

“To the Farthest Gulf for the Wealth of India:” Firsthand Experiences of American Travelers in India

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ABSTRACT

My essay analyzes the experiences of Americans in India from the colonial period to the emergence of the United States as a nation in the 18th century and further into the nineteenth century when the nation consolidated its identity through commerce, religion and race discourse. I trace these three moments in the joint history of America and India through the life and travel writings of a few key figures. Through the letters of Nathaniel Higginson, the Salem-born man who eventually became Governor of Madras in 1692, we can trace the social and political dealings of a New England based administrator in the colonial era. In the second period, in the aftermath of the American revolution, there is a great interest in India from a newly formed United States, that can be seen in the exploits of American travelers such as Bartholomew Burges. In the nineteenth century there was a further escalation of the ties between India and America that is seen in the story of Calvin Smith, a civil war veteran who traveled to India and worked in the then popular ice trade, sharing his perspectives and experiences of living in India for five years. Finally, in the mid to late 19th century, evangelical America and the Liberal Christian movement spread Christianity to other nations through missions, reaching India.

Introduction

This year I was awarded the Massachusetts Historical Society’s John Winthrop Student Fellowship for using the MHS archives and collections to research travel writing by Americans who visited India before the 20th century. Indo-American encounters largely go under the radar of most people, and are most often associated with the late twentieth century immigrant influx from India. But there is a much more rich history of interactions dating back centuries unknown to most people from both continents. As someone of Indian heritage I am interested in that exchange between two nations that have a common history of origin in British colonial rule. Much of the modern history of India is dominated by colonial subjugation by the British; however, I wanted to discover how the American perspective on the subcontinent may be different. In my preliminary research, what I found was that while numerous Americans, especially from New England, traveled to India, few actually recorded their experiences. The MHS has records of a lot of travelers, but most of the information is in the form of ship logs and financial records. However, reading through a range of documents in their collections and beyond, I found travel writings, memoirs and letters that showcase an interesting triangular relationship between British rulers, Indian subjects and American travelers in India. What interests me most is that while most Americans were influenced by the hierarchies established by the British and saw India through what Edward Said calls “Orientalist” perspectives,¹ their writings display a wide range of responses to their encounters, from political shrewdness to a focus on the exotic “otherness” of natives and an open-ended curiosity and adventurousness. It was also worth noting that some exceptional Americans challenged the colonial stereotypes of the natives and endorsed native culture on its own terms.

My essay analyzes the experiences of Americans in India from the colonial period to the emergence of the United States as a nation in the 18th century and further into the nineteenth century when the nation consolidated its identity through commerce, religion and race discourse. I trace these three moments in the joint history of America and India (though it only became a nation state in 1947) through the life and travel writings of a few key figures. As the 13 colonies emerged from Britain in the New World and began to build societies of their own, British global trade in countries like India offered a model of economic and political activity to the new American merchants and travelers. However, this stretched beyond purely economic and political behavior, as Americans largely followed the hierarchical and exploitative nature of British rule in India concerning race, culture, and religion. Nathaniel Higginson and Elihu Yale were men from New England who became functionaries in Britain's powerful East India Company in the 17th century, and were involved with expanding the Company's control and wealth, including the slave trade, and managing relations with native Indians and nawabs. I trace the journeys and experiences of Higginson, the lesser known Salem-born man who eventually became Governor of Madras in 1692, to understand the social and political dealings of a New England based administrator in the colonial era. The second period, in the aftermath of the American revolution, reveals a new attitude of greater interest towards India from a newly formed United States, where the exploits of American travelers took them to Indian cities like Kolkata and Bombay. In the 18th century, Salem, Massachusetts, became a hub for Indian trade and travel, evident from their seal that says, "[t]o the farthest gulf for the wealth of India." Institutions such as the American Oriental Society and East India Marine Society (which would later become the Peabody Essex Museum) cropped up to oversee a new set of relations between the two nations based on the cultural impact of Indian goods through trade. In the nineteenth century there was a further escalation of the ties between India and America, with the additional factor of having to deal with British rule in India which by the middle of the nineteenth century had risen to the status of an empire. To understand the nineteenth century situation, I studied the story of Calvin Smith, a civil war veteran who traveled to India and worked in the then popular ice trade, sharing his perspectives and experiences of living in India for five years. Finally, in the mid to late 19th century, evangelical America and the Liberal Christian movement spread Christianity to other nations through missions, reaching India. Building on the writing of prior travelers, they formulated treatises against Hinduism in India. The MHS has journals and accounts of Judith Walker, a humanitarian worker and missionary who worked with the reformer Pandita Ramabai that allows us to see that phase of Indo-American relationship.

17th Century

To begin with the 17th century, the story of Nathaniel Higginson, who lived from 1652 to 1708, provides insight into a lesser known governor and his accomplishments. Higginson's tenure and legacy are overshadowed by Elihu Yale, the previous and more commonly known governor of the East India Company's Madras Presidency, remembered as the main benefactor of Yale University. While Yale's life and exploits have been much storied and analyzed, particularly in modern and revisionist studies such as the Yale and Slavery Project,² the same cannot be said about Higginson. It is likely that the latter's story has not drawn attention due to lack of adequate information in the forms of letters, diaries or memoir. Nevertheless, Higginson is worthy of notice as both, a contrast to Yale and his excesses in India, and as a figure of authority who took a cautious approach to the task of establishing British authority over natives in the early days of colonial rule. What little we know of him shows a man who appears to be free of corruption, which was a big issue for trading companies in the 17th century, but Higginson is clearly implicated in working to establish the colonial rule of the East India Company over India.

Higginson's story begins all the way back in the 16th century with his grandfather Reverend Francis Higginson who was born in England, and educated in Cambridge.³ Eventually he was one of the first invited to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and founded the first church there in 1629. The story continues with Reverend

John Higginson the First, who moved to Guilford, Connecticut. Nathaniel Higginson was born there, but spent his childhood in Salem, of which little else is known. He received his MA at Harvard University in 1670. Shortly thereafter at age 22, he traveled to England, and served as a steward to Lord Wharton, and a tutor to his children. In 1680, Higginson joined the ranks of the East India Company where he quickly ascended the ladder and built a positive reputation within the company, leading to his candidacy first as Mayor of Madras, then Governor.

The British East India company, established in the beginning of the 17th century with a charter from Queen Elizabeth I, had landed in India earlier in the century to trade commodities, mostly spices, from the East. The company was vying for control over the trade on the Coromandel Coast, the southeastern shore of India's peninsula. During the age of trade and exploration, the Dutch, French, and Portuguese also had forts and trading posts in India, and this was also an area of concern for the company, especially since the Dutch East India company had developed immense control over the spice trade. By the time Higginson arrived at his post, the company had expanded considerably in southern and western India and built Bombay Castle in Bombay, and Fort St. George in Madras, where Higginson was stationed. Trade on the Coromandel Coast originated from Masulipatam, in the Muslim kingdom of Golconda in 1611, but pressure from the war between with Mughals, who were a powerful ruling dynasty in India, forced them to Madras.⁴ Madras (now known as Chennai) was one of the company's most important possessions, having a population of 100,000 by 1700, segregated into "white" and "black" towns for Europeans and natives, respectively.⁵ From 1687 until Higginson's accession in 1692, the fort was governed by the infamous Elihu Yale. Yale expanded the company's domain and developed its network, notably establishing the municipality of Madras.⁶ A brief overview of the workings of the typical British government is provided by Ian Barrow: "A mayor and six aldermen were responsible for resolving disputes over debts and other everyday matters of law. They met twice a week at the town hall and almost always settled disputes only among Indians since Europeans were able to complain straight to the governor."⁷ Higginson was mayor of Madras for six months before becoming governor, so he possibly attained his reputation as a mediator of conflicts at this post. Overall, the governance of the East India Company was chaotic and disorderly; its leaders were greedy and shortsighted. Josiah Child was the Company's chief administrator, and was described as "sordidly avaricious" by his contemporaries⁸. Having waged the First Anglo-Mughal War, Child made the Company an increasingly hostile force, which ultimately resulted in military failures for the Company.⁹ In 1690, the Mughals allowed peace in exchange for paying fines and returning goods.¹⁰ Child's war had poor consequences in England: the Company's stock price plummeted and tarnished the reputation of the English.¹¹ Meanwhile in Madras, Yale had been amassing wealth through fraudulent activities, resulting in a scandal. While the governor's salary never exceeded 300 pounds, Yale was in possession of 175,000, since he had traded on the side.¹² Ultimately, the Company brought charges of corruption against him in 1692 and he was replaced with Higginson.

J. Talboys Wheeler writes, "[t]he accession of President Higginson, followed up closely as it was by the arrival of Sir John Goldsborough as Commissary-General, seems to have been a great event in the history of Madras."¹³ Higginson entered during a turbulent period in the history of South India where native rulers were engaged in a struggle for control, with the Mughal Nawab Zulfikar Khan at war with the Mahrattas. However, Higginson abstained from entering this conflict, perhaps after seeing the unsuccessful attempts of Child and the disaster it brought for the Company in England. It appears that he favored the Mughals, as there is a record of quiet exchanges and dealings with them against the Mahrattas. His interactions and transactions with the Mughals shows that he received knowledge that Zulfikar Khan had removed his troops from Wandewash, and sent a "brahmin spy" to the Mahratta camp to gather intelligence for the Company. He would eventually learn that the Mahrattas poisoned the water supply, and "an abundance of people"¹⁴ had died. Other interactions with the Nawab include a time when the latter demanded that the company loan him one lakh (100,000) pagodas. Higginson and the council refused the loan since they believed it would never be repaid though he feared that the Nawab would resent that action. Later, the spy reported that a Frenchman was seen in the Nawab's camp,

his intentions unknown, which was especially alarming for the Company. Higginson's cautious and crafty dealings with the Indian rulers illustrates a Company strategy which would eventually bring about a take over of India, where "[o]ver the next 200 years it would slowly learn to operate skillfully within the Mughal system...with its officials learning good Persian, the correct court etiquette the art of bribing officials and, in time, outmaneuvering all their rivals," (19) as William Dalrymple writes in *The Anarchy*.¹⁵

While Company executives had to manage relations with natives, they also handled malfeasance within their own ranks. This is evident in Higginson's dealings with Yale. According to Steiner, while the aforementioned events were happening, Yale was still in Madras after he was no longer governor, and "remained a thorn in [Higginson's] side."¹⁶ In February 1696, Yale proceeded with a motion explaining that he was prosecuted unfairly and imprisoned without freedom, attacking the governor and council. The company responds by saying Yale's insinuation was "utterly and apparently false; and consequently the reflection is not only groundless, but basely scandalous,"¹⁷ and retorts that Yale is free to leave whenever he wishes, which he does in 1699 and goes back to England, where he spent the rest of his life as a "private citizen." Meanwhile, clergymen in Connecticut had founded a small college of sorts with their libraries, and its attention was brought to Yale, who was seeking to donate to a college in Oxford. Instead his contributions were redirected to his homeland, for which he donated books and 800 pounds, a "morsel, the merest fragments of his great possessions,"¹⁸ which enshrined his name with the well-known university to this day.

Not much is known about Higginson's character and personal affairs, as few letters of his remain accessible. Brother John Higginson writes in a letter dated August 20th, 1697, that while Nathaniel frequently wrote to his family, since his departure to Madras he has not received a single letter,¹⁹ which at this point must have been 14 years. John sent this letter originally to a Mr. Matthew Collet, presumably an functionary in the East India Company stationed in London, asking him to forward the letter to him. In the letter, John laments his brother's silence: "What is it that we have offended you in, that you will not afford us one line? Have the honours, profits... of the world quite swallowed you up?"²⁰ He goes on to update him with family news, and then remarks that it has come to his attention that Nathaniel has amassed considerable wealth, some estimates being one hundred to three hundred thousand pounds, and he expresses the desire to borrow some of it.²¹ This shows an interesting family dynamic, where John Higginson (perhaps like many contemporaries) assumes that India is a great source of wealth and riches, something that Nathaniel refutes when he says he does not have a "great estate," but a good one, as he sees it. It is followed by a letter from his father, encouraging Nathaniel to lend him the money.²² Not long before, King Philip's War, referred to as the French and Indian war in the letters, had impoverished New England.

Another letter of John Higginson states that he had received a letter from Nathaniel dated September 26th, 1698; however, there is no record of it in the archives. In the Higginson Family Papers at the MHS, there is only one letter from Nathaniel, from October 6th, 1699, originating from Fort St. George.²³ At this point, he had finished up his service for the Right Honorable Company, being replaced as president by Thomas Pitt in July 1698. His letter states that his original plan was to stay in India, but it appears that he resolved to retire to England following controversies in England concerning the East India trade.²⁴ He goes on to introduce his wife, Elizabeth Richards, the daughter of John Richards who was appointed to be the chief of a factory in Bengal, but Elizabeth was the only remaining member of that family.²⁵ She was taken care of by Mrs. Mary Large, who taught her the "Genhow" and Malabar languages, as well as Portuguese "very perfectly," and it seems Elizabeth desired to see New England.²⁶ Higginson also wished to see his friends there, let alone his brother and father's longing to see him again, but needed to go to England first. He asks John seven questions about the trade in New England mostly on the topics of shipping, logistics, and viability of travel, and says that he will execute an encouraging proposal, or in other words, participate as a merchant in New England with his brother, while also offering to educate his children in England, or potentially get him a job with the Company in India or on a voyage to China, it being the "best employment that [he] knows for a young man."²⁷ On August 29th, 1700, John writes a response to Nathaniel's letter, in which he is ecstatic to learn that Nathaniel may be coming back

to New England and hopes to enjoy his good company.²⁸ Unfortunately, he would never see Nathaniel in his homeland, as he died in 1708 in England.²⁹ His father John outlived him a few months, eventually also dying in 1708 in Salem, at a mighty age of 93.³⁰ Higginson's chapter ends with a final quote from Wheeler, "Mr. Nathaniel Higginson seems to have been the first Governor of Madras on record, who retired from the Presidency without a stain upon his name. After a careful perusal of the many volumes of records referring to his Government, we can find none of those charges and insinuations which were so frequent during the administration of his predecessors."³¹ Unlike his predecessors such as Child and Yale, perhaps Higginson's values were shaped by his New England upbringing as the son of clergyman; as mentioned before, Higginson's family was established in Salem, as they had founded the first church in Massachusetts and were held in high respect among the community, especially his father John Higginson, who remained a pastor until his death.³² In his letter from August 29th, 1700, brother John Higginson suggests that Nathaniel try for governor of Massachusetts, as he would be "acceptable to the people,"³³ showing that after all those years, his brother still believed in his purportedly good character.

18th Century

The 18th century was a time of remarkable change for both India and America. In America, the 13 colonies had grown increasingly independent, and merchants in port cities like Salem turned their eyes to the rest of the world. As a result, once the United States became independent from Britain, trade flourished between India and America. G. Bhagat's *Americans in India* outlines how the new nation began to form ties with India, from right after independence to the end of the 18th century, taking advantage of Europe's inability to enforce its commercial power over India due to the French Revolutionary Wars and Napoleonic Wars, which involved Great Britain.³⁴ Because of the nature of the British mercantilist system, the colonies were unable to develop trade on their own as they were forced to go through Britain for all trade as ensured by the restrictive Navigation Acts that required enumerated goods such as sugar, indigo, and rice from British colonies to be shipped only through England. Bhagat says that it was only after the Treaty of Paris that direct trade between the US and India took hold. Interestingly, big port cities in the northeast like Philadelphia and New York were generally uninterested in trading with India, which gave the advantage for trade to New England cities like Providence and Salem.³⁵ According to Rajender Kaur and Anupama Arora, trade consisted mostly of cotton and silk, alongside foodstuffs such as sugar, rice, and ginger.³⁶ They add that with the increase in trade between the two countries, India began to play more of a role in the minds of Americans, pointing to how they closely followed conflicts in India such as the Anglo-Mysore War.³⁷

Though there was a huge influx of travelers from Britain in the 18th century, a few American travelers also made it to India. Bartholomew Burges, a Massachusetts native, known for his works in astronomy traveled to India in the 1770s, and wrote a series of letters, which were meant to serve as a guide to future travelers to the region.³⁸ Anu Kumar describes Burges' travels in India in her article "A Remarkably Opulent Country: Observations of the First American to Write a Book on India" as follows:

Burges spent seven years in India, one of the earliest American merchants to do so. He does not provide exact chronological details, but from his account of the Bengal famine in 1770 and the siege of Pondicherry in 1778, it can be presumed that these events bookended his time in the country. In 1790, he published a book about his trip...it takes the form of chapter-length missives to Burges' acquaintances and is the first book by an American on India.³⁹

According to Carl Thompson in *Travel Writing*, by this time there was a flourishing travel writing genre and industry and a huge Western interest in travels to "exotic" parts of the world.⁴⁰ Burges seems to be playing into that market: the full title of the book, *A series of Indostan letters By Barw. Burges; containing a striking account of the manners & customs of the Gentoo nations & of the Moguls & other Mahomedan tribes in Indostan; with other polemical East India tracts both amusing, interesting, & perfectly original*, is designed

to capture the attention of the reader and promises to paint a picture of the seemingly mysterious traditions of India for his American readers. In his travel account, Burges offers descriptions of the customs and traditions of the people he encountered during his travels, also writing about dress codes of Hindus, Muslims, and Armenians he observed in Calcutta (now Kolkata), as well as describing the Jagannath festival.⁴¹ He uses the British language of the region, calling Hindus and Muslims “Gentoo” and “Moors,” and Jagannath “Jagernaut.” Here is Burges’ description of the festivities, in his own words:

When the sun setting [sic] below the horizon of a beautiful serene sky, I was struck with the splendid and sudden appearance of some thousand little pagodas, or Indian temples of different magnitudes and proportions, (all of them painted and gilded, from three to six feet in height, with their respective porticos, galleries, ballustrades, turrets, domes and spires,) launched from the strand; and numbers of pleasure boats in different parts of the river, on flat boards of sufficient bearings to float them; which illuminated with little gilded tapers within side and without, reflecting on and shining through casements of transparent isinglass, exhibited in a very advantageous light the images that were fixed on pedestals in the centre of these edifices: some of Bramin bulls, and peacocks with their tails expanded, and others of Jagernaut and Christnou Swamy, and different idols worshipped by these deluded uninformed people.⁴²

After an embellished account that gives a colorful and attractive image of the Indian landscape, architecture and traditions, due to his Christian ideals, he calls the Hindus “deluded uninformed people,”⁴³ showing the attitude of Americans towards foreign religions, which would later be expanded upon by missionaries in their accounts of Hinduism. Another phenomenon Burges touches upon is how droves of Western women came to India in search of a husband and wealth, apparently to great avail, which he sees residing in Calcutta:

These ladies, daughters to gentlemen of narrow fortunes, with the consent of their friends, annually, some two or three in a ship, go to India, where having nobody on the spot to supercede them, they in a short time make a conquest of some gentleman or other, advanced in the Company's service; for no one less than a factor dare presume to think of an European lady, nor will the Governor (without whose consent they cannot be married) admit of such a match, which restrictions secures to them considerable settlements, and I believe an instance never was known for a young maiden of spotless character not making a brilliant fortune by a trip to Bengal.⁴⁴

It is interesting to note that “no one less than a factor,” i.e. someone of the high stature of a factory owner or trader “dares” to aspire to these white women in India, almost as if they were a rare and precious commodity, unlike other women in that part of the world. Discussing the place of India in American commerce, Kumar goes on to write, “[a] connection with India was ‘courted by the whole commercial world,’ and with America’s independence in 1776, this had become a matter of ‘general conversation and national attention.’”⁴⁵ This would later manifest in Vice President John Adams inviting Burges, and the two raising money to publish his book.⁴⁶ The increased interest in that part of the world led to the formation of organizations like the East India Marine Society, which would eventually become the Peabody Essex Museum, and the American Oriental Society.⁴⁷ Indian words such as “avatar” or “bazaar” crept into everyday vernacular in America. Additionally, the term “Brahmin,” used in 1861 to signify the elite class of Bostonians came from India where it referred to members of the highest caste in Hindu society.⁴⁸

19th Century

A phenomenon that is mostly forgotten about today but was quite lucrative and popular in the 19th century was the ice trade in India. Boston merchant Frederic Tudor, son of the wealthy William Tudor, who enjoyed ice in his drink, saw an opportunity to bring ice to tropical and warm destinations. The New England Historical Society and Jenny Rose provide valuable information about the earlier days of the company. According to Rose, although Tudor did not invent the “ice house,” he was the first to attempt shipping it abroad.⁴⁹ According to the

Historical Society, he began in the Caribbean in 1806 with his first shipment to the island of Martinique; however, it was a failure:

In 1806, he sent his first shipment of ice to Martinique amid much derision. “No JOKE,” reported the Boston Gazette. “A vessel has cleared at the Custom House for Martinique with a cargo of ice. We hope this will not prove a slippery speculation.” Ice turned out to be a harder sell than Frederic Tudor imagined. He was trying to sell it to people who had never once experienced anything cold. They didn’t have ice houses, and they didn’t know how to keep ice from melting. He and his partner – his brother William – lost money on the deal.⁵⁰

After many failed attempts, he refined his technique and expanded the business to finally achieve success and began to branch out to India, where he established ice houses first in Calcutta, then Bombay. Tudor’s ice extraction operations spread throughout the Commonwealth, first in Fresh Pond and Jamaica Pond in Boston, then Walden Pond in Concord, and eventually up to Lake Champlain in Vermont and New York. Henry David Thoreau observed droves of Irish men carve up the ice, calling the methods “too well known to require description,” showing how well established the ice trade had become in New England. For Thoreau, the ice trade provided another example for his transcendentalist and spiritual vision, where “[t]he pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges.”⁵¹

The ice trade also connects with the life of a Civil war veteran named Calvin Smith, who in 1864, set sail to Bombay to work for the company. In January 1864, in the midst of the Civil War, Calvin Smith was stationed with the Invalid Corps in the Alexander Barracks in St. Louis, Missouri. Originally from Illinois, Smith had enlisted to fight against the rebels with the 13th Illinois Infantry⁵² but injured his hand, rendering him unfit for combat, and confining him to an office job.⁵³ Though he was “having a good time enough here,” for him, “it [was] not like the field. There is no excitement, nothing going on,” he writes in a letter to his mother, and knowing he would not likely fight again, begins looking for a new profession.⁵⁴ He decided to pursue every opportunity that came his way except for farming, planning to leave the army in May. Conditions were not ideal, as in April he writes that there were several exposures to smallpox, though he had not contracted it and enjoyed good health. Nonetheless, despite being bored with his life, he maintains a sense of humor and high spirit. When remarking on the weather he writes, “It has rained for two days and no sign of it stopping. I am thinking of building an ark for safety.”⁵⁵ Finally in May he reported with great delight that he had left the army, signing his letter as “Calvin W. Smith, Citizen of the United States.”⁵⁶ After leaving the army, he traveled for a while, before finally settling for a few months in Grantville, Massachusetts, arriving there on July 24th. Sometime during this period, he heard of an opportunity to work with the Tudor Ice Company in one of their ice houses in India, and to Smith this may have been a way to live the adventurous life he had been longing for. He calls it the “East India Gamble,” and learns that the ship is slated to leave in October. Meanwhile, he enrolled in French’s Commercial School, and began studies for three months, which cost him \$15. Throughout this time, he maintained a positive and hopeful attitude, looking forward to traveling. For example, he learned of his Uncle Charles traveling to the budding city of Chicago, and said “when they went it made me think I should like to go, but I believe India will be better.”⁵⁷ The people in Grantville did not encourage him, but he still desired to go, writing that “I think it is the best thing I can do. I can get a living here, but I can get that anywhere,” again iterating his desire to have more in life and be adventurous. He adds, “I have been testing spiritualism this last week. They all tell me to go, that I am to succeed well,” and finally, on November 2nd, he set sail to Bombay on the *Ellora* at the age of 21, with 900 tons of ice, and 400 barrels of apples.⁵⁸

Smith’s voyage seems to have positives and negatives. Hailing from the landlocked midwest, this was likely his first experience on the tumultuous ocean, and he remarked on the mountainous waves as the ship passed the Cape of Good Hope, and suffered from severe sea sickness. On the other hand, he saw pods of whales, dolphins, and built his own writing desk. Overall, he says he had a pleasant time on the passage. Finally, the ship docked in Bombay in March 1865. Shortly thereafter he got set up in Bombay, finding a residence sized 20 by 24 ft for 50 rupees a month, located a half mile away from the Ice House with a grand view of the Harbor. One thing that initially surprised him about India is how he can pay “boys”⁵⁹ to do all his work: he has

natives for cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and even to write his letters, whom he pays on a monthly basis in the range of 2 to 12 rupees. Calling them “boys” reinforces the implicit condescending attitude towards the natives and perhaps mirrors his attitude towards black people in America. He uses other Indo-British terms such as “coolies” for laborers and “sepoys” for soldiers, but interestingly does not call Hindus as Gentoos. On his arrival, he explains, “I like this city as well as I expected, what little I have seen of it, and they tell me I have seen the worst part.”⁶⁰

Initially, business with the ice house was “brisk,” as there was great demand for the goods, but ice was not the only thing that caught the attention of the natives. Smith describes the chaos that ensued as the company attempted to sell the apples they had brought over:

I have been very busy the last eight days selling the apples we brought out. The natives are perfectly mad for them. I never saw such a mob as we had here for eight days. We had ten coolies picking these over and they could not begin to get them ready fast enough. I armed myself with a club and it was all I could do to keep them from breaking down the counter and helping themselves. I made many sore heads those eight days. The second day the judge ordered a company of sepoy to guard them every day and disperse the crowd.⁶¹

It is certainly puzzling why people were so interested in six month old apples. Nonetheless, Smith’s attitude towards the natives seems to fall along the colonizer’s stereotype of unruly children that need the white “master” to control and civilize them. Despite the breakneck pace of business the company began with, by May they had already run out of ice and were relegated to selling tobacco, which barely sold. May was the hottest part of the season, and there was lots of sickness that could have been ameliorated with the ice. Interestingly, the company possessed a machine that could make ice, but it was broken. Despite the prowess of the Tudor Ice Company, there was another ice company in Bombay. In June, Smith describes how he fell ill with “India fever,” during the aforementioned ice shortage, and resorted to getting a small amount from the Patent Ice Company, a rival enterprise.⁶² By July, Tudor’s expected shipment of ice had not arrived, and the men in Bombay had given up hope for it. The insurance situation was complicated though, since the underwriter will only compensate for the ice if the ship is a total loss outright, and in this scenario, the ice would have melted and they would have gotten nothing, as Smith explains. He also speaks about a “commercial crash” being imminent in Bombay, and though it is not fully clear what he meant by this, he talks about native and European “houses” failing and going under.⁶³

Beyond his work, Smith continued to have interactions with the natives, and when business was slow, he occupied himself with sightseeing. One such experience he describes is in the harbor on his ship coming into contact with an Arab boat headed to the Red Sea on a pilgrimage, containing 300 or so people. The following excerpt describes his experience:

It was very amusing the manner in which they received us, they did not want us to come on board and made motions to that effect, but we concluded not to understand them, as soon as our boat struck the side of their ship we caught hold of the rattlings and were on their deck in an instant.⁶⁴

He goes on to describe the Muslim women, and how the men hid them so as to not be seen by strangers, and despite his disobedience, the captain of the native ship invited him and his associate to the quarters where they tried two different types of “grogs” made from rice. He writes that he “enjoyed that visit very much.” He also went shopping in the various bazaars of Bombay, and found a particularly beautiful shawl, but it cost \$1500. Smith seems to enjoy his lifestyle in India, stating that he enjoys his cooks services very much, and remarks on the food:

I like the style of living out here very well, about the only new dish is curry and rice. I think it’s fine. Curry and liquor are the two things of India and in the proportion to one curry to twenty liquor. I used to think that the western people could drink but now I think they have not learned how. But don’t be alarmed on my account, I am a teetotaler.⁶⁵

Whilst in India, Smith still kept up to date with the war back home, mostly through telegraph from London. In 1865, he received news of the fall of Richmond, and subsequently the assassination of President

Lincoln, which at first he did not believe. By December, the war had concluded and reconstruction began, and civil rights for freed slaves and how to deal with the confederacy were contentious topics. Smith voices his opinion in his letters to family:

I would welcome Jeff. David the arch traitor himself to the ballot box before the negro. I want Jeff hung. I have every confidence in Andrew Johnson to uphold him in all he has done. When the president receives the power to say who shall vote in the south he can do the same in the north but I wont say anymore on this question for I know none of you will agree with me; perhaps I have said too much but it is the way.⁶⁶ His racism towards black Americans is also matched by his overall condescending attitude towards the Indians.

Beyond the commercial connection, the relationship between India and the US in the 19th century was also shaped by the zeal to spread Christianity in a heathen land. Many missionaries and evangelists took notice of the vast continent of Hindus, whose religious identity, based on polytheism and idolatry, clashed with Christianity. In the wake of the Liberal Christian movement in America, ministers such as Joseph Tuckerman built on the reports of traditions and culture in India by travelers, similar to Burges' accounts, and published damning criticisms, such as his *An appeal to liberal Christians for the cause of Christianity in India*, published in 1825.⁶⁷ In it, he discusses the "religious and moral state of the hindus," describing sacrificial rituals, widow laws, polygamy, and extreme inequality between castes.⁶⁸ Another notable publication is *Lectures on India* by Caleb Wright that contained images of the Juggernaut deity and described the Hindu Shastras, referred to as "shasters."⁶⁹ By the late 19th century, reform had begun with the Brahma Samaj movement, and the work of Pandita Ramabai, who set up schools for young widows, one of which was Sharada Sadan near Bombay. Ramabai had previously traveled to the US, and was inspired by the American education system, and in the school they studied languages such as Marathi and English, as well as Sanskrit for the matriculation exam to Bombay University, and a variety of sciences and humanities are taught.⁷⁰ Her tour in the US captivated many Americans, and resulted in the creation of the American Ramabai Association, which raised funds to donate to schools and the cause in India; a 1903 report states that \$7,789.94 was raised.⁷¹ The school is described as a "little life boat in this stormy sea to save some of God's children that are despised by the world."⁷²

These widows were pretty much only of the elite Brahmin caste though, since the school had a tuition which was prohibitive to other castes, especially the lower castes who mostly lived in abject poverty. Even so, a letter from March 1889 states that six were discharged because their fathers did not pay the tuition. An American missionary named Judith Walker Andrews was engaged in a correspondence with Ramabai, and they exchanged many letters on the topic of Christianity, the school, and the religious and political climate of India at the time; it is noted that many in India were opposed to the education of women, and the institution was "novel and unpopular."

Conclusion

While I was limited by time to dig deeper into the archives to find American travelers who expressed other views of India in their writings, Bhagat's work provides details of some travelers who broke free of the prevailing negative stereotypes regarding natives and turned a critical eye towards fellow Americans and British colonizers. He provides the example of two Massachusetts natives who expressed nonconformist views of what they saw in India, both before the Indian Mutiny of 1857 (also known as the First War of Independence), showing that Salem was truly a hub for a diversity of thinking and views on India. One of them was William Rogers, who commented on British colonial activities in the subcontinent. Upon seeing atrocities in Ceylon, the island of Sri Lanka, he writes, "I suspect in no one instance had rapacity been more strongly exhibited than on this island," referring to the greed of French and British rulers.⁷³ He also scrutinized the actions of the East India Company, which while engaged in lawless conquest up to this point, "created wars, dictated peace; deposed [India's] rightful sovereigns," and proceeded to recognize the self-immolation of those sovereigns.⁷⁴ The other figure Bhagat mentions is Horace Putnam from Danvers, who met with American missionaries around

Bombay. He found that they were living in luxury, traveling by mode of carriage or palanquin, and resided in homes that “would be quite places at home.”⁷⁵ This clashed with what Putnam had previously been told of the missionaries’ state, which was “privation and suffering,” but he does not criticize them for this since he would do the same. ⁷⁶ Both men were delighted by the city of Bombay, and describe enjoying the food, hospitality, art and architecture of the Indians in their candid accounts of the place. However, not long after these travels, the Indian Mutiny of 1857 had Americans siding with the English, even though they had engaged in a war of independence against the British not one century before. Bhagat writes, “[e]xcept for an occasional missionary...few Americans condemned the Indian uprising vigorously...Most Americans at home cared little about the events on the far side of the globe, except as they involved traders and the opportunities for profit.”⁷⁷ This attitude seems to sum up the experience of Americans in India as a whole quite well. Perhaps the twenty-first century will show a different facet of the exchange between two of the largest democracies in this world.

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¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage books, 2003). Said’s *Orientalism* highlights the ways in which European and American colonizers viewed the East through the invented lens of “orientalism,” a multi-layered concept that he describes as “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (1). Though I do not go in depth into Said’s work, my analysis reflects many of his frameworks from *Orientalism*.

² From <https://yaleandslavery.yale.edu/>, “The Yale and Slavery Working Group (YSWG) is focused on a deep and thorough investigation of Yale’s historic involvement and associations with slavery and its aftermath.” Accessed July 28, 2022.

³ Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Descendants of the Reverend Francis Higginson: First "Teacher" in the Massachusetts Bay Colony of Salem, Massachusetts and Author of "New-Englands Plantation" (1630)* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: T.W. Higginson, 1910), vii.

⁴ Barrow, Ian J. Essay. In *The East India Company, 1600-1858*. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2017, 70.

⁵ Barrow, *The East India Company*, 71.

⁶ Bernard C Steiner, “Two New England Rulers of Madras,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 1 (1902), 212.

⁷ Barrow, 71.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Steiner, “Two New England Rulers of Madras,” 215.

¹³ Wheeler, J. Talboys. “Governorship of Mr Nathaniel Higginson.” In *Madras in the Olden Time: Being a History of the Presidency; from the First Foundation of Fort St. George to the Occupation of Madras by the French 1639-1748; Compiled from Official Records, 140–66, 1882*.

¹⁴ Wheeler, *Madras in the Olden Time*, 158.

¹⁵ Dalrymple, William. “1599.” In *The Anarchy: The East India Company, Corporate Violence, and the Pillage of an Empire*, 19. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.

¹⁶ Steiner, 220.

¹⁷ Wheeler, 157.

¹⁸ Attributed to Prof. Dexter in Steiner, 223.

¹⁹ Letter from Brother John Higginson to Nathaniel Higginson, 20 August 1697, Ms. N-1397, Box 1, Higginson Family Papers, 1628-1902, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts

²⁰ *Ibid.*

- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Letter from Father John Higginson to Nathaniel, 20 June 1699, Higginson Family Papers.
- ²³ Letter from Nathaniel Higginson to Brother John, 6 October 1699, Higginson Family Papers.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Return Letter from John Higginson, 29 August 1700, Higginson Family Papers.
- ²⁹ The end of Higginson's saga seems to be disputed. Joan Mickelson Gaughan writes in *British Women in India* that Higginson left Madras and his wife in July 1693, and died in November, whereas the records I came across indicate that he went back to London with his family and died there in 1708. This shows the paucity of information about these influential men and women from the 17th century.
- ³⁰ Higginson, *Descendants of the Reverend Francis Higginson*, 6.
- ³¹ Wheeler, 181.
- ³² Higginson, 7.
- ³³ Return Letter, Higginson Family Papers.
- ³⁴ Goberdhan Bhagat, *Americans in India, 1784-1860* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1970), xxiv.
- ³⁵ Ibid., xxiii.
- ³⁶ Rajender Kaur and Anupama Arora, *India in the American Imaginary, 1780s-1880s* (Springer International Publishing AG, 2017), 5.
- ³⁷ Kaur and Arora, *India in the American Imaginary*, 4.
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- ³⁹ Kumar, "A Remarkably Opulent Country."
- ⁴⁰ Carl Edward Thompson, *Travel Writing* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2011), 45. Thompson provides more detail about the impacts of travel writing, "[t]he genre also worked a crucial influence on the evolution of other literary forms in this era, such as poetry and the novel. The proliferation of accounts of voyages and travels reflects the fact that this was an era of ever-increasing mobility, as across Europe feudalism gave way to a more commercial, embryonically capitalist society."
- ⁴¹ Bartholomew Burges, "A Series of Indostan Letters," *A Series of Indostan Letters* (New York, NY: W. Ross, 1790), pp. 5-11, 10.
- ⁴² Burges, "A Series of Indostan Letters," 9.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 11.
- ⁴⁵ Kumar, "A Remarkably Opulent Country."
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Kaur and Arora, *India in the American Imaginary*, pg.
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⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Letter to Mother, April 1864, Calvin W. Smith Papers.

⁵⁶ Letter to Mother, May 1864, Calvin W. Smith Papers.

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⁷³ Bhagat, 122.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 123.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 125.