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Indian  
arrivals  
1870–1915

*Networks of British Empire*

ELLEKE BOEHMER

# INDIAN ARRIVALS 1870-1915



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In memory  
Jon Stallworthy  
(1935–2014)



## Acknowledgements

A work of literary and cultural history like *Indian Arrivals 1870–1915: Networks of British Empire*, which seeks to make a particular contribution to a specialized yet increasingly populated field, would be inconceivable without extensive collaboration, and hence owes many debts of gratitude. First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the support of the ‘Making Britain: South Asian Visions of Home and Abroad’ research project, funded by an Arts and Humanities Research Council Major Research Award, 2007–2010 (AH/E009859/1), with funding also from the University of Oxford English Faculty and the Open University. A substantial portion of the research for *Indian Arrivals* was carried out while I worked as a co-investigator on this flagship project. Piloted by Susheila Nasta of the Open University, ‘Making Britain’ explored migrant South Asian contributions to British culture and society between 1870 and 1950 and succeeded, via a range of outputs, persuasively to challenge representations of a racially homogeneous Britain in that period. My heartfelt thanks go to Susheila for her generosity, collegiality, and commitment to the subject of pre-1950 Indian immigration, as well as her discerning eye for what this history reveals about the long-term heterogeneous make-up of the ‘small island’ of the UK. It was also Susheila who made the link between the project and the pioneering historical and archival work of Rozina Visram. Throughout the project, Rozina was so courageous as to take a gamble on working with a group of literary critics, and so open-hearted as to share her copious research notes compiled across an entire career of scholarship, on which her own keynote study *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (2002) was built. All of those who were involved in ‘Making Britain’ are indebted to her work.

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As co-investigator, I served as the lead researcher on the 1870–1920 strand of ‘Making Britain’, a period marked (in my view) by some of high

imperialism's most subtle and fascinating contradictions. Though my 2002 *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial: Resistance in Interaction* had investigated these fault-lines in so far as they manifested as cross-empire connections, closer attention to the literary 'diaspora space' of Britain in the long close-of-century period opened up an even wider range of interesting and unexpected interrelationships. In this work I was ably assisted by the AHRC 'Making Britain' Postdoctoral Research Fellow Sumita Mukherjee. My indebtedness to her work is acknowledged in the notes and bibliography, but should also be taken as a golden thread running through the book. I am extremely grateful to Sumita's parents, Arabinda and Nita Mukherjee, for the energetic and patient support they gave to Sumita's work on the project, and also for Arabinda's hospitality in Santiniketan, a place where Rabindranath Tagore's far-sighted universalist vision continues to make a palpable impression on daily life. I will always remember mid-March 2009 as a very special time. Sanjukta Dasgupta at the University of Calcutta and Rosinka Chaudhuri at CSSS both gave me a warm welcome in that city in the same month. I am grateful to Amit Chaudhuri for the booking at the Bengal Club and for his encouragement throughout.

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# Contents

*List of Figures*

xvii

<b>Introduction: Indian Arrival—Encounters Between Indians and Britons, 1870–1915</b>	1
I Encounter	2
II Interconnected Cultural Terrains	5
III Cross-border Poetics	11
IV Arrivals and Arrivants	15
V The Enigma of Arrival	20
VI Chapters	22
<b>1. Passages to England: Suez, the Indian Pathway</b>	32
I Ondaatje’s ‘Fragmentary Tableaux’	33
II Across the Black Waters	36
III The ‘Magnificent Ditch’ in Its Imperial Context	41
IV British Perspectives	45
V Indian Passages to England: Travelling in the West	51
VI Forged Through the Medium of Travel: Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu	60
<b>2. The Spasm of the Familiar: Indians in Late Nineteenth-century London</b>	73
I ‘... to England to Discover India’	73
II Native and Foreign in England	77
III ‘Versions of Our Old Route’: India-in-Britain	81
IV City Networks: ‘No Route Back’	92
V A Poetics of Crossing: ‘That World-wide Circle . . . Like an Electric Current’	108
<b>3. Lotus Artists: Self-orientalism and Decadence</b>	131
I ‘Catching the Nearing Echo’: 1890s Poetic Encounters Between India and Britain	132
II The Fantastical 1890s	139
III ‘Lotus-eyed’ Ghose ‘the Primavera Poet’	147
IV ‘So Impetuous and so Sympathetic’: Sarojini Naidu as Self-orientalist	159
V Cornelia Sorabji: ‘getting England into my bones’	173

<b>4. Edwardian Extremes and Extremists, 1901–13</b>	191
I Difference Within	191
II India Housed and Unhoused	200
III Indian Bloomsbury	214
IV On or About 1912	222
<b>5. Coda—Indian Salients</b>	245
<i>Works Cited</i>	255
<i>Index</i>	275

## *List of Figures*

1. Frontispiece sketch to Sarojini Naidu, *The Golden Threshold* (1905), by J. B. Yeats. © Estate of Jack B. Yeats. All rights reserved, DACS 2014. 135
2. First edition of Sarojini Naidu's *The Bird of Time* (1912); image of the author as frontispiece. © British Library Board, (V 10326). 136
3. Photograph of William Rothenstein and Rabindranath Tagore, 7 July 1912, by John Trevor. 226

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## Introduction

### *Indian Arrival—Encounters Between Indians and Britons, 1870–1915*

Near Hastings, on the shingle beach,  
    We loitered at the time  
When ripens on the wall the peach,  
    The autumn's lovely prime.  
Far off,—the sea and sky seemed blent,  
    The day was wholly done,  
The distant town its murmurs sent  
    Strangers,—we were alone.  
We wandered slow; sick, weary, faint,  
    Then one of us sat down,  
No nature hers, to make complaint;—  
    The shadows deepened brown.  
A lady past,<sup>1</sup>—she was not young,  
    But oh! Her gentle face  
No painter-poet ever sung,  
    Or saw such saintlike grace.  
She past us,—then she came again,  
    Observing at a glance  
That we were strangers; one, in pain,—  
    Then asked,—‘Were we from France?’  
We talked awhile,—some roses red  
    That seemed as wet with tears,  
She gave my sister, and she said,  
    ‘God bless you both, my dears!’  
Sweet were the roses,—sweet and full,  
    And large as lotus flowers  
That in our own wide tank we cull  
    To deck our Indian bowers.  
But sweeter was the love that gave  
    Those flowers to one unknown,

I think that He who came to save  
 The gift a debt will own.  
 The lady's name I do not know,  
 Her face no more may see,  
 But yet, oh yet, I love her so!  
 Blest, happy, may she be!  
 Her memory will not depart,  
 Though grief my years should shade.  
 Still bloom her roses in my heart!  
 And they shall never fade!

Toru Dutt, 'Near Hastings',  
 from *Ancient Ballads and Legends  
 of Hindustan* (1876/1882)

## I ENCOUNTER

The Victorian Indian poet Toru Dutt's lyric 'Near Hastings' is notable for being probably the first poem in the English language to represent a British–Indian encounter on British soil.<sup>2</sup> Set at an iconic place of arrival in British history, the site of the 1066 Battle of Hastings, not far from where William the Conqueror landed, the two 'strange' women walking on the shingle beach seem themselves to have arrived on British shores after a long journey: 'weary, faint', they are mistaken for Frenchwomen by the passing British 'lady'. A conversation then begins, a gift exchanges hands, and spontaneous mutual affection is expressed. Throughout, the poem interweaves British and Indian glances, greetings, and blessings, if also a pervasive taint of uncertainty, so offering an apt object lesson with which to begin a study entitled *Indian Arrivals 1870–1915: Networks of British Empire*. By the poem's close, Indian arrival has been staged, in more ways than one.

With 'Near Hastings', Dutt precociously explored something of the cultural strangeness, anxiety, and hesitation mixed with curiosity and recognition that is involved in arriving in a new culture. Writing from her own pioneering experience of travel and education in Europe as a young Bengali woman, she evokes in surprisingly assured Romantic terms the process of finding the linguistic and aesthetic means through which to articulate the discovery of sameness within difference.<sup>3</sup> For Kwame Appiah, in his work on cosmopolitanism, an ethical position informed by cosmopolitan values is based on a respect for the other's difference in its absolute specificity, balanced by a willingness to find areas of agreement and concord.<sup>4</sup> Although the Indians and the Britons who are discussed in

this book, most of them distinctively Victorian liberals and reformers, may not consciously or consistently have espoused cosmopolitan values, yet they displayed a commitment to such openness to another culture, even while often grappling with the feelings of racial distrust and antagonism that imperial structures inevitably fomented. These contrary impulses, for and against harmonious interaction, run through and across the broad spectrum of the memoirs, poetry, letters, essays, and other writing produced out of their encounters with one another. Many of these texts also outline, as I will show, that this cosmopolitan respect for difference is something negotiated through the give-and-take of conversation in its broadest sense, a trading of recognitions, ‘the respect and candid exchange of views among individuals and cultures’ in Appiah’s terms, in spite of moments of doubt and disjuncture. The picture that emerges is of a more dialectical late Victorian or imperial cosmopolitanism than may hitherto have been conceived—one in which turn-of-the-century Indian travellers not only participated, but to which they also contributed in important ways.

Set on a significant piece of English ground, Dutt’s ‘Near Hastings’ captures the dynamic moment of such exchange in its pivotal third stanza in particular, when a conversational overture is made and then accepted. As such, the poem gives an anticipatory snapshot of an encounter scene that acknowledges sameness as well as difference—one that would be repeated across the decades from 1870, as travellers from the subcontinent began to travel to Britain in ever greater numbers, as did Dutt, in quest of education, or political representation, or social reform, until at last, in 1914–15, over a million Indian sepoy arrived in Europe, to safeguard the Western Front.<sup>5</sup> While Dutt’s much-anthologized ode ‘Our Casuarina Tree’ represents perhaps her most poignant expression of intercultural translation, ‘Near Hastings’ addresses itself more precisely to the purposes of this book and to a specific scene of Indian arrival, and therefore furnishes the more fitting exemplary text with which to open.<sup>6</sup>

Made up of five stanzas, like ‘Our Casuarina Tree’, the progressive rhyme scheme *abab cdcd* of ‘Near Hastings’, different from the other poem’s Keatsian frame, immediately evokes a sense of forward movement and underlying harmony. Though for the imperial historian Antoinette Burton ‘Near Hastings’ suggests how conspicuous Toru and her sister felt as Indians whenever they travelled outside London, and though the overall mood of the poem is unmistakably plangent, in fact the poem also highlights the tenderness of the contact with the English lady, and, despite her out-of-the-ordinary saintliness, the relative terms of equality on which the women meet.<sup>7</sup> Throughout, ‘Near Hastings’ also interestingly recalls Matthew Arnold’s ‘Dover Beach’ (1867), famously set on the English shoreline facing France, with which an avid reader of poetry like Dutt

would surely have been familiar. Yet the ‘naked shingles’ of Arnold’s well-known poem of foreboding are in Dutt touched by the soft light of an autumn evening, and the poem’s focus rapidly shifts from the potentially desolate beach scene to the floral gift that connects three people and three geographies—not only France and England, but also India.

The first two stanzas of ‘Near Hastings’ lay down the conditions under which the encounter takes place, building to the initial crossing of paths at the end of stanza two, with the opening of the conversation—‘we talked’—and the giving of the symbolic gift of roses that then follows in the central stanza. Wandering on a ‘shingle beach’ near Hastings at the end of an autumn evening, the speaker’s companion, presumably her ailing sister Aru, feels faint, and the two sit down, whereupon they are spotted by the passing woman. She observes that they are ‘strangers’ (the word is repeated in stanzas one and three), yet at the same time casts them as proximate rather than distant others, by asking whether they are Frenchwomen.<sup>8</sup> Then, spontaneously bestowing her floral gift, which somewhat miraculously lies to hand, the lady asks for God’s blessing upon them. In the final two stanzas, the speaker shifts to an overtly Christian register and boldly compares the lady’s selfless unqualified love to Christ’s. This rather predictable move (for the Christianized Dutt) is shadowed by a more interesting symbolic transfer in which the gift of the roses is said to be transposed into the speaker’s memory and heart—in which form, she avers, their image will never fade.

The sense of inextricable fusion rising out of the brief yet telling encounter between strangers sheds a retrospective light on other suggestions of merging and mingling in the rest of the poem: the ‘blending’ of ‘sea and sky’ in the evening light; the ‘browning’ of the deepening shadows, which in context is a significant chromatic choice; and then, suggestively, the red roses—English blooms—that are, however, described as ‘large as [the] lotus flowers’ that float on the tank at home in India and are used to ‘deck our Indian bowers’. There is some passing hint that the English lady may herself have been bound for a shrine or grave on which she was to lay the flowers (or why did she have them so conveniently to hand?). However, in an act of profound hospitality to the two strangers, women like herself, she gives the lotus-sized red English roses to them, so drawing from the speaker a reciprocal, if perhaps overcompensatory assertion of emotion: ‘I love her so!’ A recognition of foreignness shifts into a profound (and for Appiah cosmopolitan) exchange of love, trust, and understanding which, in its final wishful expression ‘Blest, happy, may she be’, returns the blessing the Englishwoman gave the Indian sisters and turns the poem itself into a further confirmation, however evanescent, of the friendship between the two of them and England, as embodied in the rose-bearing lady.

Despite the pervasive Arnoldian mournfulness, the poem is imbued with the sense that England's welcome to India, as perceived by at least some Indians, is warm and genuine, and as such the poem embraces those English people who have extended a hand of friendship to travellers from the subcontinent.<sup>9</sup> India, the assurance is made, will repay the benefits of this hospitality in manifold ways. Its Christian sentimentality aside, 'Near Hastings' makes clear that the reciprocation of affection described is contingent upon the Englishwoman's initial overture, upon the giving and receiving. Viewed in this light, 'Near Hastings' looks ahead to the complicated dialogic lineaments of the many encounters that were to take place between 'arriving' Indians and their British hosts in the decades featured in this book—from 1870 and the opening of the Suez Canal to the outbreak of the First World War.

## II INTERCONNECTED CULTURAL TERRAINS

*Indian Arrivals 1870–1915: Networks of British Empire* sets out to paint a more textured picture than has been available until quite recently, not only of cross-cultural contact between Indians and Britons in Britain, but also of the place of India in the British metropolitan imagination at this relatively early stage for Indian migration.<sup>10</sup> The book explores, through a series of four roughly decade-based case studies and a coda on the First World War period, the late nineteenth-century arrival in Britain of a number of remarkable Indian individuals, including scholars, poets, and political activists. To do so it examines, where appropriate, the take-up in the metropolis of the literary, social, and cultural influences and ideas that accompanied their transcontinental movement. Each chapter reflects critically on various literary and historical accounts of significant Indian arrivals and 'arrivants', in two cases including actual portraits (a pen sketch and two photographs: Figures 1 and 2 in Chapter 3, and Figure 3 in Chapter 4). For if, as is now widely accepted, vocabularies of inhabitation, education, citizenship, and the law were in many cases developed in colonial spaces like India, and imported into Britain, then, the book suggests, the presence of Indian travellers and migrants needs to be seen as much more central to Britain's understanding of itself, both in historical terms and in relation to the present day.<sup>11</sup> Plainly expressed, the colonial encounter in all its ambivalence and complexity inflected social relations throughout the empire, *including* in Britain. Indian as well as other colonial travellers enacted the diversity of the empire on London's streets.

*Indian Arrivals 1870–1915* builds on the pioneering work of historians of Indian migration such as Rozina Visram, Antoinette Burton, and

Kusoom Vadgama in investigating the ways in which individual Indians ‘at the heart of empire’, like B. M. Malabari or Cornelia Sorabji, negotiated the colonial and racialized meanings that were often attached to their encounters with Britons.<sup>12</sup> Its perspective is shaped also by the valuable work of Catherine Hall on how empire (concepts of ‘new colonial selves’, for example) lay at the heart of nineteenth-century understanding of Britishness.<sup>13</sup> However, *Indian Arrivals* goes further than Burton or Visram in one particular sense, in that it looks closely and critically at how cross-cultural and interpersonal negotiations between Indian and British individuals on British soil figured and reconfigured Britain in literary and textual terms. It is specifically interested therefore in negotiations that were conducted in writing, with a special emphasis on poetry—at a time before modernist iconoclasm created opportunities for an Indian author like Mulk Raj Anand to join in with ‘conversations in Bloomsbury’.<sup>14</sup> Each chapter reads the ramifications of Indian presences in Britain, as expressed within literary and related texts, in order to track, as Edward Said writes, the ‘interdependence of [Indian and British] cultural terrains’ in the making of British as well as Indian identities and cultural perceptions at the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> So, whereas Visram’s approach rests on an accretion of hitherto buried evidence relating to Indian migration, and Burton’s interest is in the specific biographical trajectories of Pandita Ramabai, Behramji Malabari, and Cornelia Sorabji, the focus of the chapters that follow is on those arrivals and encounters that can be seen to have made a certain distinct impression on British cultural and literary life before the First World War, yet that to date have tended to be marginalized or overlooked by the colonial archive.

In dialogue with the findings of the major research project ‘Making Britain: South Asian Visions of Home and Abroad, 1870–1950’ (2007–2010), the different case studies in *Indian Arrivals 1870–1915* examine a range of British–Indian interrelations, especially one-to-one collaborations, partnerships, and friendships.<sup>16</sup> The more finely meshed, networked picture of early Indian immigration to Britain that emerges from this investigation goes some way towards responding, at least for this period, to Edward Said’s compelling invitation in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) to interrogate the binaries of colonial self and colonized other, European metropolis and non-western periphery, that have conventionally underpinned the rhetoric of empire. To the same end of ‘unthinking Eurocentrism’ in Said’s terms, *Indian Arrivals* also draws in insights from Rasheed Araeen’s work on the deconstructed and expanded metropolis, and Partha Mitter’s account of global cosmopolitanism, in order to develop an understanding of the imperial world as at once more complicated and as integrated.<sup>17</sup> As Mitter suggests, non-metropolitan movements in the

arts, including early twentieth-century modernism, exhibited remarkable 'plurality, heterogeneity and difference' even when compared to their western, apparently pre-eminent counterparts. *Indian Arrivals* seeks to evoke something akin to the asymmetrical, uneven yet interconnected world pictures modelled by these peripheral modernisms, and uses critical terms drawn from its own readings of the individual writers' texts (with their accent on interchange and reciprocity, as will be seen) in order to do so. Yet, as this book several times has occasion to observe, metropolitan writers, too, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, used rhetorical strategies drawn from colonial texts in order to '[imagine] the imperial centre' as fluidity, darkness, and cesspool, and in this way also disturbed conventional centre-periphery divides.<sup>18</sup>

*Indian Arrivals 1870–1915* is premised on an understanding of empire as multilayered and interconnected, as well as divided and dichotomous. As the work of historians and historiographers such as Frederick Cooper, Nicholas Thomas, and Daniel E. White shows, empire made up an intercalated field of meanings not confined to the oppositions of colonizer and colonized which dominated both materialist and nationalist postcolonial historiography until quite recently.<sup>19</sup> The structures and devices put in place by colonialism were never merely accepted by its subjects, but were always contested, revised, interrupted, and creatively reinterpreted, such as when Indians and Britons collaborated in the production of Decadent poetry, or when the Parsi Dadabhai Naoroji served in 1892–1895 as the first South Asian Westminster MP, representing the constituency of Finsbury Central. Joining with the new scholarship on imperial circulation that has developed in the past two decades or so, this book considers how networked relations operated as modes of identity and knowledge production in the diasporic space of 'India-in-Britain'.<sup>20</sup> Or, as Antoinette Burton reminds us, 'colonialism . . . was made, contested, and remade in the . . . local spaces of the everyday'—spaces such as might be found in London or in Liverpool—or in Calcutta. Concurring, P. D. Morgan observes that empire operated as 'an entire interactive system, one vast interconnected world'.<sup>21</sup> As in Burton, many of the case studies brought together here focus on London; however, an expanded narrative of Indian arrival could equally include Bristol, Brighton, or Edinburgh in legitimate and lively ways.

The emphasis throughout *Indian Arrivals* on circulation and exchange should not, however, be read as claiming that such interactions were not often impeded as well as facilitated by empire. Under colonialism, Appiah's definitive encounter between two individuals sharing cosmopolitan values would in many cases be distorted by experiences of racism and cultural misrecognition. Given that otherness must be ceaselessly recreated

in order for colonialism to sustain itself, imperial cosmopolitanism rarely involved entirely emollient relations. Indeed, the postcolonial identification of the cosmopolitan as transnational notwithstanding, the genealogy of cosmopolitan values is ineluctably bound up with the west's history of imperial domination.<sup>22</sup> Relating cosmopolitan approaches, historically developed within the west, to individuals coming from outside the west, therefore demands from us a constant critical vigilance as to geopolitical location. Cosmopolitanism espoused in any unequal situation, even if in the metropolis, would always have been different from the open exchange that Appiah and others describe.

Leela Gandhi's *Affective Communities* (2006) makes an important contribution to our view of empire as cross-connected, as well as to postcolonial theories of transnational migration and exchange, with its readings of Indian–British friendship in roughly the same turn-of-the-century period as that explored in this book. However, the predominant focus of *Affective Communities* is not on the intercultural dynamics of Indian–British transactions *per se*.<sup>23</sup> Drawing on Marx, Derrida, and Nancy, Gandhi's concern is rather to take the interrelationships of, say, M. K. Gandhi and C. F. Andrews, or Manmohan Ghose and Laurence Binyon, as paradigmatic instances of the radical aesthetic 'autonomies' that the disparate, often risky affiliations of the European *fin de siècle* made possible. Her predominantly philosophical study asks how hospitable collaborations between members of the oppressed and oppressor echelons at the turn of the century anticipated 'new and better forms of community and relationality', and how, in effect, such anti-colonial practices helped to generate an anti- or postcolonial ethics.

*Indian Arrivals* responds to Leela Gandhi's work through its reflection on some of the specific channels through which Indian ideas, mentalities, and encounters contributed to shaping metropolitan cultural life. It takes an approach at once literary and historicist, by considering how interrelations between Indians and Britons served as catalysts in the moulding of metropolitan cultural and social perceptions in the 1870–1915 period, and how this was refracted, calibrated, and in some cases made possible through literary writing—in the travelogues, memoirs, letters, poems, and other records of contact produced by Indians and their British hosts across these turn-of-the-century years. The book's methodology, therefore, combines both sifting through archives and close reading; both the decoding of textual traces and the literary-critical recuperation of forgotten, buried, or partially erased contacts and connections. Inspired by Paul Gilroy's notion of British migrant history as produced through 'a fusion of [cultural] horizons', the different chapters consider how the presence of Indians and Indian texts in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century

metropolitan society intervened in literary movements and other cultural developments until now seen as almost exclusively British. The picture of 'knotted . . . histories' that emerges, certainly disturbs any understanding of the cosmopolitan as frictionless.<sup>24</sup> Diverse 'voyages in', including salon conversations, street-side interactions, and drawing-room friendships, suggest in each case how Indian identities abroad came into articulation in contrapuntal ways, through representations of the familiarity and unfamiliarity of England as well as of India. The book's readings will therefore be interested in the unsaid as well as the said of these encounters, in particular in those textual traces of early Indian presences in Britain (bodies, knowledge, forms of awareness) that suggest even in their inadvertency and contingency how the metropolis that ruled over a quarter of the planet was striated at its core by its contact with India.<sup>25</sup>

At this point, it may well be objected that in *per capita* terms the number of Indians in British cities in the period was relatively small—at the turn of the century, about 10,000 in 8 million (as against 100,000 African-origin people).<sup>26</sup> Moreover, as well as being relatively few and far between, Indians in Britain at this time—mostly men, but also a small number of women—were rarely at large in public spaces, and did not freely mingle with Britons. They tended to inhabit the relatively closed environments of college quads and designated hostels and dormitories, and congregated for mutual support. In the course of this study therefore, it may seem from time to time that a great deal of theorizing and speculation will be made to bear down on relatively thin evidence.

Yet, as Antoinette Burton also recognizes, for those who had the eyes to see it (the novelists Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens were among them), Indians were everywhere present in Britain's larger cities, 'on street corners, in West End theatres, in travelling shows', and of course on the quaysides and in the sailors' hostels that lascars frequented as they waited for a berth on an India-bound ship.<sup>27</sup> As commentators observed at the time, 'Asia Minor' might be found in the neighbourhood of the London docks.<sup>28</sup> The less-than-privileged Indian lascars or seamen who were mostly designated in these descriptions were in fact those who most actively plied the networks of travel that connected Britain and the sub-continent in the nineteenth century: they were perhaps the first Indians to develop a global awareness, an experience of the world that was mobile, multilingual, creolized, and networked through the planet's constellation of port cities.<sup>29</sup> Though their presence and that of other Indians may not at first have made a strong demographic impression, nonetheless these travellers were able to have an impact precisely because their numbers were perceived as relatively small and therefore unthreatening, an effect which their occasional displays of exceptionalism only reinforced (as in the case

of Sarojini Naidu, in Chapter 3). Their ways of seeing and being in the metropolis laid down a store of experience and memory that would not only serve as a guide and an inspiration for later generations of migrant Indians, but at certain points also sparked change, initially often slight, yet incrementally influential, in Britain's cultural and social make-up. Significantly, the lascars' metropolitan presence in this early period also reflected in microcosm the flow of Indian labour through the world system of imperial capitalism, as expressed in indenture. Developed to fill the labour vacuum that the abolition of slavery had created, the structures of indenture interconnected the far-flung plantations of Fiji, Mauritius, Trinidad, and Natal in a new, highly uneven, and fateful global network.<sup>30</sup>

The mention of lascars draws attention to a further important fact concerning Indian demographics abroad, which is that the Indian travellers who plied between Europe and the subcontinent in this period fell into two main groups—the privileged and educated, and the unprivileged; elite travellers as against lascars, ayahs, soldiers, and other working people. Considering that the preoccupations of this study are literary and textual, the focus here falls primarily on the first group, Indians who travelled to Europe as paying passengers, who tended to be educated members of elites. As Thomas Babington Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* of 1835 had recommended, these elite Indians were products of an education in British history and the English literary classics explicitly designed to anglicize their cultural values and beliefs.<sup>31</sup> Nehru, for instance, had read Dickens, Thackeray, Kipling, Wells, and Conan Doyle before he ever arrived in England. He and his migrant compatriots therefore interpreted the metropolitan world using the cultural and linguistic codes that had been made available to them back in India, not excluding, of course, the English language. In fact, as Dipesh Chakrabarty observes, almost everything that nineteenth-century elite Indians were taught was refracted through the concepts and books of Europe, through a bifocal lens that affirmed European cultural superiority, yet at the same time cast liberalizing ideas and practices as applicable to the wider world.<sup>32</sup> In short, the class and, to an extent, race coordinates of this group of travellers were a world away from those of the larger population of working-class Indians also present in Britain at that time.

However, whether they were privileged scholars or stranded lascars, the contribution of early Indian migrants to the life of the metropolis has not until recently been formally acknowledged to any significant degree, including not in literary historical studies, despite the far-reaching historical investigations of Visram, Burton, and others. So Ann Thwaite's 1985 biography of Edmund Gosse pays no attention to this Victorian scholar's mutually formative friendships with the innovative Indian poets Toru

Dutt or Sarojini Naidu, or how these reflected his lifelong interest in the aesthetic perspectives offered by other cultures and literary traditions.<sup>33</sup> And the several Indians that W. B. Yeats befriended across his long career as a poet and spiritual seeker until recently merited little more than a passing mention in studies of his life and work.<sup>34</sup> This lack of recognition for pre-1914 Indian migration can in part be attributed to the question of numbers already raised; in part to the fact that its traces lie in documents, texts, and other sources often deemed evanescent and peripheral; and in part to how the dominant narrative of British national history operates (like most national stories) in unifying and homogenizing ways. ‘Events’, as the historiographer Hayden White writes, ‘are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others.’<sup>35</sup> In many cases, as women’s histories also show, historical details, voices, strands, and traces relating to minorities are not registered within the authoritative or ‘highlighted’ narrative frameworks through which national histories are read. Or, as the anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot observes: ‘Historical narratives necessarily produce silences that are themselves meaningful.’ The meaningfulness of such silences is asserted in particular when minority voices resist how canonical history has interpreted them.<sup>36</sup> To address these gaps in the historical record, *Indian Arrivals* is particularly interested in combining views from a range of different sources, relating to both incomers and their hosts, and so creating a deeper, even stereoscopic, understanding of the obscure and overlooked stories that nonetheless also helped shape turn-of-the-century British cultural life.

### III CROSS-BORDER POETICS

*Indian Arrivals 1870–1915* is informed throughout by an interest in textuality as it is manifested in literary, as well as some non-literary, writing; that is, in how textual forms mould and model intercultural contacts and relationships. It takes this writing—its tropes and formal structures—as both reflective and diagnostic of the Indian–British encounter, and therefore as bearing a critical impression of the salient features of the Indian interaction with Britain. As Nile Green’s research also recognizes, Britain, and in particular England, had been ‘textualized’ by Asian travellers from as far back as the early nineteenth century. Their travel writing not only testified to the reciprocity of the religious and social exchanges they conducted with Britons, but also laid down an archive of written observations with which later travellers and arrivants might interact—one, moreover, that cuts across colonial dichotomies and fills

historical silences with presence.<sup>37</sup> It is this archive to which the Indian scholars, students, teachers, poets, and activists covered in these pages contributed in their turn as they wrote up their experiences of travel to, and within, the west.

As with Green's travellers, textual sources such as journals and memoirs, based on evocative narrative genres such as the picaresque, provide rich contemporary impressions of the complex of perceptions and emotions associated with the Indian–British encounter. In the worked, encoded forms of such writing, the subtleties of interaction are traced, and the associated anxieties and aspirations of travel captured. Here it is important not to forget that English-born writers, too, such as Wilkie Collins or Frances Hodgson Burnett, played a key role in exploring and articulating some of the complicated dimensions of intercultural encounter between Britain and the subcontinent on British soil. So Collins in *The Moonstone* (1868/1871) intriguingly represents Indians as not merely forming a part of the hustle and bustle of London's streets, as is discussed in Chapter 2, but also as maintaining their self-mastery even under pressure, unlike many of his British characters.

As this implies, *Indian Arrivals* approaches in particular literary texts in two interrelated ways: first, as actual records of travel and cultural transaction, but also in their particularity, as imaginative structures or 'technologies', in Cara Murray's definition, or as cognitive models or 'affordances', in the definition of Terence Cave.<sup>38</sup> We will be interested in how literary texts, not least lyric poetry, shaped and were in turn shaped by the encounters in question. For example, how did a British–Indian poetic collaboration, such as that of Manmohan Ghose and Lawrence Binyon, imprint on a cultural movement like 1890s decadence (as in Chapter 3)? Or how might the concept of a spiritualized modernity explored by Rabindranath Tagore and his promoter friend William Rothenstein have shaped the emergence of the 1910s modernist poem, not least in terms of providing it with a necessary foil against which to react (as in Chapter 4)? In each case, the literary text will be taken as an instrument through which to understand and reflect critically on the world, as it indeed was by the writers and artists in their time. Or, as Cara Murray recognizes, in the late nineteenth century certain generic forms (such as the colonial romance) made possible new modes of global imagining, new symbolic investments in space that was until then uncharted.

As part of its critical methodology, the book also gives attention to and reads in-depth contemporary postcolonial or transnational writing that attempts to retrieve and flesh out encounters that the historical record to date has not captured, or that have slipped from historical memory, such as we