advantage of an honorary insider's knowledge. The next taking refuge in a foreigner's convenient incomprehension. (Holland & Huggan, 2003, p. 07)

This approach of writing by Dean Mohammad differentiates him even from the Travelogue writers from among the colonizers. For example, Fisher (2013) indicates the difference between the representation by William Hodges (1793) and by Dean Mohammad. Fisher (2013) says that the representation of Jagannath Island was done by Hodges only in terms of the environment while Dean Mohammad discusses the appearance of the holy man also in terms of his face, beard, dress and rosary.

However, Dean Mohammad, even after being a colonized subject, considers himself as an anglicised postcolonial subject and an assimilated Indian in British culture and thereby attempts to represent his own people with the gaze of an imperial master. His narrative is therefore of double representation: representation of the imperial gaze and the representation of the gaze of a colonized in terms of a postcolonial subject. According to Ahmed (2013), this representation by Dean Mohammad is conglomerative in determining and shaping his own identity when he discusses the weaknesses and strengths of British culture and that of his indigenous people.

This goes in conformity with the style of the colonizer writer who has the only monolithic representation of his colonized subject as referred to by Said's concept of the Orient; when he says that "The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging ...constitutes one of the main connections between...culture and imperialism....From the beginning of Western

speculation about the Orient, the one thing the Orient could not do was to represent itself” (Fisher 1997). Fisher (1997) quotes Pratt to strengthen his point of view that the European travelogues mostly projected the colonized subject with an imperial gaze and hence objectified most of the colonized people.

### **Conceptual Underpinning**

This attitude of the postcolonial subject can also be understood with reference to the attempts of the postcolonial subject to get absorbed into the master’s culture. Raja (2014) while quoting Said, has proposed three steps of the assimilation of the postcolonial subject into the master’s culture. These three stages are: The first phase mostly works based on the infatuation with the master which may create a Gramscian view of cultural hegemony; secondly, it is the study of the culture of the master in order to imitate and replicate it, which automatically makes master’s culture superior; and in the third phase, the postcolonial subject begins to realise the difference between the treatment to him and the treatment propagated by the master’s institutions. Boelhower (1981) also believes in this type of three staged efforts of the postcolonial subject and employs the terms like Expectation, Contact, or Separation and resolution for the process of absorption. The behaviour of Dean Mohammad in his travelogue can also be analysed as per these stages and steps and can be better understood in terms of Fanon’ (1963), when we see how Dean Mohammad looks at the culture of Master with lust and envy and “Dreams of possession: every type of possession: of sitting at the colonist’s table and sleeping in his bed, preferably with his wife.” (Fanon, 1963/2004)

The current focus of the study can further be expanded in terms of Fanon’s understanding of the assimilation of the postcolonial subject into the master’s culture. Fanon thinks,

“In order to assimilate the culture of the oppressor and venture into his fold, the colonized subject has had to pawn some possessions. For instance, one of the things he has had to assimilate is the way the colonialist bourgeoisie thinks” (Fanon, 1963/2004).

So according to Fanon, the matter largely depends on the way the postcolonial subjects aim to assimilate and that too is not determined by him but by the master and the extent to which the master lets him assimilate is also as per the demand of the master. In the case of Dean Mohammad, the task of this determination becomes even more challenging because Dean Mohammad is writing about his people at a time when he was still under physical and practically active colonization. It was the time when both the colonizer and the colonized were in an effort to struggle not only within themselves but also with the opponents not only the British were in transition from being just a trading company towards an established component of the British Empire but also the residents of Indo-Pak subcontinent were experiencing the same transition from the Mughal Socio-cultural set up to the life of a colonized under a different alien and foreign power. It was the most difficult and daunting task for the Indian people, especially the Muslims. But still many of the Muslims made the difficult choice and started to follow the English (Ahmed 2013). In this way, Mohamed’s personal account was the first opportunity for Britons to glimpse life there from a native’s point of view” (Quoted in Fisher’s introduction to Dean Mohamed, 1997).

### **Discussion, Findings and Results**

At the very outset, Dean Muhammad’s text reflects the attachment and fascination of the colonized subject with his colonial master namely Baker. The text exhibits a wonderful experience of Dean Mohammad in following his master, even as a child throughout the day (Mohammad 1997). But while doing so he equated the British company officers with those of the Rajas of India who, according to him, both shared the luxury of style and excellence of manners. But the recognition of this luxurious lifestyle by Mohammad put the remaining generally colonized public much behind the scene and as a result, the gulf between the colonizer and the colonizer begins to enlarge itself, which according to Fanon was necessary so that a savage and uncivilized image of the Local people may be created so that civilized and cultured image of the colonizer may be successfully harnessed. This image of the colonizer was so powerful that Dean Mohammad not only was very thankful to his master for his permission to let him stay but also refused to oblige his mother’s efforts to get him back. He personally refused by saying to his mother that he felt much upset even at the thought of going back to his home and so refused his mother. This refusal of Dean Mohammad is suggestive of the hegemonic nature of the colonial empire.

Dean Mohammad also adds the attitude of the local people who he terms as criminals and condemns their activities in the fashion of the colonial master. For example, he says about his stay of

one night in a village 'Fulwerah' that he found just after a few hours that he and his luggage had been plundered. He says, "So cruel were the merciless savages, that some were forming the barbarous resolutions of taking away my life, lest my escape would lead to a discovery of them; while others less inhuman, opposed the measure, by observing I was too young to injure them, and prevailed on their companions to let me go" (Mohamed, 1997). Fisher (2013) also supports the same point of view when he says that the people of India were uncultured, uncivilized and wilder and were ever ready to hit and plunder the people from the East India Company. He adds that frequently the army had to be deployed for the security of the company's interest. This aspect of Mohammad's travelogue can also be discussed with reference to the postcolonial theory because the colonizing agenda has frequently found its refuge behind the curtain of civilizing mission and so any level of resistance on the part of the local people is taken in the sense of brutality on the part of the local people. Sometimes even very harshly the label of being brute and uncivilized is applied very quickly. "Such rape narratives typically involved "savage brutes" assailing white victims, re-inscribing myths of racial superiority and validation for a civilizing mission in India" (Lothspeich). So, the text by Dean Mohamed carries the impression as if Dean Mohammad had the British and Irish audience in his mind while he was writing it and so was writing the perspective of his master or as he would have deemed it (Fisher, 2013). The same attitude Dean Mohammad has adopted while he compares the animal life in England in comparison to the Indian animals.

After having a detailed discussion on the Brutality versus the civilized attitude of the British, Dean Mohammad reverts to the description of the military might of the British and while he describes so, his focus, again and again, turns to the description of the grandeur and awe that the British army displayed while it was facing the local Indians. According to Dean Mohammad, "the natives, who flocked from all quarters, for many miles around, were delighted and astonished at the sight" ... (Mohamed, 1997). This automatically, as a binary opposition, establishes the weakness and inferior nature of the indigenous people in comparison to the military might of the British Army. This military might and the weakness could not cohabit without being dominated by the superior power. This point of view is supported by Fanon also when he says that their first confrontation was coloured by violence and their cohabitation-or rather the exploitation of the colonized by the colonizer-continued at the point of the bayonet and under cannon fire. (Fanon, 1963)

This analysis of Dean Mohammad's narration shows his acceptance of the cultural and political superiority of the colonial master and above all Dean Mohammad's narration seems to take sides with the colonial master rather than his own people. So, he is less a voice of his people and more a confirmation to the voice of the master.

This view about Dean Mohammad is further strengthened when we read the text of the travelogue, especially its description of the accuracy of the geographical details he mentions regarding the town of Calcutta. Calcutta was the centre of British establishments prior to 1857 and so reflected the competency of the administrative set up of the British. Dean Mohammad, as he was deeply imbued with the appreciation for the British way of managing and mapping the areas in which they inhabited, narrates his observation of the British and their working in Calcutta. One example of such a description is as follows,

Calcutta is a very flourishing city, and the presidency of the English Company in Bengal. It is situated on the most westerly branch of the less Ganges at 87 deg. east lon. and 22, 45 north lat.; 130 miles northeast of Balisore, and 40 south of Huguley [Hooghly]. It contains a number of regular and spacious streets, public buildings, gardens, walks, and fishponds, and from the best accounts, its population has advanced to upwards of six hundred thousand souls. (Mohamed, 1997)

This appreciative attitude does not find its availability in the other places of India where the British did not inhabit. He however keeps his similar attitude of narration towards the description of streets, gardens, public places, walking paths and the fishponds. This and many such chunks of the travelogue by dean Mohammad reflect the basic tenet of Postcolonial Theory that a colonized subject is surely mesmerised with the culture and behaviour of the colonizer and so is Dean Mohammad situated in his narration of the colonizer and his appreciation for him.

On the other hand, his descriptions of the local kings, princes and Nawabs is not in that favourable light. He rather portrays them as excessively decorated and obsessed with their possessions and so his narrative works well in conformity with the occident's viewpoint that oriental kings are

pretty exotic and showy and are much concerned about their appearance. Their gaudiness prompts them to be self-conscious and hence are mostly dictatorial in nature. Thus, the narrative of Dean Mohammad toes the same line as the imperial master would do in the case of the local and indigenous dignitaries. But when the same narrative turns towards European officers, the description is loaded with the power, discipline, and work-oriented attitude. Amrita Satapathy also confirms the same point of view when he says that Edward Said's observation that 'Orientalism is premised on exteriority' suggests that the mythical synonymy that the West is Europe and consequently its denizens belong to a superior race. The East, its natural antonym by default, is insipid, tame, and thus constitutes the lesser Other (Satapathy, 2012).

Dean Mohammad has also looked at his own people with reference to the attitude towards women in general and thinks that the British have a liberal point of view not only about their own women but also towards those of Indigenous ones. He here talks in conformity with the accusations on the oriental, laid on him, under the garb of Orientalism that he keeps his women tightly locked in his harem. This is true according to Mohammad in India without any differences of religion or caste. This keeps the colonizer and colonized apart because the British has a more liberal view of women. In fact, the concept of the harem in the eastern societies also differentiates between the West and East because the West is mostly monogamous while polygamy is a preferred mode of life in the East. Mohammad in his narratives disapproves of polygamy among Indians and he appreciates the monogamous style of the western nations. For example, he says that the Hindus and Muslims shudder at the very idea of exposing their women to the public eye and this thing is regarded as highly sacred because even a fighting soldier will spare the women and instead would love to protect them (Mohamed, 1997).

Dean Mohammad very ironically discusses the courtesans of India that on the one hand women are protected by the Indians and on the other hand many are put by them on the Kothas or second stories of the homes at selected places so that the rich may spend time with them and have a good time. Not only this, he leaves the women who worked at home and were well versed in their arts. Some of them were good and excellent poets and singers and knew many artworks. He only emphasises on the bad attitude of the Indian men towards women and so looks at his own people with the eye of a western rather than an Indian. For example, he says that even in wars and victories, the beautiful women of the defeated people were forced to accompany the victorious. On the other hand, he vigorously defends his master's attitude towards the defeated enemies, their families and women while referring to Captain Doxat, Lieutenants Stalker, Symes, and Scott and their retreat at Chunar (Mohamed, 1997).

### **Conclusion**

This discussion brings us to the conclusion that Dean Mohammad was deeply attached and fascinated with his British Master at the time when the East company in India was transitioning towards a full-fledged government in India in 1857. Therefore, the time can be called transitory one; instead, a total colonised time. But some men like Dean Mohammad were already assuming the role of the compradors in order to prove themselves more progressive than their brethren or in other words they have been simply mesmerised by the culture of the master. This was the most probable reason that even the intellectuals like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan advocated the following of the British way of life which was possible through cooperation with the British rather than the confrontation with the British. Sake Dean Mohammad is a prototype of this thought but when he begins to align himself with his master, he temporarily forgets his own identity and begins to look at his people with the gaze of his master but very soon realises that he cannot be absorbed into the British culture and become a British. The narrative of Sheikh Dean Mohammad credits him only to be a writer from India who represents his people as per the colonizer's gaze.

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