PART THREE

New Empires, New Nations, ca. 1800–1920

9

Conflicting Meanings of Persianate Culture

An Intimate Example from Colonial India and Britain

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During the long period of transition from Mughal to British imperial rule over India, the Persian language and Indo-Persianate culture conveyed conflicting meanings to various individuals and classes of Indian and British people in India and in Britain. These powerful meanings shifted over time and were context-sensitive. In India, the frontier of Persian and its associated culture had advanced from the sixteenth century on, especially with the expanding rule of the Mughal imperial family. Much of the power of the Mughal Empire came from its capacity to incorporate a range of Indian people and Indic elements into its Persianate imperial culture.[1] Indeed, this cultural force meant that the Mughal imperial dynasty and court lasted for a century and a half after the military power and effective rule of these emperors had largely fragmented (conventionally dated from the death of the emperor Aurangzeb in 1707).

Until the official end of the Mughal Empire in 1858, many Indian princely states and the English East India Company both continued nominally to respect Mughal sovereignty and to emulate parts of its imperial Indo-Persianate culture, albeit to different degrees and in inconsistent and often conflicting ways. Many of the fading Indian rulers and traditional service elites continued to value and to identify themselves strongly with that Indo-Persianate culture. However, in the context of expanding British political, cultural, military, and economic assertions in Asia, the Persian language was no more than a useful tool. Simultaneously, there were also debates in Britain, however, over the meanings of Persian and Indo-Persianate culture, which involved both "Orientals" in the abstract and some Asians in person, and concepts of biological racial difference increasingly inflected them in the nineteenth century. This chapter complements a substantial existing body of insightful scholarship on the lives of Persophone Asians who visited or settled in Britain in that era.[2]

In order to explore these conflicts and transitions as the Persian and Persianate frontiers advanced, retreated, and persisted at various social strata in India and Britain, this chapter contextualizes and analyzes the early nineteenth century case of a hybrid heir to the doomed north Indian principality of Sardhana: D. O. Dyce Sombre (1808–51). For him, Persian was the most intimate and status-giving of languages. While his tendentious life in both India and in Europe was eccentric, it provides especially rich primary source material about what Persian meant to him personally—from his private diary and letters as well as from the extensive evidence about his words and actions from his contemporaries. When placed in the larger historical context of whole classes of Indians and Britons in India and in Britain, this case suggests the conflicting effective and affective meanings of Persian and Indo-Persianate culture in various times and places during this crucial period, as power and prestige were more broadly shifting to English and Anglicized culture globally.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS IN INDIA AND IN BRITAIN FOR PERSIAN AND INDO-PERSIANATE CULTURE, SIXTEENTH TO EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURIES

Especially as strengthened by the innovations of the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605), Persian language and culture diffused into key parts of society in India's cities, towns, and even villages.[3] After the Mughal dynasty entered India (starting in 1526) and sporadically expanded its power there, it adapted Iranian (especially Safavid imperial) culture and also built on and synthesized existing Deccani and Delhi sultanate Persianate and also Indic cultures into its distinctively Mughal Indo-Persian model. Increasingly, the Mughal court attracted into imperial service a range of Indians (both Indian Muslims and non-Muslims, including Rajput and other Hindus, as well as Jains and members of other Indian religious communities). Additionally, the flow of Persophone service elites from Iran (and Central Asia) into the Mughal Empire continued for two centuries.

Over time, the Mughal imperial court became the model for many subordinated but also independent Indian regional courts. Various elite and scribal communities also studied and adapted to its Indo-Persianate culture. Hence, in north, central, and even parts of south India, many official histories, high literature, and documents, including landholding and revenue records, were in the Persian language and script. Wide sectors of society used Persian terms and concepts in daily and official activities, appreciated and contributed to its literature, and displayed the associated Indo-Persianate etiquette and deportment.[4] Thus, as shown by Purnima Dhavan's chapter 5 in this volume, "Persianate clusters" developed within and around the Mughal Empire, where competitive expertise in Persian language and literature brought prestige and attracted people of various sociocultural origins.

Even after the Mughal Empire fragmented over the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many regional successor states sought to perpetuate and/or revive various forms of its imperial and cultural Indo-Persian traditions. Rulers and scholar-officials in these states in various degrees valued Persian as their court, administrative, and high-cultural language, even if they also wrote and domestically spoke in "Hindustani" (Urdu, Deccani, Hindawi, or Hindi) or another regional language (within either the Indo-European or the Dravidian language families). Sharif Husain Qasemi argues that the early nineteenth century saw an unprecedented volume of Persian literary production, as the surviving Mughal successor courts sought to establish their cultural and political credentials through lavish (if anxious) patronage of Persian-language arts, especially the writing of histories about their dynasties and states, that referenced their connections with historic Mughal glory.[5] Further, these rulers, courtiers, and scholar-officials in part strongly supported these arts so as to resist British Anglicizing assertions.

Hence, even as many Indian rulers perforce submitted politically, and traditional service elites accepted employment under the British from the late eighteenth century on, many of these men still sought to instruct Britons in the established Indo-Persian modes of high-cultural etiquette and its related administrative techniques and technologies of rule. Inherent in their efforts was their conviction that Britons who became their students and who accepted Indo-Persianate high culture would better understand, appreciate, and govern Indians, including themselves. Some individual Britons also personally adopted key aspects of Indo-Persianate culture, including various British political residents at Indian courts, for example, Lt. Colonel David Ochterlony, the East India Company's political resident agent at the Mughal imperial court from 1803 to 1806 and 1818 to 1822.[6]

In contrast, many Britons in Britain and in India had long believed that gaining access to Persian instrumentally empowered them to master and control Indian peoples and polities, without necessarily accepting the inherent Indo-Persian culture. As Bernard Cohn puts it: "The British realized that in seventeenth-century India, Persian was the crucial language for them to learn. They approached Persian as a kind of functional language, a pragmatic vehicle of communication with Indian officials and rulers through which, in a denotative fashion, they could express their requests, queries, and thoughts, and through which they could get things done. To use Persian well required highly specialized forms of knowledge."[7] By the late eighteenth century, the East India Company largely recognized the value of Persian as the "language of command," although many British officials and officers simultaneously rejected the Indo-Persianate manners and morality of the old regime they were displacing.[8]

To advance the implementation of its policies, the new British colonial regime established state-supported institutions where Indians taught Persian (among other subjects) to arriving British officials. The Calcutta Madrasa (established in 1781) perpetuated many established traditions of Persian-based education. However,

FIGURE 12. Machine-minted Persian: East India Company coinage from the Soho Foundry, Birmingham, England, 1803. Photograph by Jon Augier. Museums Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.

reflecting growing British cultural assertions, at Fort William College (established in Calcutta in 1800), British professors took charge, with Indian teachers in subordinate roles as assistants (munshis) and tutors to incoming British officials. But these young British students customarily treated their Indian instructors as hirelings. Thus, "the teacher-taught relation with which the Indian teachers were familiar did not exist in the College of Fort William. It was a new relationship, that of *Sahibs* and *Munshis,* that of European officers and their servants."[9] Such policies at Fort William degraded Indian scholars, but they at least preserved Persian as a major subject, albeit under British curricular and pedagogic control. These "Orientalist" policies, however, themselves gradually gave way to even more powerful British cultural assertions of Anglicization (peaking with the Governor-General's Council's 1835 Minute on Education). Nevertheless, many Indian courtiers and scholar-officials who embodied Indo-Persianate culture continued to resist such Anglicizing pressures. A few traveled to England to create positions for themselves as expert Persian-language teachers. There, they found different conditions from colonial India, including the pedagogy they had to use, the meaning of Persian and Indo-Persian culture, and their own social lives.

From the early seventeenth century on, many Persian-speaking male visitors, travelers, and members of royal diplomatic and commercial missions from Persia and India, together with their servants, lived for considerable periods in London.[10] By the mid-nineteenth century, as many as forty thousand Indians alone had reached Britain.[11] Many of these men married or formed liaisons with British women, the Persophones among them presumably informally teaching Persian domestically or for profit. Their Indo-Persianate culture (in public most visibly expressed in their clothing) during this period carried an attractive oriental

exoticism for many (albeit not all) Britons, as many of these Indian visitors themselves noted, and occasionally used to their own advantage.

With the growth of British commercial and political assertions in India over these centuries, increasing numbers of Britons demanded Persian-language training, sometimes from a personal or an abstract academic interest but more often to empower themselves in India over Indians. However, interest in Persian remained limited at universities such as Oxford until much later.[12] Consequently, some Britons turned to private instruction in Persian under the direction of Asian teachers who had traveled to Britain as part of their own larger effort to educate Britons in the superior moral and literary values inherent in Persian and Persianate culture. For instance, Mirza Sayyid I'tisam al-Din of Bengal went to Britain in 1766–68 as a diplomat representing the Mughal emperor; while there he also taught Persian privately.[13] Various other Indian teachers of Persian published advertisements in London newspapers for British pupils to whom they could teach, for a fee, "the true Court Persian Tongue, as also the Arabic and Hindostannee Languages, as Pronounced in the Country," skills they believed a cultured Briton going to India should desire.[14] By stressing their accurate pronunciation, unattainable by a native English speaker, these Indians thus highlighted their own superiority. Most, but not all, of such scholars going to England were Muslim. A Bengali Hindu by birth, Goneshamdass, traveled to England and testified in English before Parliament in 1773 as an expert on Indian legal practices customary under the Mughal emperors and other Muslim rulers.[15]

Most famously, Mirza Abu Talib Khan Isfahani (1752–1806) ventured from Calcutta to England in 1799 and remained there for three years, famous in British society as "the Persian Prince."[16] He was already prominent in north India for his Persian-language books of history, poetry, and other literary forms. In Britain, he taught Persian privately, intending that the study Persian would spread through the country "as one candle lights a hundred."[17] Abu Talib recalled how he had saved at least one eager pupil from ill-informed rival British "false teachers" who were outrageously charging a guinea and a half for each useless ninety-minute lesson in inaccurate Persian:

> an amiable young man, Mr. [George] Swinton . . . agreed that . . . he would attend me at *eight* o'clock in the morning. . . . Thanks be to God, that my efforts were crowned with success! and that he having escaped the instructions of *self-taught* masters, has acquired such a knowledge of the principles of the [Persian] language, as so correct an idea of its idiom and pronunciation, that I have no doubt, after a few years' residence in India, he will attain to such a degree of excellence as has not yet been acquired by any other Englishman![18]

Thus, in Abu Talib's judgment (as expressed in Persian for his peers back in India), Europeans who presumed inappropriately to claim expertise in Persian needed to be humbled and his own expertise in Persian recognized. Abu Talib particularly singled out the prominent Persian grammar written by the famous (and

recently deceased) Sir William Jones (1746–94): "Whenever I was applied to by any [British] person for instruction in the Persian language who had previously studied [Jones's] grammar, I found it much more difficult to correct the bad pronunciation he had acquired, and the errors he had adopted, than it was to instruct a person who had never before seen the Persian alphabet. Such books are now so numerous in London, that, in a short time, it will be difficult to discriminate or separate them from works of real value."[19] Abu Talib graciously excused Jones for his immature efforts: "Far be it from me to depreciate the transcendent abilities and angelic character of Sir William Jones; but his Persian Grammar, having been written when he was a young man, and previous to his having acquired any experience in Hindoostan, is, in many places, very defective; and it is much to be regretted that his public avocations, and other studies, did not permit him to revise it, after he had been some years in India."[20]

While in England, Abu Talib himself wrote a Persian-language book and an English-language article about his experiences and his moral judgments of Britain.[21] Earlier, three other Indian teachers in Britain had also composed books in Persian about Britain for the edification of other Indians.[22] In all these books, the authors generally expressed their own Persianate-Islamic cultural superiority, criticizing Britain for its religious practices and the overly free treatment and behavior of British women. Visiting English libraries, these Asians were impressed by the vast, and growing, collections of books and manuscripts in them, especially those in Persian and Arabic, showing British respect for those languages. Abu Talib was astonished, as well as proud, that Oxford held some "ten thousand" books about Islamic sciences.[23]

One of Abu Talib's main reasons for venturing to Britain was to establish a government-sponsored Persian-language training institute (a madrasa, as he saw it) under his own direction in London or Oxford. It would have created a firm foundation in England for the knowledge of Persian, as well as for his own fame. Despite Abu Talib's reasoned advocacy, his plan met delay (partly due to the ongoing Napoleonic wars). To temporize, Lord Pelham, British secretary of state for the Foreign Department, requested that Abu Talib extend his stay in London for an additional sixteen months to give the government more time to consider his proposal. Finally, just before Abu Talib finally left England in June 1802, the government belatedly authorized him to create and direct such an institute, with a handsome annual salary (£600 plus expenses).[24] However, his letter of appointment letter did not reach his home in India until shortly after his death.

Overall, many Indian visitors to Britain used knowledge of Persian language and Indo-Persian culture to prove British moral inferiority. Yet, growing British military, political and technological assertions clearly threatened their self-confidence. In India, British cultural assertions and Indian resistance even more powerfully created conflicting understandings of Persian and Indo-Persian culture for whole classes of Indians.

THE INTIMATE MEANINGS OF PERSIAN FOR A NORTH INDIAN COURT AND PRINCE

In order to explore what the Persian language and Indo-Persian culture meant in personal terms, we can consider the admittedly unusual case of Col. David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre, MP, heir to the north Indian regional principality of Sardhana and an immigrant to Britain.[25] It is striking to find such an extensive, first-hand written record of the intimate feelings of someone from this period in India. In the last decade of Dyce Sombre's life, British courts convicted him of lunacy six times, and he died facing the seventh trial, but as with individuals studied in other chapters of this volume, his case nonetheless provides insight into larger cultural patterns among Britons and Asians in India and in Britain during this transitional period.

Asian-born but of mixed Indian and European cultural and biological ancestry, "Davey" (as David was known by his extended family) was raised by the notorious Farzana, Begum Sombre, also known as Begum Somru (ca. 1750–1836), at the court of the small (250-square-mile) princely state of Sardhana, located about thirty miles from the Mughal imperial capital of Shahjahanabad. This principality emerged in 1777, when Emperor Shah ʿAlam II (r. 1759–1806) awarded it to a German-speaking Catholic mercenary, Walter Reinhardt (ca. 1720–78), whose nom de guerre was (for disputed reasons) Sombre, but whose Mughal imperial Persian titles were Zafaryab Khan, Muzaffar al-Dawla. Setting aside Reinhardt's legal wife and son, his slave mistress Farzana succeeded him in 1778 as Begum Sombre, independent ruler of Sardhana. During her fifty-eight-year rule, she created a multilingual, multicultural princely court, in which Persian was, however, the most prestigious of the many languages used by her courtiers, and Indo-Persian etiquette largely prevailed. Farzana had evidently been born Muslim, but she openly converted to Roman Catholicism after she took the throne of Sardhana. Hence, her identification with Persian and Indo-Persian culture were not religious, but these remained culturally powerful for her throughout her long reign.

Hence, Begum Sombre constantly nurtured and highly valued her relations with the Mughal imperial family, showing much deference and also providing much funding for them. She appreciated (and perhaps could read) Persian poetry, keeping a copy of the famous thirteenth-century Iranian poet Saʿdi's works always by her bedside. Her diverse courtiers composed poetry in Persian, as well as Urdu and English, as did David himself. Her chief secretary, Munshi Lalla Gokul Chand, penned an extensive, eulogistic Persian-language poetic history of the Begum, entitled *Zib al-Tawarikh*.[26] This was not just the consumption of Persian literature, it was also the creation of new works in that tradition.

At the same time, she recognized the military and political dominance of the invading British. She pragmatically submitted her army, her state, and herself to them in 1803—at the time of their capture of nearby Shahjahanabad (that is, Delhi) and the incumbent Mughal emperor. Her principality was located in the shadow of

Meerut, which gradually became the major British military base in upper Gangetic north India. Hence, for most of her long career as ruler of Sardhana, she made persistent efforts to create and sustain a valued place in both Mughal Persianate and British Anglicized worlds.

Soon after the birth of her owner-lover's biological great-grandson in 1808, she took him as her heir, having no biological children of her own. His full name, David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre, reflected his hybrid biological and cultural identity: his foster-mother named him after her "brother," Delhi Resident David Ochterlony; his half-Indian, half-Scots biological father's surname was Dyce; and Sombre was the adopted name of both the Begum and his biological maternal great-grandfather. In one system of Western biological cultural terms, he was half Indian in "blood"; in another Western cultural system, he was "Anglo-Indian," "Indo-Briton," and/or "Eurasian"; in yet another, more binary Western system, he was "black."

While David spoke Hindustani, and had a limited Anglophone education with Protestant and Catholic clergymen in Sardhana (learning Latin from the latter), Persian was clearly the language he most highly and intimately valued. His strong affective relationship with Persian is clear from his private diary (which he kept for most of his life) and also from how he used Persian in his most personal relationships with various men and women, both in India and then in Britain. In some contexts—for example, when attending an Indian nautch (*nach*) dance performance—David wore Indo-Persian dress, but in others wore British clothing.

In many aspects of his life, he struggled (often in vain) to ingratiate himself with the domineering British, first in India and later in Britain. In his youth, he learned to gain access to the British officers in nearby Meerut by losing heavily in gambling. But he also led Britons into the world of Indo-Persianate nautch performances, strongly associated with cultured courtesans, where he was the expert connoisseur and his British guests the often awkward neophytes. Indeed, many of David's most sympathetic companions were other young elite men with similarly mixed Indian-European biological and cultural heritage.

David transgressed boundaries of genre and language in his diary. Many volumes of it were destroyed during his later legal struggles, but parts have survived: the earliest set starting with his twenty-fifth birthday (December 18, 1833) and ending with his arrival in London (June 7, 1838), plus one later twelve-month period (1847–48).[27] For the last of these, for example, he used a printed, bound English-language and style daybook, with a lined half-page for each day. But he began in August, proceeding to the end of that calendar year, and then continued from the front of the book, even though this made his notations a calendar year behind the printed date, and uncoordinated with the days of the week, on that page. Furthermore, he often wrote across, rather than within, the printed blank spaces.

David wrote most of his diary in English, but he reverted to Persian for his most intimate thoughts and record of his deeds and thoughts, usually of a poetic

or erotic nature. He evidently associated Persian with both elegance and sexuality, and he apparently also intended these remarks to be unintelligible to English readers. On occasion, in an otherwise English paragraph, he transcribed the names of British men or women into Persian characters, especially when he thought of them in sexual terms. He also seems to have thought in Persian about Indians, and his transliterations of many Muslim names omit unmarked vowels as Persian script does (e.g., writing "Mhmd" for "Muhammad").

He also used mastery of Persian language and culture to assess the status of various elite Indians and Europeans, relative to himself. Repeatedly, David demonstrated, at least to himself, his superiority over them based on their lesser expertise in Persian. Given his ambivalent and hybrid background and social and political status, his psychological need for self-esteem is understandable.[28] Nonetheless, his use of expertise in Persian as the measure of a person's true worth is significant, and characteristic of an entire class of his contemporary Indian elites in India and then in Britain.

A few brief examples from India in David's private diary illustrate the role of Persian language and culture as a key element in his personal relations. The Sardhana court's relationship to the Mughal imperial family was complex. Begum Sombre was far wealthier than many of the Mughal imperial princes. But she (and they) believed that the imperial family stood far higher than her in protocol and social standing. Thus, unsurprisingly, David tried to convince himself that he was actually superior to the Mughal princes he encountered. He privately ridiculed the imperial prince Mirza Muhammad Shah as "very foolish," for example, because Mirza lacked an education beyond the Quran and Sa'di's *Gulistan* and did not read the *Jam-i Jahan Numa,* a Persian weekly newspaper from Calcutta, as David regularly did.[29]

Persian was also David's standard for assessment of both Europeans and Indians. For a time, he considered marrying one of the half-Indian daughters of the French Catholic mercenary General Jean-François Allard (1785–1839), a cavalry officer under Napoleon who, after Waterloo, served for many lucrative years under Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839), ruler of the Punjab. In 1834, on Allard's way back to France, he stayed at the Begum's court, France's King Louis-Philippe having delegated the Begum to invest Allard with the Légion d'honneur on his behalf (the French and Sardhana monarchs earlier having exchanged correspondence and portraits of themselves).[30] David felt a special affinity for Allard, noting, "Monsr Allard . . . talks Persian pretty well for a foreigner."[31] But he did not end up marrying either of Allard's daughters.

As Begum Sombre aged, she sought an heir for her vast fortune of some five million rupees (approximately £500,000 then; between £3 and £54 million today, depending on the basis of calculation).[32] On December 16, 1831, just two days before David's twenty-third birthday, the Begum signed her final will (*hibbanama,* with Persian and English versions), bequeathing him almost everything she

owned, including her treasury and her properties in Sardhana and elsewhere. She also made him colonel-commander of her small army and had Pope Gregory XVI knight him in the Pontifical Order of Christ.

Immediately upon her death in 1836, however, the British annexed Sardhana, making David homeless. Various legal cases, including ones by his own biological father, were brought against David, seeking possession of various parts of his inheritance. Indeed, the final lawsuit over this estate was not settled until more than two decades after his death.

On his part, David refused to live in his lost Sardhana, instead traveling across north India, with thoughts of emigrating to Britain. Unrealistically, he considered marrying the young Queen Victoria (1819–1901). As a departing warning, a neighboring British-Indian ruler, Colonel James Skinner (1778–1841), paternalistically composed a poem in Persian to persuade David not to venture to England, correctly warning that he was unprepared for what he would encounter there.[33]

As David traveled down the Ganges River, he met other culturally Indo-Persianate rulers, in various stages of suppression or exile at British hands. In Lucknow, he observed the self-proclaimed Padshah (emperor) Nasir al-Din Haydar (r. 1827–37), who still ruled the large Indian state of Awadh. David noted that Nasir also wore both European (sometimes European women's) clothing and elaborate Indo-Persianate garments. David judged Sardhana's Indo-Persianate (and Anglicized) architecture and court culture superior to Lucknow's. Early in January 1837, David visited the newly completed Palladian-style palace of Humayun Jah, Mubarak 'Ali Khan Bahadur (r. 1824–38), the pensioned Nawab of Bengal, in Murshidabad. There, David met and conversed comfortably in Persian with the Nawab's chief eunuch and his chief astrologer, again judging that language the most appropriate and congenial medium. Here, too, David in his diary lauded Sardhana's cultural superiority.

Later that month, he entered Calcutta, the British imperial capital of India. There, he met both with Europeans (some of whom made him aware for the first time that he was a "black") and also Indians of a range of social classes, from sex workers through members of the Bengal Renaissance. One of his supporters among the British establishment was Henry Thoby Prinsep (1792–1878), longtime Persian secretary to the government (in charge of the Company's political relations with Indian states that used Persian as the language of diplomacy), a published historian, and also an acting member of the Governor-General's Council. They had met briefly in Shahjahanabad six years earlier. Prinsep invited David to his office (not his home). But in this case, Prinsep's interest in Persian was mostly professional; his household was Anglo-Indian in style, and they evidently conversed in English.

David's attitudes toward Calcutta's elite Indians were complex; they treated one another with both reserve and sympathy. Governor-General Sir George Eden's unmarried sisters Emily and Fanny (Frances) invited David, other Indian royalty

and elite men, and high-status European men and women, to their parties. David considered his own mastery of sophisticated Persian as the criterion for rating elite Indians. He noted, in the Eden sisters' drawing room. "a Baboo, who pretends to be, I am told, a very clever man. I introduced myself to him, and talked to him in Persian, wh [*sic*] he talks pretty fair."[34]

Wherever he travelled, David always carried his library of Persian and Urdu books. He endeared himself to Dr. L. Burlini, librarian of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, by donating Begum Sombre's copy of Sa'di's poetic *diwan*, "always kept by H. H.'s [her highness's] bedside," and a rare early manuscript of that poet's *Gulistan*.[35]

After a traumatic stay in the British imperial capital of Calcutta (1837–38, interrupted by a short trip to China), David ventured to Britain. Amid the confined passenger community aboard ship, David experienced social and cultural alienation. He salaciously detailed in his diary a rich social and sexual world he believed was rampant among the other paying passengers (all Europeans), using Persian character transcriptions of the names of the parties involved. He also devoted himself to reading Persian poetry, as well as solving European mathematical puzzles. When he disembarked in Britain, he faced complex social conflicts, many of them centering around the ambivalent meanings there of Persian and Indo-Persianate culture, and his personal identification by others and by himself with these.

BEING PERSOPHONE IN EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

While in Britain, David continued to demonstrate his affinity with Persian and Indo-Persian culture, using it both to reassure himself of his own often challenged social status and self-worth and also in his personal relationships with others. He frequently directed his Sardhana correspondents to write him in Persian—to which he remained committed, in so doing both evoking his earlier life in India and concealing the contents of these letters from his Anglophone associates and quarrelsome relatives.[36] He proposed in 1839 bringing to Europe, as his scribe and private tutor, a scholar of Persian, Kullender Buksh "Meanjee," whom he had known in India: "If he has no better employment, perhaps he would not mind coming to this country. I would allow him 15 rupees a month for his trouble, & 5 shillings a day, & finding a lodging for him here. I want his assistance in some work I am doing for my amusement. . . . Of course, I would pay for his passage out and back again, unless he took employment in England, in case I do want him to remain beyond a year . . . & then he need not be afraid of losing his caste."[37] This plan never worked out.

While Persian conveyed intimate parts of David's identity, it also occasionally erupted antisocially into the public sphere. He had known an Italian general, Jean César Baptiste, Comte Ventura de Mandy (1794–1858), in Sardhana, and they met

again socially in Europe. But they eventually quarreled bitterly. In one altercation in Paris, David verbally assaulted Ventura in the presence of his daughter using (according to Ventura) "every abusive term that the English, French, Persian, or Hindustanee language can furnish; in fact he ransacked the vocabularies of the four languages for filthy and disgraceful epithets."[38]

David also socialized with many of the thousands of Asians then living in Britain, including with other Indian princes, or would-be princes. These included Nawwab Iqbal al-Dawla Bahadur, a claimant to the throne of Awadh, recently made vacant by the death of his cousin, Nawwab Nasir al-Din Haydar. This prince, exactly Dyce Sombre's own age, had entered British high society just before him, in 1837, remaining in Britain for nearly two years. At Iqbal al-Dawla's lavish apartments near Regent's Park, he and Dyce Sombre repeatedly dined together.[39] Their conversations were presumably in Persian, as would be appropriate for the etiquette their respective courts. In addition to savoring all that London offered, Iqbal al-Dawla futilely lobbied the British government and East India Company for his enthronement.

David also met socially with Mirza Ibrahim, an Iranian who was currently professor of Persian at the East India Company's college for civilian officials at Haileybury (near Hertford, established 1806).[40] Mirza Ibrahim was the fifth in a series of Indian and Iranian teachers between 1806–44 holding full-time, permanent, and well-paid appointments in the faculty at Haileybury and the East India Company's military seminary at Addiscombe (in Croydon, south of London, established 1809). Experts in Persian and Hindustani languages and literatures, they provided formative language training to thousands of young Britons bound for colonial rule over India for nearly four decades. They also profitably wrote and translated texts on "Oriental" subjects, generating British-style grammars and other teaching aids. Four took European wives or longtime mistresses (generally of lower social status than themselves), and several had children there, thus demonstrating how their male gender and professional class standing overcame their difference by "race" in English metropolitan society at the time. The staffing of the Oriental language departments of these two colleges in England was contested from the outset, since British scholars and veterans of the East India Company's service in India argued that they had the moral right to be handsomely employed to teach these languages. Yet even they recognized that only Asians could provide "that idiomatical accuracy (which never can be attained by any foreigner) so essential to such works."[41]

For their part, these Asian faculty members regarded themselves as doing their British students a service by teaching them the Persian language and modelling Persian culture for them. They generally enjoyed far superior salaries to what they would have received teaching languages in Asia, took positions of authority over their British students, and also held the status of scholar, professional, and gentleman in English society. Nonetheless, they taught in institutions designed and run by Britons, using British codifications and pedagogy, to British students who were

preparing to administer and militarily expand a colonial state ruling large parts of India. Nor was Persian-language instruction very much valued by the colleges, most British faculty, or most British students. Like that of these professional teachers of Persian at the Company's Colleges, Dyce Sombre's Indo-Persianate identity proved to be both one of his most attractive features to some Britons, but also a source of his ultimate alienation from European society.

SANE IF ORIENTAL, LUNATIC IF EUROPEAN

In Europe during the last thirteen years of his life, David faced conflicting racial, gendered, and other cultural forces. Many Britons and other Europeans highlighted his putative biological race, which they increasingly associated with all "Orientals." He was publicly tagged by diverse European and American newspapers, journals, and other publications as "Black," "a half-washed Blackamoor," "Copper-coloured," "Dark," "Indian," "mixed breed," "Negro," "Orientalist," "Othello," "sable," "Sambo," and a "tawny alien." French newspapers identified him as "excessivement brun" and "le prince noir."[42]

David's vast wealth and oriental exoticism inevitably attracted many, including some British aristocrats, and within two months of his arrival in London, he had become engaged to Mary Anne Jervis (1812–93), the twenty-seven-year-old youngest daughter of the second viscount St. Vincent. Said to be a highly accomplished composer and singer who had performed at Covent Garden (as a gracious amateur, of course, not as a professional), she was also widely rumored to be the mistress of the duke of Wellington (1769–1852). To woo Mary Anne, David taught her loving phrases in Persian, his language of intimacy, and recited what he said was an "Indian Love Song." Despite her Low Church Anglican family and his Roman Catholicism, they married after a tumultuous, two-year-long engagement. David hoped to gain stature and legitimacy with British society generally from her family and by getting himself elected in 1841 to the House of Commons (from Sudbury in Suffolk)—the first-ever Asian and second nonwhite British MP. After he became estranged from his wife, she futilely tried to win him back by writing him notes including what she recalled as the Persian poetry he had taught her, saying: "You see, tho' I am obliged to write it in an English way, that I have not quite forgot what taught me, Boht hub, Persian hub; you must say Wah, Wah."[43]

In fact, he proved unable to sustain most of his relationships with British society. Nearly two years after Dyce Sombre's election, Parliament expelled him for the blatant corruption of his electors. Then his wife's family had him arrested, confined, and convicted of lunacy. Over the next decade until his death, he faced six retrials for lunacy which largely revolved around his Indo-Persianate cultural and racial identity. On one side, his defenders tried to excuse his obsessions as natural in a "black man" raised in Oriental culture, who could never really become morally British or European. Since a major charge against him was his demanding that

his wife not go out in public, this defense asserted that all Asians are obsessed with their womenfolk observing purdah, making him sane if he was Asian. However, Dyce Sombre himself consistently and heatedly rejected this public identification of him as non-European, even though it might have led to his legal reclassification as sane. Yet privately he clearly continued to value and identify with Persianate culture. For their part, his British accusers highlighted his Anglophone education in court, saying no man of European culture would act as he had done toward British women, thus making him a lunatic.

In these multiple, highly contested retrials of Dyce Sombre, his identity was so complex that most of the presiding judges could not come to a definitive judgment. Hence, his initial conviction as a lunatic was never overturned. We should not, however, overlook the unspoken dimensions of these prolonged and repeated court cases, where a rich but isolated nonwhite man faced his powerful, aristocratic English in-laws during a period when the Victorian bourgeois values of the husband's responsibility for protecting his wife and family fortune were rising and elite male autonomy (even for white British men) being questioned. Significantly, when Dyce Sombre fled confinement, escaping to continental Europe, the courts and the general public judged his behavior sane and well within the sociocultural bounds for an elite male, especially an Oriental one.

Over the decades that followed his early death in 1851 (as his seventh trial for lunacy commenced), his widow continued to draw upon the prestige of Indo-Persian culture (supported by much of his vast wealth, which she had won after protracted legal battles). She occasionally dressed in high society in the Indo-Persianate garments he had given her and was known in her elite social circles as "the Begum." Hence, for some elite Britons at least, Indo-Persianate culture (when performed by an aristocratic white woman) appeared safely and exotically attractive.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the particular (and perhaps peculiar) case of David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre, this chapter has explored some of the conflicting meanings of the Persian language and Indo-Persian culture in India and Britain during a period of increasing Anglophone dominance globally. Especially under the Mughal dynasty, the frontier of Persian and the development of imperial Indo-Persian culture had expanded across most of India. But even during the fragmentation of the Mughal Empire, the cultural power of this language and culture persisted, even strengthened, in the face of British imperialism and Anglicization. Many (but not all) Britons in India and in Britain regarded Persian as having effective utility, usually without identifying themselves with Indo-Persian culture. But for many Indians, Persian language and culture carried retained their affective power. Both in India and in Britain, some Indians attempted to convey this culture to Britons for their edification and moral improvement.

Culturally and ethnically mixed, David Dyce Sombre identified deeply with Persian during this crucial transitional period, using Persian language and Persianate culture as a measure of his own worth and that of others both in India and in Britain. But it was his very identification with Indo-Persian culture—by himself and by Britons—that led to his trials for lunacy, incarceration, and the confiscation of his vast wealth, sadly illuminating some of contested aspects of Persian learning and its social frontiers that this volume as a whole explores.

NOTES

1. Indigenous Indian linguistic and other cultural elements were also present and respected even at the Mughal imperial court and, though dominant, Indo-Persianate values were not hegemonic. See Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). Brian Spooner's Epilogue to this volume explores what the literary tradition of classical Persian in particular has meant personally to native and non-native speakers in today's world.

2. Scholarship on these issues in the broadest sense for India and Britain is too voluminous to be cited here. However, studies of Indians and other Asians in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe include Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Gulfishan Khan, *Indian Muslim Perceptions of the West during the Eighteenth Century* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race and Identity,1880–1930* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); Satadru Sen, *Migrant Races: Empire, Identity, and K. S. Ranjitsinhji (*Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto, 2002); and *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain, 1700–1947* (London: Pluto, 1984), plus the works cited below.

3. In addition to Thibault d'Hubert's chapter 2 and Purnima Dhavan's chapter 5 in this volume, see Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). For the "curve" of the roles and genres of Persian during other transitions in Asia, which was similar and also differed in fascinating ways in each region, see Devin DeWeese's chapter 4 and Marc Toutant's chapter 10 in this volume.

4. N.S. Gorekar, "Persian Impact on Indian life," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay* 70 (1995):59–70. See also Michael H. Fisher, *A Short History of the Mughal Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

5. Sharif Husain Qasemi, "Persian Chronicles in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies,* ed. Muzaffar Alam, Françoise Nalini Delvoye, and Marc Gaborieau (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000), 407–16.

6. Although born in Massachusetts, Lt. Colonel Ochterlony (1758–1825) served in India from age nineteen on.

7. Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 18.

8. For comparative examples of imperial states using Persian instrumentally, see Murat Umut Inan's chapter 1, Graeme Ford's chapter 3, and David Brophy's chapter 6 in this volume.

9. Sisir Kumar Das, *Sahibs and Munshis* (Calcutta: Orion, 1978), 108. Emphasis in original.

10. See Nile Green, *Terrains of Exchange: Religious Economies of Global Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), and Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, 2014).

11. See Michael H. Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1600–1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).

12. Green, *Terrains*.

13. See Nile Green, *The Love of Strangers: What Six Muslim Students Learned in Jane Austen's London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 87–88, 140, and *Shigarf-nama-i Wilayat: Safarnama-i Mirza I'tisam al-Din ba Wilayat Englis, 1765–1766,* critical edition, ed. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi (Toronto: Iran Nameh Books, 2016).

14. E.g., *Public Advertiser,* November 5, 1777; *European Magazine* 39 (January–June 1801): 7–8; Home Political Consultation, May 15, 1797, no. 50, Home Miscellaneous Series, vol. 559, fols. 297–301, 405, National Archives of India.

15. *House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century,* ed. Sheila Lambert, 147 vols. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1975), 135: 546–49, 138: 124; *Memoirs of Sir Elijah Impey* (London, 1846), 237.

16. See Michael H. Fisher, "Representing 'His' Women: Mirza Abu Talib Khan's 1801 'Vindication of the Liberties of Asiatic Women,'" in *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 37, 2 (2000): 215–37.

17. Mirza Abu Talib Khan, *Masir Talibi fi Bilad Afranji,* Persian reprint of British Library, Add 8145–7 [my pagination hereinafter is from the Persian reprint edited and published by Husayn Khadiv-Jam, Tehran, 1983], 107–8, 175.

18. Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, *Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan in Asia, Africa, and Europe during the Years 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802, and 1803,* trans. Charles Stewart, 3 vols., 2nd ed. (n.p.: Longmans, 1814), 101; see also 92. Emphasis in original.

19. Ibid., 173–74; *Morning Chronicle,* March 29, 1800, 4a; *European Magazine and London Review,* 43 (January–June 1803): 3;

20. Khan, *Travels,* 173–74.

21. Mir Muhammad Husain, Risala-yi Ahwal-i Mulk-i Farang, MS R.IV-51, K.R. Cama Oriental Research Library, Bombay, and Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh; Munshi Isma'il, Tarikh-i Jadid, in Simon Digby's private collection, discussed by him in "An Eighteenth Century Narrative of a Journey from Bengal to England: Munshi Ismail's New History," in *Urdu and Muslim South Asia: Studies in Honour of Ralph Russell,* ed. Christopher Shackle (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1989), 49–65; Mirza I'tisam al-Din, *Shigarf Nama-i Walayat,* translated into English and Urdu and published by James Edward Alexander and Munshi Shamsher Khan (London: Parbury, Allen, 1827). See also Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning,* and Fisher, "Representing."

22. See Fisher, *Counterflows.*

23. Mirza Abu Talib Kahn, *Masir Talibi fi Bilad Afranji,* 116.

24. Minutes of the Court of Directors, February 10, 1801, fol. 1015, British Library [hereinafter BL]; Abu Talib to Pelham, Persian letter with translation, August 28, 1803, Add 33112, Pelham Papers, fols. 138–39, BL.

25. For a full biography, see Michael H. Fisher, *The Inordinately Strange Life of Dyce Sombre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

26. "Zeb al-Tawarikh," ADD 25,830, BL; *History of Zeb-ul-Nissa: The Begum Samru of Sardhana,* ed. Nicholas Shreeve (Crossbush, West Sussex, England: Bookwright, 1994).

27. These survived only due to his virtually all-encompassing legal entanglements later in life. *The Times* (London), March 7, 1857, 11. PROB 37/1700, National Archives of the United Kingdom [hereinafter PRO] and L/L/63–65, BL [hereinafter Dyce Sombre, Diary].

28. There is a large literature about "hyphenisation" and "hybridity" that seeks to analyze ambivalent identities like Dyce Sombre's. See, e.g., Pawan Dhingra, *Managing Multicultural Lives: Asian American Professionals and the Challenge of Multiple Identities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), and Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994). A full psychological or somatic analysis of Dyce Sombre is beyond the scope of this paper. See Ronald Pies, Michael H. Fisher, and C.V. Haldipur "The Mysterious Illness of Dyce Sombre," *Innovations in Clinical Neuroscience* 9, 3 (March 2012): 16–8.

29. Dyce Sombre, Diary , December 24–31, 1833. He had a similar view of other Mughal princes:

ibid., February 17, November 25–28, and December 23–27, 1834; March 17, 1835.

30. Louis Philippe, Emperor of the French to Most Illustrious, Most Excellent and Most Magnificent Simrou Begum, Princess of Sardana, October 27, 1835, L/L/64 (438); PROB 37/1700, PRO.

31. Dyce Sombre, Diary, September 39, 1834.

32. "Measuring Worth," www.measuringworth.com/ppoweruk.

33. H. G. Keene, "Sardhana: The Seat of the Sombres," *Calcutta Review* 70 (1880): 458; V. C. P. Hodson, *List of the Officers of the Bengal Army,* 4 vols. (London: Constable, 1927–47), 4: 579.

34. Dyce Sombre, Diary, February 7, 1837.

35. Ibid., February 13 and March 6, 1837.

36. Dyce Sombre to Peter Solaroli, December 27, 1841, in *Mary Anne Dyce Sombre, Dyce Sombre against Troup, Solaroli (Intervening) and Prinsep and the Hon. East India Company (also Intervening) in the Goods of David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre, Esq., Deceased, in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury,* 2 vols. (London: Seyfand 1852) [hereinafter *DSAT*], 1: 868–69.

37. Dyce Sombre to Peter Solaroli, June 2, 1839, and May 1, 1841, *DSAT,*1: 867–68; Dyce Sombre to Antonio Reghellini, May 1, 1841, and December 30, 1842, PROB 37/1700, PRO.

38. Comte Ventura deposition, October 22, 1853, *DSAT,* 2: 472–79; John Warwick, affidavit, November 18, 1846, in David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre, *In Lunacy: In the Matter of David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre, a Person Found to Be of Unsound Mind* (London: Hansard, 1851), 93–98.

39. George Sigmond, depositions, July 28, 1851, April 6, 1852, *DSAT,* 1: 68–72, 686. See also Fisher, *Counterflows,* chaps. 7–10.

40. Dyce Sombre to Peter Solaroli, June 2, 1839, *DSAT,* 1: 867. For a study of all five of these faculty members, see Michael H. Fisher, "Teaching Persian as an Imperial Language in India and in England during the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries," in *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order,* ed. Brian Spooner and William L. Hanaway (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2012), 328–58.

41. Jonathan Scott, *Observations on the Oriental Department of the Hon. Company's East India College, at Hertford* (Hertford: The Author, 1806), 10.

42. E.g., G. Bobson, "Letter to T. Smith," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 59, 367 (May 1846): 534–42; *Agra Ukhbar,* August 14, 1841, reproduced in *Friend of India,* September 2, 1841; *Satirist* (England) , March 10, 1849; *Saturday Evening Post* (U.S.), September 29, 1860; *The Diary of Philipp von Neumann, 1819 to 1850,* 2 vols., ed. and trans. E. Beresford Chancellor (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), 2: 164–65; *Le Siècle: Journal politique, littéraire et d'économie sociale* (France), March 21, 1844.

43. Mrs Dyce Sombre to David Dyce Sombre, September 28, November 3, and October 16, 21, and 24, 1843; January 8, 1844, *DSAT,* 2: 276, 281–85.