

The First Indian Author in English: Dean Mahomed (1759–1851) in India, Ireland, and England. By MICHAEL H. FISHER. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996. xviii, 368 pp. \$27.00 (cloth).

Dean Mahomed's journey from Patna to Brighton, by way of the Bengal army, the Anglo-Irish community in Cork, and London's West End, furnishes us with a unique opportunity to witness firsthand and from an Indian perspective the massive transformations which British colonial rule was unleashing in India and Ireland as well as in England itself. We get to experience this through Dean Mahomed's own words, for much of this book is built around Mahomed's published writings, and particularly the *Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794) which is reprinted here. Elsewhere, Fisher has filled in the gaps in Mahomed's life by combing through local archives in England and Ireland. Yet this close attention to recovering the voice of Dean Mahomed has not been undertaken at the cost of the bigger picture. Fisher carefully situates Mahomed within the broader historical context, and his explanation of the structure and composition of the Bengal army of the eighteenth century is particularly lucid and comprehensive.

Dean Mahomed was born in Patna in 1759; his family were respectable gentry who had fallen on hard times. At the age of ten, Dean Mahomed attached himself as a personal servant to an Anglo-Irish ensign, Godfrey Baker. It was through Baker's patronage that Mahomed went from servant to commissioned rank as a subedar. In 1784, accusations of impropriety prompted Captain Baker to resign and return to Ireland. Mahomed accompanied Baker to Ireland and settled in Cork until 1807. There, he married into the Protestant Ascendancy, and in 1794 published *Travels of Dean Mahomet*, a narrative of his years with the Bengal army which was written as a series of letters to an anonymous friend. In 1807 he moved with his growing family to London where he first secured work in a bath house, before opening a coffee shop-cum-restaurant known as the Hindostanee Coffee House. Bankruptcy brought an end to this venture, and in 1814 he relocated to Brighton. After another spell at managing a bath house, he raised sufficient capital to set up his own bath house which set itself apart from its competitors by promising authentic Indian shampoos (therapeutic massages). The success which had for so long eluded him was now his, and he soon numbered George IV and William IV among his clients. Yet success was short-lived, and by the 1840s his business languished. It would seem that his ability to play upon his Indian background, with its evocative associations with eastern science and therapies, had become redundant.

Fisher is too careful a historian to suggest that we can derive specific rules about culture and identity in the imperial contact zone on the basis of Dean Mahomed's experience, nor does Fisher inflate the literary importance of Dean Mahomed's *Travels*. It was not a major seller; it was not even reviewed in any of the major literary periodicals of the time. Moreover, by setting Dean Mahomed's written version of his life against what can be gleaned from other, mainly official, sources, Fisher has highlighted some interesting anomalies in *Travels*, including the fact that several of the chapters describe places which Dean Mahomed never visited. Careful detective work has also identified sections of Dean Mahomed's narrative that were lifted, nearly word for word, from other contemporary accounts.

As Fisher suggests, Mahomed's omissions, inventions, and reinventions can partly be understood as tactical choices that were designed to allow him to move about in

societies where racial, gender, class and religious boundaries were being renegotiated. Dean Mahomed took advantage of this flux as best he could, distancing himself from or accentuating his 'Indianness' as the situation warranted. At times his writings mimicked the stylistic conventions, ethical positions, and political agendas of his readers. What we would now identify as orientalism runs through his *Travels*. He speaks of Indians in terms that are strikingly similar to those which we would expect Europeans to use, e.g., referring to camp followers as "composed of the lowest order of the people residing in the country, and forming many distinct tribes according to their various occupations" (p. 25). Yet at other times Mahomed takes on the task of trying to mediate between India and Britain; this takes many forms, including an insider's view of an Indian funeral and marriage, and an effort to portray figures like Chayt Singh, vilified by Europeans, in a more sympathetic light.

Ultimately, it is the ambiguities and inconsistencies in the text, as well as Dean Mahomed's choice of literary forms and embellishments, that are the most revealing. It is not so much his life, but how he wanted his life to be seen, that allows us to appreciate just how complex cross-cultural navigation was in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Michael Fisher has done a first rate job in making such complex interactions so accessible, enlightening, and entertaining. I would recommend his book without hesitation to anyone interested in cross-cultural contacts or in the application of colonial rule in eighteenth century India.

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Living Liberation in Hindu Thought. Edited by ANDREW O. FORT and PATRICIA Y. MUMME. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. xiv, 278 pp. \$59.50 (cloth); \$19.95 (paper).

This collection of provocative, often technical essays has emerged from panels and discussions, beginning in 1989 and extending over several years, within the American Academy of Religion. They take as their starting point the observation that religious traditions around the globe and throughout history have held out the possibility of human perfection or liberation. Such a possibility is commonly known in the Hindu tradition—where "Hindu" refers to those "authors and schools of thought. . . [who] take the Veda and *Itihāsa purāṇa* as authoritative, and/or worship some form of Viṣṇu or Śiva" (p. 12n)—as *mokṣa* or *mukti*. What is striking about the Hindu formulation in comparative context is that it appears to promise liberation while still living (*jīvmukti*), that is, while embodied and prior to death. But what is equally arresting is that there is no consensus within the tradition about what an individual is liberated *from* or *to*. The collective intent of these essays is to inquire into the variety of Hindu opinions on these matters, as evidenced in the ideas of major thinkers or texts written during the classical period, and thereby to advance our understanding of a justly famous doctrine that has heretofore escaped nuanced examination.

Andrew Fort's introduction consists chiefly of brief summaries of the ensuing essays, although he also identifies some of the recurring questions: "What is the relation of liberation to embodiment? . . . How do forms of bondage such as *karma* . . . limit or prevent liberation? . . . How are *karma* and ignorance related? . . . How