

**BEYOND THE COLONIAL SUBJECT: MOBILITY,
COSMOPOLITANISM AND SELF-FASHIONING IN SARAT
CHANDRA DAS' A JOURNEY TO LHASA AND CENTRAL TIBET**

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On the summit of the pass I noticed a species of thorny shrub, the like of which I had not seen in any other part of Tibet; the thorns were quite long, and the stem and leaves of the plant of an ash grey colour. (Das 1902: 129)

The minister asked me to examine his eyes, which were a little swollen, telling me at the same time that this young man had served him devotedly during his residence at the Nyag-khang, and was deserving of my care. (109)

The passages cited as epigraphs capture the many modes through which a colonial subject of the British Empire in the nineteenth century undertakes a self-fashioning. This self-fashioning, the subject of the present essay, eventually positions him as something other than just a colonial subject or even an Indian-Hindu, and more as an informed, cosmopolitan cultural citizen within a site of transcultural exchanges.

Three questions frame the essay's agenda. How does an Indian subject of the British Empire at the turn of the nineteenth century function as a traveller when exploring a famously inaccessible country and culture? Is such a subject's gaze the same as an 'imperial gaze', as Mary Louise Pratt (2008 [1992]) presciently characterized the European explorer of the nineteenth century? Or is the travelling colonial subject one who has only 'internalized' modes of travel from the Europeans, as Inderpal Grewal argues? (1996: 136)

Simonti Sen has proposed that 'of the various modular forms of the West that went into the fashioning of our colonial modernity, travel, both within the frontiers and outside, was certainly a major one' (2005: 3). Travel, she goes on to argue, 'became a metaphor for the mobility of "freedom" from "unfreedom"' (4). It is an engagement of the self and the other, Sen argues. Tabish Khair argues that, of the nineteenth century Indian travellers, 'some view themselves as (almost) partners and others as subject people', in the British Empire (2008: 9). Imperial citizens have come in for attention very recently for their modes of subject-formation when in the land of their colonial masters, the English. Sukanya Banerjee reading SN Banerjee, Dadabai Naoroji, Cornelia Sorabji and MK Gandhi in Victorian England argues that the 'potential' of the Indians' position as subjects was at stake in these times, and that Indians were

trying to find in ‘extralegal life’ the ‘modes of self-representation’ that would help them to ‘become a citizen’ (Banerjee 2010: 7, emphasis in original).¹ ‘Citizen’ here is of course taken to mean more than an identity in legal, juridical and political senses, and in keeping with newer interpretations of the category where citizenship is increasingly seen as articulated within social practices as well as the affective and cultural domains as much as in statutory legislation and the regime of rights.

My essay proposes that Das uses mobility and travel as a site where particular modes of self-representation construct him as a particular kind of citizen in the cultural domain. More than the ‘freedom’ that Simonti Sen identifies as central to the Indian’s notion of travel, I see travel as a site where, *contra* Sen who believes the *colonial* subject-self rooted in Indian traditions and customs faces/off the cultural other, the traveller escapes the identity of a colonial subject to become something else altogether. I believe that neither of the two positions Khair describes is adequate to understand a figure like Sarat Chandra Das. Here I take my cue from Youngs’ reading of the empowering effects of travel among hitherto politically and culturally disenfranchised subjects. Travel, as Tim Youngs has demonstrated in the case of African American travellers, was a space wherein identities were ‘affirmed, discovered, or renegotiated’ (2010: 71). I examine Das’ text for the link it forges between movement, movement-spaces (as geographer Nigel Thrift calls it, 2004, cited in Urry 2007: 6) and identity. Travel’s ‘freedom’, in my reading of Sarat Chandra Das, is *freedom from the colonial subject position* and the *freedom to reconfigure the self as a transcultural, cosmopolitan self*. It is the modalities and routes through which this reconfiguration of the self occurs in Das that interests me. Sarat Chandra Das, born into the *vaidya* caste (traditionally, healers) in 1849, educated at Presidency College, Calcutta, and head master of the Bhutia Boarding School, Darjeeling, was adept at the Tibetan language and an acquaintance of several lamas in Sikkim. In 1879 Das, accompanied by a lama from Sikkim, Ugyen-gyatso, visited Tashilhunpo, Tibet, as a guest of the Prime Minister there. He also explored the Himalayan ranges in the vicinity during this trip. In 1881 Das undertook a second, and extended, trip into Lhasa and Tibet, explicitly on the directive from the British government of India. The narrative of this journey was, according to Das’ later editor, WW Rockhill, ‘kept as strictly confidential documents by the Indian Government until about 1890’ and even after that only ‘selections ... bearing exclusively upon the ethnology of Tibet’ were published in *Contemporary Review* and *Nineteenth Century*

1 A brief view of the context of such a travel narrative as Das is perhaps in order here. Through the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth, numerous Indians travelled through England, Europe and America. Many of them kept detailed accounts, in English, that offer commentaries ranging from the incisive to the enchanted, from the satirical to the sharply critical. N. Doss, Berhamji Malabari, the Raja of Kolhapur, Jagatjit Singh, G. P. Pillai and others, I have argued (Nayar 2012), also demonstrate a cosmopolitanism, albeit one based on an entirely different set of criteria. It is therefore interesting to see Das, travelling not in the ‘Western’ world, embodying a related, but not similar, cosmopolitanism that enables him to escape the colonial subject tag.

(vii).² Paratextual information by way of the Editor's Introduction announces Das' institutional affiliations and role: 'Sarat Chandra Das, CIE, of the Bengal Educational Service, Member of the Asiatic Society, Bengal, etc'. Towards the end of the editor's Introduction we are informed that Das had been awarded the title of Rai Bahadur by the government of India (x).³

Das on the 1885 expedition to Peking and Tibet was introduced, according to Nobin Chandra Das his brother and the editor of Das' *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow* (1893), to ministers and nobles of the Chinese government, even 'gaining the confidence of the Prime Minister' (Nobin Chandra Das, Preface to Sarat Chandra Das, *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow*, vii). Later Das served as the Tibetan translator to the Government of Bengal. The narrative of the 1881 expedition appeared in 1899 under the title *A Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet*, with a second edition in 1902 (this edition is my text here).

Das' privileged mobility, the result of his insertion into the imperial structure, undeniably suggests a role as part of an imperial machinery of exploration. How he evaluates and interacts with the Tibetans is determined by the authority and facilities accorded him as a member of the imperial structure. Yet – and this is my key point – Das queers this otherwise codified encounter. Indeed, I would argue that Das, despite his embeddedness in colonial institutional structures and constraints, *distances* himself from colonial rules of conduct and engagement by restructuring the contexts of his interactions. Further, this distancing is achieved through a deliberate process of self-fashioning, at least as it emerges in his narrative.

Das' self-fashioning that enables him to escape the identity of a colonial subject may be read as a two-step process. The first entails a clear assertion of his status as a colonial subject institutionally supported by the British government. The second stage is one where Das undermines this privileged status as a colonial traveller through specific modes of self-fashioning. It must be noted that the two steps are not sequential but intertwined.

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- 2 Rockhill also seems to have excised and edited Das' work depending on what he deemed important for future readers. He says in a footnote: 'our author gives several pages of texts on the ethics, etc, of the Bonbo, but they are so technical that I have been obliged to omit them' (215). There is therefore some textual confusion that we need to keep in mind: about editing, redactions and censorship of Das' work wherever it suited the British government's interest. That his other work was reviewed widely in English periodicals and newspapers, as noted in my essay, suggests that there was a ready English audience for his work, making it, perhaps, all the more important that only particular materials from his writings on the sensitive Tibetan-Chinese-British India border territories be made public.
 - 3 The Asiatic Society was founded in Calcutta by William Jones, the Orientalist scholar, in 1784. Its publication, the *Asiatick Researches*, documented Indian fauna, flora, castes, religion and all things Indian. As a learned society, the Asiatic was at the forefront of what Edward Said and the postcolonial critical school would see as the Empire's epistemological conquest of India.

The Privileged Mobility of the Colonial Subject

The 'explorer' was a glorified icon of individuation, as Adriana Craciun has noted about this eighteenth and early nineteenth century European 'type' of traveller, but is in fact 'a deceptively static figure in which there remained at play numerous disciplines, professions, and aesthetic codes' which then become institutionalized, so that the explorer becomes 'naturalized' in the later nineteenth century (2011: 44). What I will call, after Amanda Anderson, Das' 'privileged mobility' achieves precisely this naturalization: Das becomes an explorer-traveller, examining as an objective observer, an other culture, through the institutionalization of his mobility. Although, it must be noted that Das does not quite fit into the individual hero-explorer type since he travelled with a large retinue to regions he was already quite familiar with, and he was expected and received by powerful sections of the societies he travelled to. Thus the apparatus of travel here is of a kind that suggests Das was an official traveller and 'surveyor' (although Das' editor uses the term to describe his assistant Ugyen-gyatso, vii).

The Himalayas, Sikkim and Tibet are 'movement spaces'. Movement-spaces are defined by Nigel Thrift as 'the utterly mundane frameworks that move "subjects" and "objects" about' (cited in Urry 45). These frameworks, in the case of Das, include ponies, passports, translators and lamas, horses, medical kits, woollen clothing, food packages, and others. From the paratextual notes we come to know that Das sets out as a colonial subject, asked to proceed on his travel by the British government of India.

The very opening of the travelogue, dated 7 November 1881, demonstrates the structures of travel within which Das experiences his mobility:

Coming to the river, which was rather broad at this season of the year, I met lama Ugyen-gyatso, who was waiting to help me across. Three or four bamboos loosely laid over the main stream enabled us to cross, though with some difficulty, and with the help of an intelligent Bhutia attendant I was able to push on over the narrow slippery path... (1)

Das has attendants at every point, facilitating his needs, whether it is tea or medicines, or aid over tough terrain. Das is appreciative of assistants like Phurchung who, according to Das, 'as soon as [he] had laid his load on the ground, he ran off to the house of an acquaintance to buy for me some bottles of beer' (8-9). While Das rests, 'stretched ... at ease ... the servants had dispersed, some to collect firewood, some to pick wild plants, others to buy vegetables for our evening meal' (9). He is carried by the attendants on their backs (22, 28, 38, 39). When a Tibetan family serves him tea he notes that he was served in a 'china cup'. He acknowledges this for what it is: 'a form of Tibetan politeness only shown to persons of superior social standing' (24).

He admits: '[Phurchung's] devotion and loyalty to me were boundless' (27). Acquaintances from his previous visit are all extremely helpful, 'presenting' him with provisions and even sending their own servants for his benefit (50). Ministers offer him 'special favours' (77) and treat him with exquisite courtesy. A local minister promises to keep him in his house 'as a member of his family' and to 'defray all [his] expenses' (106). Everybody receives him with great kindness and offers him gifts for good luck (123).

When he falls ill he is attended to with all possible care by his men (130-135). Provisions, in plenty, are supplied by villagers and headmen of the villages he stays in (139).

So used is Das to the privileged mobility that even the slightest misdemeanour on the part of the servants/attendants annoys him, and he complains, as in this case: 'I had to start without breakfast, as the coolies had left early' (19). When he is given new escorts, albeit by the minister of the region, Das worries that his safety might be compromised. This last of course fits in with the discourse of heroic travel, where the protagonist must document his anxiety over the journey. Das writes: 'Thus did I start on a journey to a hostile, inhospitable, and unknown country with only two men as my companions, and they strangers to me' (127).

This is the framework of his travel, and it is a framework facilitated by his connections with the Indian government, his relations with the Sikkim and Tibetan monks and the resources supplied to him by virtue of his being a colonial subject of the British Empire. That Das chooses to quietly efface this structural condition of his travel is interesting, for Das, one guesses, is striving to project his travel as an individual act of heroism and courage, and himself as a traveller whose expertise (to which I shall come soon) and determination rather than his supporting structures facilitate the journey into a different culture.

Das' privileged mobility is not marked by the 'tension' Stephen Greenblatt identifies as important for mobility studies: the tension between individual agency and structural constraints (2010: 251). Some constraints exist, mostly of the bureaucratic variety, with regard to passports and permissions to travel. Indeed, I would argue that it is precisely because Das' narrative offers a vision of privileged mobility with structural supports (rather than constraints) that we are able to speculate on the kind of agency he possessed. Such a privileged mobility situates the traveller in a particular relation with the culture left behind, the culture he is passing through and the culture he is heading towards.

Amanda Anderson has written eloquently about particular kinds of travels that lead to the creation of cosmopolitan sensibilities and self-representations:

Privileged mobility among elites synecdochically masquerades as global community, or the coming together of humanity, bespeaking a profound investment in the exceptional individualism of the intellectual class, their enabling but anomalous detachment from ordinary, provincial loyalties. (2006: 73)

Thus, even as the 'privileged mobility' enables an individual to 'detach' from provincial loyalties, it resituates him within a new set of loyalties through a personal investment (I shall come to this in the next section). Anderson's emphasis on movement and the structures that at once enable mobility and a concomitant subjective investment in an idea(1) offers a useful frame for reading Das' narrative and subject-making strategies. It is this same privileged mobility is the setting and structural condition for a refashioning of the colonial subject's self as a cosmopolitan self. It is important that the mundane framework of Das' movement-space is itself multicultural, multilingual and

transnational, for it generates a particular kind of self-representation that leads to Das' emergence as a cosmopolitan cultural citizen.

There is, however, an intermediate moment where Das also quietly sidesteps the public narrative of privileged mobility by focusing on his personal, subjective responses to the landscape. This 'romantic' component of his narrative is the first move in distancing himself from the position of a privileged traveller.

Mobility and the Romantic Narrative

Das' travelogue opens with the following entry dated 7 November 1881:

Our eyes often turned with anxiety towards the mountain-tops on the eastern outskirts of Nepal, to see if snow was falling on them; and the fear of death in the snows and the hope of overcoming the obstacles of nature alternated within me as I left my home in Darjiling, soon to bid a long farewell to my native land, with but the faint hope that I would ever see it again. (1)

Yet, except for this one opening remark capturing his psychic state at the moment of departure, Das makes absolutely no reference to his home, family or home country anywhere else in the narrative. There is no nostalgia or mourning which would be attendant upon such a displacement inscribed anywhere in his text.

Das opens the narrative of mobility, as we can see, with a sense of anxiety – the danger and difficulty trope standard to travel literature – during the moments he is leaving home.

Coming to the river, which was rather broad at this season of the year, I met lama Ugyen-gyatso, who was waiting to help me across. Three or four bamboos loosely laid over the main stream enabled us to cross, though with some difficulty, and with the help of an intelligent Bhutia attendant I was able to push on over the narrow slippery path... (1)

A descent from their mountain, he notes, 'was fraught with immense dangers' (18) and they have to descend, therefore, with 'great difficulty' (20). Das suggests that his determination and his joy of successfully navigating the dangers enable him to deal with the obstacles of the landscape: 'having succeeded in crossing the loftiest of snowy passes, I felt too transported with joy to be frightened by their thunder' (35). And again: 'Though I was by this time greatly reduced in the flesh by the hardships I had had to encounter, I was in high spirits at the success which had so far attended me' (43).

Das records the physical hardships in climbing, crossing rivers, and in navigating the narrow mountain paths (16). On some nights he sleeps fitfully for he is worried that he might 'roll into the abyss' (17). He is frequently exhausted with the climbing and numb with cold in the nights (33). 'With neither food nor drink, placed as if in the grim jaws of death in the bleak and dreary regions of snow, where death alone dwells, we spent this most dismal night' (34). Das records: 'the very remembrance of the sufferings of that

dreadful night makes me shudder even now' (34). Rivers are flooded and the crossing is dangerous in many cases (37) and dust-storms maroon them (40). At one point Das is so weak with exhaustion and ill that he writes his will, assuming he is going to die (133).

Elaine Freedgood studying European mountaineering memoirs argues that the personal confrontation with and experience of danger and personal injury enables the individual to present himself/herself in a certain way, and the making of his/her subjectivity (2000). The emphasis on the purely physical aspects of his travel, the risks of mobility and the suffering he experiences constitutes the 'romantic' component of Das' travels where the subjective aspect of the journey is the focus.

In addition to the accounts of the personal experience of suffering, risk and pain, the 'romantic' frames of Das' mobility also appear in the form of his description of the landscape. The 'appreciation' of the landscape in aesthetic terms and personal responses to it constructs Das as a traveller with a 'sensitivity'. Taking recourse to an aesthetic and psychological-physiological vocabulary, Das recounts his experience of the Himalayas in several places.

His first major account of the mountains runs thus:

We reached the summit ... the pass is protected to the south and west by a very rugged cliff resembling the outspread wings of an eagle both in colour and shape, and inspired me with a strange feeling of dread. (19)

He confesses that despite the dread and his own tiredness, he 'enjoyed ... the grandeur and sublimity of the scene' which he describes as 'romantic' and beyond any poetic description (19-20). And again, later:

These splendid scenes of wonderland, the grandest, the most sublime my eyes ever beheld, which bewildered me so that even now my pen finds no words to describe them, inspired me with feelings of deep gratitude to Heaven, by whose mercy my life had been spared so far. (35)

Variations in the landscape – forests that contrast with the 'barren rocks' – are 'refreshing' to their 'tired' eyes, says Das (22).

There are melancholy scenes of emptiness and forlorn landscapes as well, which impress upon Das the absence of all natural beauty:

Patches of snow and ice glistening in the sun gave, from a distance, a fine appearance to the village, but, on approaching, the beauty vanished, as we perceived the forlorn and deserted condition of the place. Not a living being, not a yak, nor a dog, only some hungry crows perched on the flag-poles and the roof. (15)

Together, the aesthetic and the risk-suffering account – what I am calling 'romantic' for its emphasis on subjective responses to the sights around him – enable Das to present himself as a determined traveller who will undertake risks, endure physical discomfort

and pain, and can appreciate the landscape's various beauties. This is the subjective and personal aspect of his self-fashioning. In the place of the institutionalized travel of privileged mobility, the romantic narrative in Das focuses on individuation – his subjective response to the sights around him.

Now Das is ready for one more step in fashioning himself differently from his privileged traveller role. Having documented his personal trials and sufferings as well as his subjective responses to the landscape, Das now presents himself as an individual with expertise, a cultural insider who uses his mobility as a space of intercultural exchange devoid of imperial baggage and ideology and founded entirely on his, individual agency and qualities. Cultural insidership, acquired through a careful deployment of his various forms of expertise, is the cornerstone of the new self that Das fashions.

Expert Culture and Self-fashioning

Sarat Chandra Das passes as a Tibetan, an expert in Tibetan texts and Buddhism, comments on the landscape and its fauna-flora and makes effective use of his abilities in medicine. This component of the narrative, especially when detailing the landscape and the fauna/flora, is cast more in the tone of scientific observations and is in sharp contrast to the subjective personal narrative of heroic suffering and aesthetic appreciation. Any structural constraints are overcome, in Das' narrative, because of his performance of expertise. Expertise in various domains becomes, in other words, an assertion of *individual* agency, where the 'expert' fashions himself apart from the institutional mechanisms that enable his privileged mobility. Three domains are central to Das' self-representation as an expert: the natural world, science and medicine and culture.

Das' expeditions and scholarly pursuits received considerable contemporary attention and praise. Graham Sandberg in the *Nineteenth Century* praised Das for 'visiting every thing that was notable' in Lhasa and for producing 'one of the most delightful books of travel' (). A correspondent for the London *Times* referred to Das as the 'learned Pandit' and praised the British government's sagacity in sending scholars like Das, possessed of the 'tolerance of privations and the subtlety of address which are special characteristic of the Hindu' (cited in Nabin Chandra Das, Preface to Sarat Chandra Das, *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow*, viii). Das' 1908 edition of histories of Buddhism and of Tibet by the Abbot Sumpa Khanpo Yeše Pal Jor was reviewed quite favourably by Mary Ridling in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, and refers to the work as a 'monument of the editor's splendid energy' (1909: 524). His travelogue also has unusually detailed geographical and topographical plans of forts and monasteries in Tibet (see plates facing 45, 51, 155, 161) and entire regions such as Lhasa (facing 149). His geographical researches were acknowledged by the Royal Geographical Society and may even have had particular political uses for the colonial government's 'Great Game' in the Himalayas (Tim Myatt's suggestion, 2012, building on Hopkirk's that Das might have been the model for the Babu-spy figure of Hurree Chunder Mookherjee, who is a major player in the Great Game, in Kipling's *Kim*, has

a certain validity if one were to ponder over Das' meticulous documentation of borders, forts, political personages and their ideological slants and travel routes.)

Even this abbreviated account of his reception suggests that Sarat Chandra Das was widely renowned as a scholar, and the 'self-fashioning' I trace in my essay is a step toward the making of Das as a public figure and scholar, at once in the service of the colonial government and a scholar-at-large on Tibetan culture, Buddhism and the geography of the Himalayan regions.

Expertise is emphatically *not*, therefore, a trope contributing to Das' self-fashioning, it is a very *material* intellectual project that enables Das to negotiate a 'new' culture. It is a performance that does not merely establish his identity, but reifies and reinforces it.

Das opening descriptions set up his role as a naturalist: 'We saw long canes growing abundantly, and there was quite a large grove of plantation trees, showing the warm climate the country enjoys' (4). He is able to identify various plants, their life cycle and their uses: nettle creepers, he notes for instance, grow up to more than a 100 feet, and their leaves make 'excellent soup' (5).

Das constantly offers us the botanical marvels of the region he is travelling through, and thus plays out the naturalist role to near-perfection (7, 15, 16, 19, 21, 22, 129). He is also able to document the animal life of the regions (7, 8, 14, 15, 123), with particular attention to domesticated animals (7-8).

Das is also able to use his medical skills very effectively. At one point he records:

My host and his wife came and begged some medicine, and I prepared for him an effervescent draught ... and the spectators all said, in amazement, "This amchi is a miracle-worker (*tulpa*)" ... and so my fame was noised abroad. (41)

This passage narrates a typical incident in Das' narrative in the course of which, on several occasions he impresses the spectators with his medical skills (54). His refusal to take money for his services makes him even more famous (55). He is thus frequently called in to deliver his services as a medical expert (98, 100, 109, 119-120, 127, 196-7). He explains land surveying and the use of surveying instruments to the locals (101). He disabuses local theories of medicine and illness - 'we laughed heartily at his holiness's fancies ... at last he was convinced of the groundlessness of his fears' - and thus establishes his expertise (105). Das is also called upon to explain the working of a telescope and stellar maps (109). He carries a small lithographic press with him, which impresses everyone (113).

But more than the scientific expert and the naturalist-as-expert it is his fashioning of his self as a cultural expert that Das secures the greatest purchase in crafting a new identity for himself. A voracious reader and compulsive collector of books - he is believed to have acquired over two hundred manuscripts, block-prints and books from his 1881 expedition alone (Rockhill viii) - Das is the savant-traveller *par excellence*.

In the early moments of the narrative Das presents himself as a cultural authority, discussing with his guides Tibetan customs of drum beating, the nature of the drums and the occasions for the practice (3-4). A lengthy footnote describes the ethnic composition of the various people in the border region of Nepal and India, with some account of their histories, alphabet and cultural practices (3-4). Together these set the tone for the rest of the narrative: Das has made the initial moves toward presenting himself as a cultural observer and expert. This role of cultural expert and cultural insider is perhaps the single most important mode of self-fashioning that allows Das to distance himself from his privileged mobility as a colonial traveller.

Das seeks out and reads Buddhist texts, translates them, acquires and collects them. He is taken to the monasteries' libraries and shown their sacred texts (63, 90). He records Tibetan customs, comments on them, and seeks explanations of local legends, stories and myths, while carefully eschewing disparaging commentaries and ironic comments.

Then he also has to offer explanations and insights into various cultures. Thus he has to tell the Tibetan women that in India one man can have many wives but in the land of the whites, one man has only one wife (162).

Booksellers help him buy books, and offer him 'very interesting information' about other books (59). He spends a considerable amount of time reading Buddhist texts (63, 113, 121). He hires assistants to translate and copy other texts (68, 215). Local priests and monks read out extracts of their own works to him (78-9). He discovers Sanskrit texts written in Tibetan script, causing him to be 'transported with joy', as he puts it (112). Inscriptions in temples fascinate him and he makes considerable efforts to decode them (151), just as he seeks out and records local myths and legends throughout his journey.

He translates sections of Tibetan works for the reader (177, 201). Das takes considerable pride in his 'curious' nature. At one point he says of his encounter with a Kashmiri settled in Lhasa: 'as often as he spoke of these subjects [the Kashmiri speaks of the English], so often did I rejoin with some inquiry about Buddhism or a lamasery I wished to visit' (228-9). Das devotes his entire last chapter to an ethnography of Tibet (246-266).⁴

With such moves, we see Das perform his 'detachment' (as Anderson called it) from provincial loyalties and resituates himself, by virtue of his actions, in a new one, a transcultural one. The culture of the expert in the public narrative ensures that Das is spoken of and *received* as a learned traveller, skilled in scientific and cultural domains. Travelling as an expert in Buddhism and Tibetan language and culture, and received as one, Das relies on his fame and reputation for not only having travelled in these regions before (this is his second journey), but for having acquired more than sufficient knowledge of the local cultures. In other words, he travels *as a scholar*. With this self-

4 This culture of expertise that is woven around him occasionally results in some embarrassment for Das because he is taken to be an expert in several things, including palmistry (97).

representation and adulatory reception, Das can now locate himself at the intersections of cultures as savant, medicine man, cultural authority and scientist. Although he is occasionally taken for a holy man (31) Das downplays the spiritual side of his researches and interests as for instance, when he says in a disarmingly honest self-appraisal:

I was careful to conduct myself like a good *gelong* (priest). Reading attentively, writing and making notes was the chief occupation of my days. It was not my habit to chant mantras, or hymns, or say my beads, for in the former practice I was never proficient, and with my beads I could only separate one bead from another without any knowledge of the prayers meant to accompany that mechanical action. (59)

The focus on his expertise in various domains ensures that the limelight stays on his *actions* and activities. This emphasis on his individual actions ties in with Anderson's assertion that privileged mobility entails an 'investment in the exceptional individualism of the intellectual class', and sets Das on the route to a new identity, that of a cosmopolitan scholar. Indeed we see this role played out very clearly in the travelogue as well as Das' other text, *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow* which opens with a lecture on student life in Tibet that demonstrates a thorough knowledge of systems and structures of Buddhist learning, hierarchies and institutions (2004 [1893]: 1-14).

The culture of the expert in Das might be read as the performance of a certain kind of *labour*: that of the scientist, the cultural historian and the philanthropic medicine man. This performance of labour includes witnessing, decoding, recording, acts of healing and interpretation in a different cultural context. The performance of labour by the objective observer and expert is a crucial cog in the self-fashioning machine. The performance of expert labour in Das has two conflated components: of the observing subject position and the experiential subject position.

We have already noted how Das presents an 'objective' set of *observations* of Tibetan life, landscape and culture. 'Labour' here is an *experiential* condition: of eyewitnessing Tibetan cultural practices, the landscape and its weather, and finally, of healing. However, despite this being an experiential condition, Das effaces his own corporeality and subjective feelings in order to deliver a scientific observer narrative when speaking of his actions (there is a touch of remorse only when he is unable to heal somebody). It is possible to claim here that Das, a colonial subject for long inured to being merely the observed object of the colonial gaze (as numerous commentators on colonial discourse have argued), now possesses the chance to be an observing I/eye. He is the *observing subject* who records and documents the 'other' culture and casts it as the narrative of an expert commentator rather than a personal narrative, thus positioning himself as a scientific observer careful of maintaining the right distance from the object he observes. Thus we can think of the performance of expert labour as something that bestows a certain agency and identity upon Das: the expert who observes and documents cultures and works with a different society's people.

The culture of expertise in which Das participates ensures that at no point are his credentials as a representative of the British Empire invoked: Das' narrative

almost entirely effaces this feature of his identity even as it obviously makes use of the privileged mobility conferred by his association with the imperial structures. He acquires agency through the performance of expert labour in a transcultural context, and this prepares the ground for Das' apotheosis as a cosmopolitan citizen. This final step toward a new identity is founded upon the continued process of appropriating various structures and devices to craft his self as a connoisseur-traveller, a process that is essentially about motility.

Conclusion: The Colonial Subject as Cosmopolitan Cultural Citizen

Writing about the mountaineering and discovery narratives of the nineteenth century Peter Hansen argues that the European climbers 'did not so much discover mountain summits as appropriate local knowledge to pursue goals which had meaning only in relation to their discourses of discovery' (1999: 210). Hansen notes that it was the local guide team that found paths, carry loads and cut steps in the ice for the 'discoverers' to travel through the mountain. Further, Hansen sees the context and practice of mountaineering as a site of transcultural exchanges (211). I propose, via Hansen's insight, that Das, involved in a similar transcultural exchange with his guides, local hosts and priests acquires a cultural citizenship into the larger domain of knowledge, and implicitly reconstructs himself, despite having clearly benefited from the institutional support of the British Empire.

Das fashions himself as a cosmopolitan cultural citizen through an acquisition of cultural insidership in Tibet and Buddhism. At no point is he a stranger or 'mere' discoverer-explorer of a *new* land. Rather, his exploration is founded on a prior knowledge of Tibetan culture (he has travelled there earlier but also because he has made extensive studies of their religion). Das plays out the role of a highly competent individual, sure of his abilities to negotiate with a new culture and can easily ignore his 'origins' (Indian-Hindu, British imperial citizen), and therefore fashions himself less as a discoverer than an expert. He does this by appropriating any and every possible cultural artefact and practice available to him in the course of his journey. What we have here in the form of his cultural appropriation and adaptation is less of 'mobility' than 'motility'. Motility is 'the way in which an individual appropriates what is possible in the realm of mobility and puts this potential to use for his or her activities' (Kaufmann, cited in Urry 38).

Das' motility is the mark of a certain kind of agency where, with or without official sanction, Das is able to negotiate with lamas, headmen of villages, ministers and priests to help him in his journey, based entirely on his learning, skills and expertise. Das distances himself from his institutional role, as a representative of the British Empire. This assertion of cultural and scientific authority is a self-fashioning with ideological purchase for it enables Das to assert individual agency rather than institutional authority. Motility, therefore, is what constitutes Das as a cultural citizen, and one who is able to traverse multiple cultures.

Das' cultural citizenship is akin to, yet distinct from what Pratt identified as 'anti-conquest' in colonial subjects' travelogues. Pratt proposed that when the colonial

travelled in the late nineteenth century, he/she signalled a departure from the avowedly imperialist, conquistadorial travel of the earlier era by presenting an ‘innocent’ self even as this presentation reinforced European hegemony (181). I see ‘anti-conquest’ as embodied in Das’ ability to establish a cosmopolitan cultural citizenship through a distancing from the imperial travels of, say, George Bogle (whom he cites) in Tibet, and a simultaneous insertion into the multicultural ethos of the journey itself. If the culture of the expert positioned him as a traveling savant or culturally superior traveller, the ensuing motility enables Das to present himself as a cosmopolitan at ease with/in several cultures: Tibetan, Buddhist, Sanskrit and Chinese across India, Sikkim, Lhasa and Nepal. His avid pursuit of books and scriptural texts in several languages ensures that he seeks out, and travels to places of Tibetan learning.

When Das is able to masquerade as a Tibetan pilgrim we once again see not a conquistadorial travel (which would be institutionally supported and determined) but a particular kind of motility predicated upon individual agency. The headman of a village where they stop in fact informs the team that he would not prevent them from going on because Das had ‘spoken Tibetan with greater fluency and accuracy than many Nepalese’ (31). He demonstrates his knowledge of Buddhism, ‘citing ... one or two proverbial sayings in course of conversation’ (31) and thus convinces the headman of his credentials, ‘of my character and holiness’, as Das puts it (31). When fish is served he carefully avoids eating it for ‘it would have been incompatible with my character of a pious pilgrim’ (141). He wears lama costumes as well (150). At one point he is even asked if he was not a ‘reincarnation’ of an Indian Buddhist who had passed through the place earlier and had made the images for the monastery (79), an excellent instance of Das’ carefully crafted cultural insiderness. The cultural insiderness that Das exhibits and asserts here ensures that there is no cultural or imperial superiority underwriting his interaction with the local cultures. Once again, this distances him from his colonial, privileged mobility.

A cosmopolitan cultural citizenship is also acquired when Das acquires the goodwill of the villagers: ‘I set out in excellent spirits, having escaped the much-feared obstruction from the Yangma people, on whose mercy and good-will our success entirely depended’ (32). Motility here is clearly the exploitation, initially, of the institutional structures of travel, of the position Das occupies and later, the expertise he exhibits in order to construct a particular subject position, what I am identifying as a cosmopolitan cultural citizenship. Motility is then, in Das’ case, the appropriation for purposes of movement, the culture of the expert which enables him to *find an identity outside the frames of the colonial structure*. He has already signalled his implicit departure from the colonial identity by never mentioning it in his narrative, but which we, the readers, glean through the paratextual elements and the ease with which he is able to acquire permissions to pass through the unfriendly territories. Instead, he constructs a new self, based entirely on his actions (even though, one suspects, his ethnographic, politico-economic and geographic observations might have been demanded of him by the British government in its pursuit of documenting a politically significant region that bordered their boundaries with China – for why else were the details from his travels, except selections ‘bearing exclusively upon the ethnology of Tibet’, kept confidential by the government, as the editor notes, vii?).

Das at no point in his narrative presents himself as either an Indian or a subject of the British Empire. Instead he presents himself as an erudite, curious and ‘expert’ individual whose field of action is primarily knowledge rather than politics, learning rather than conquest.⁵ By presenting himself primarily as a learned individual curious to gather more information Das moves away from his pre-determined identities of both colonial subject and Hindu-Indian. He becomes a cultural citizen curiously devoid of nationality and religious identity, and acquires a stature and identity as a philosopher-expert. The Tibetans, as a result – and this is important – all greet him not as a citizen of the British Empire or as a Hindu but as a doctor, a scientist and a scholar of Tibetan culture and texts. Yet, it is not only Tibet or Buddhism that enables Das to fashion himself as a cosmopolitan: another dimension to Das’ cultural insiderness and role of expert exists in this narrative and elsewhere.

Das spends a considerable amount of time and energy in tracing and acquiring Sanskrit texts in Tibetan. His interest in ancient India and its cultures also, therefore, presents a certain *nationalist* project that dovetails with his colonial master’s project of exploring a geopolitically significant culture (Tibet and China). For example, when he is asked if he was a reincarnation of earlier Indian Buddhists, Das says he ‘felt proud to hear of [his] countrymen being so highly admired and venerated’ (79), implying a fair amount of nationalistic pride. He is interested in documenting ‘the ancient controversies between the Brahmans and Buddhists of India as perceived by Tibetan monks and scholars (80). Elsewhere, in *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow* he also documents early Indian scholars in China (Lecture II), and Bengali pandits in Tibet (Lecture III), once again suggesting a quasi-nationalist project of tracing genealogies for Indian culture’s exports and intellectual interactions.

When Tabish Khair refers to Indian travellers as seeing themselves as ‘(almost) partners’ with their colonial masters, it is also important to recognize that travellers like Das were also playing a certain nationalist role in tracing and establishing traditions of Indian scholarship. The culture of the cosmopolitan is, by definition, of more than an either/or cultural identity: Das is at once the colonial subject when he fulfils the British government’s agenda of documenting Tibet (as a spy, perhaps?), but he is also the *Indian* scholar whose academic and bibliographic pursuits locate him firmly within *his* cultural traditions. In fact Das’ eclectic and cosmopolitan academicism invites the argument that Das is primarily a citizen of the republic of letters, carving out a niche as a scholar that is (i) neither colonial nor native, (ii) and not English, not Sanskritic, not Buddhist but a productive mixture of all three. Here it might perhaps be worthwhile locating him beside his scholarly contemporaries in a genealogy of scholarly and erudite Indians who could not and would be ‘reduced’ to their ‘colonial citizen’ tag that includes stalwarts such as Romesh Chunder Dutt the economic historian and commentator, Dadabai Naoroji the author of *Poverty and UnBritish Rule in India*, Berhamji Malabari the social reformer,

5 Such a cultural citizenship, it must be noted, is also necessitated by the geopolitics of the age and the territory: Das discovers that British policies are viewed with significant suspicion by the Tibetans and the Hindu Indians are not anyway given access to their shrines and sacred texts.

TN Mukharji the curator of the India section of the industrial exhibitions of London, Rabindranath Tagore the poet-philosopher-critic and later the politician-leaders and thinkers like MK Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and BR Ambedkar.⁶ He would be, in terms I adapt from Pnina Werbner's (2006) own appropriation of Homi Bhabha, more of a 'vernacular cosmopolitan', *rooted in the multiple cultures from his geopolitically bounded regions of origin, while being equally knowledgeable about several others*. Das' therefore is not limited to English, Tibetan, Sanskrit or Buddhist identities although it is the English colonial government's structures of administration and travel that facilitates his reinforcement of an already crystallized identity as a cosmopolitan scholar.

Sarat Chandra Das thus acknowledges his privileged mobility but does not wish to be limited to it. If privileged mobility underscores his status as a colonial citizen-subject, Das undertakes a rewriting of this identity through, first a clear romantic individuation. Later, through his self-representation, founded on a career of scholarly work but also on an established reputation, as an expert – naturalist, scientist, cultural – he asserts a certain amount of agency, again as an individual. Finally, having positioned himself as an expert, he is able to appropriate various mechanisms to present himself as a cultural insider and his mobility itself becomes his space of intercultural exchange. While an employee of the British government, charged with the responsibility, perhaps, of spying for its political aims, Das refuses to be just that. As a result Das fashions himself as a transcultural, cosmopolitan citizen, having 'overcome', at least within the self-representation available to us in the form of his narrative, his identity as a 'mere' colonial citizen.

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6 I have argued elsewhere that *aesthetic* understanding and concomitant cultural insiderness enables the colonial traveller to England in the 1870-1900 period to alter an identity from the enchanted colonial subject in the land of the colonial master to what I term the 'informed enchantment' of a cosmopolitan Indian (Nayar 2012).

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Biographical note

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