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**ILLUSION AND DISILLUSIONMENT**

**TRAVEL WRITING IN THE MODERN AGE**

Edited by
Roberta Micallef

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The Chameleonic Identities of Mohan Lal Kashmiri and His Travels in Persianate Lands

Sunil Sharma

Two decades before the Victorian explorer and orientalist Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821–90) visited Mecca disguised as a Muslim hajji, a young native informer in British India, Mohan Lal Kashmiri (1812–77), traveled through Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia in the years 1831–34, under a nebulous disguise which was sometimes Muslim (Figure 1). Although Burton’s trip was undertaken as a personal adventure while he was on leave from his job with the East India Company, as a young man he had already traveled in disguise through the region of Sindh gathering information for his employers. Similarly, Mohan Lal was nineteen years old when he was handpicked for such a mission because of his fluency in English, the new language of the British colonial administration, and Persian, the lingua franca of a large geographical area in Asia. He was to accompany an exploratory expedition led by Sir Alexander Burnes (1805–41), famously remembered as “Bukhara Burnes,” to the lands northwest of British India. The party traveled from Delhi through Panjab, across the Khyber Pass to Afghanistan, Central Asia and eastern Iran, in an attempt to gauge the political situation in the lands that separated the Russian and British empires. Although they were both quite similar in the way that they derived pleasure in playing with disguises, we find that “Burton was far more interested in parading his mastery over a range of identity roles than in actually adopting them,” while Mohan Lal’s chameleonic self-representation originated in negotiating several actual and potential identities, i.e. Kashmiri, Hindu, Persianate, Shia Muslim, Christian, Indian, in a cultural climate where these national, religious, and cultural identities were becoming increasingly fixed. And it was as a traveler that he learned that he could actually manipulate his identity as a fluid category, depending on the local geography and history – both of the present and past. The chief source for our information on him are two editions of a travel book that he published in English (Figures 2 and 3), which I argue are autoethnographic accounts of his transformation from a traditional Persian munshi (secretary) to a westernized colonial subject.


Many travel texts produced by Indians in the first half of the nineteenth century can be categorized as Persianate in style and orientation because of the continued influence of classical Persian literary forms and tropes at this time. In the second half of the century, Persian continued to be used by elites even as travel literature in the vernacular Urdu began to proliferate, while there was a simultaneous confluence of multiple textual and generic traditions, chiefly in the way that English and other Indian languages also came to be increasingly employed in a distinctively Persianate mode. Written in such a literary milieu, Mohan Lal Kashmiri’s narrative is a lively account of his travels in the fast disappearing Persophone sphere. His work is located at the nexus of several traditions of writing travel – chiefly Persian and English – reflecting his unique personality, as well as the complex social and cultural realities of late Mughal and pre-1857 British India. It is characterized by an admixture of scientific and lyrical ethnography, with some sections, especially those that describe his encounters with people and visits to places,

2. Daniel Majchrowicz studies this topic in his recent dissertation (Majchrowicz 2015). See especially Chapter 2 on the emergence of Urdu travel writing. I am grateful to Daniel for his insightful comments on this paper, especially with regard to the question of adopting different identities in this period, which apparently was something of a common practice among both the British and Indians.
drawing on various forms of classical Persian poetry. Was this a conscious choice on Mohan Lal’s part or was his account a new form of writing in a new language over a palimpsest of a long tradition of Persian learning? An examination of his life and close reading of parts of his travel book will be a help in answering these questions.

Mohan Lal’s biography is as complex and fascinating as the cultural history of the nineteenth-century Persianate world east of Iran, a region that would include the modern-day countries of Iran, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. There were several facets to his background that would make him particularly suitable for the secret mission led by Burnes. Born into a Kashmiri Pandit family of the Hindu Zutshi community that had long served in the imperial Mughal administration, often as Persian munshi, Mohan Lal also took up this lucrative profession. In a similar capacity, his father, Rai Brahmnath “Budh Singh,” had accompanied Lord Mountstuart Elphinstone on a diplomatic mission to Peshawar in 1808–9. Budh Singh had two wives, one Kashmiri Hindu and the other a Muslim. Thus, as a child Mohan Lal “moved freely between the domestic worlds of his Brahmin biological mother and his Muslim stepmother, learning the languages and values inherent in each household.” This is not so surprising since the Kashmiri Hindu community was highly Persianate in their cultural orientation. Early on Mohan Lal found a life-long patron and friend in Sir Charles E. Trevelyan, a key figure in instituting English-language education at Delhi College in 1828, for the training of a new generation of anglicized Indians. Mohan Lal was among the first six graduates of this pioneering program. Trevelyan was, interestingly, the brother-in-law of Sir Thomas Babington Macaulay, notorious for the Macaulay Minute on Education that in 1835 would render Persian a homeless language in India in favor of English. With his education in English, Mohan Lal “formed the vanguard of new-model Anglicized Indian civil administrators that would expand over the following century”; although there were decided advantages to being chosen for this career path, many men like Mohan Lal “frequently felt the frustration of their consequent dependence on and, often, betrayal by their British employers [...] and suffered deracinement and distancing from their natal communities.” Although he did not feel he had full mastery over English, this was the language that he chose to employ for his writings. Mohan Lal

was a particularly valuable traveler for the British because of his ability to communicate fluently in Persian and English. According to Fisher, “both sides [the British and local people wherever he went] regarded him as a cultural intermediary,” and his experiences in Central and West Asia “clearly affected his self-conceptualization profoundly.”

The travel party’s leader Alexander Burnes posed as a British army captain who was traveling back home overland, their itinerary taking them from Delhi through Panjab, across the Khyber Pass to Afghanistan, Bukhara and eastern Iran, at a time when the Great Game in which several empires had a stake was already in full play. Burnes knew both Persian and Hindustani, the two languages that would be sufficient for a traveler in these parts. Burnes and Mohan Lal parted ways in Iran, with the former going on to the Caspian region while the latter returned to India. Bukhara Burnes gained instant fame when he published his report in 1834 as the three-volume Travels into Bokhara, Being an account of a Journey from India to Cabool, Tartary and Persia. In 1833–34, Mohan Lal published six short pieces that later were part of his travelogue in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta. These were in the style of ethno-archaeological reports contributed by European explorers. Subsequently, while undergoing further training to be a surveyor, he brought out an edited book edition of his travelogue: Journal of a Tour through the Panjab, Afghanistan, Turkistan, Khorasan, and Part of Persia, in Company with Lieut. Burnes and Dr. Gerard. During his sojourn in Britain in 1844–1846, where he went after the disastrous so-called First Anglo-Afghan War of 1839–1842 to lobby influential supporters to help him regain his heavy losses in Kabul, he brought out an expanded version of his travel book, with the title, Travels in the Panjab, Afghanistan & Turkistan to Balk [sic], Bokhara and Herat, and a Visit to Great Britain and Germany. Although written in English, this work often reads as if it were a translation of a Persian text in the author’s use of certain poetic tropes, a highly rhetorical style, and description of the wonders of particular places. At the same time, clearly, there is an attempt to write in a new ethnographic style modeled on European travel narratives. In this regard, it may be useful to employ Mary

8. Burnes 1834.
9. “A Brief Description of Herat”; “Further Information regarding the Siah Posh tribe or reputed descendants of the Macedonians”; “Account of Kala Bagh”; “A brief account of the origin of the Daudputras”; “A brief account of Masud, known by the name of Farid Shakargari or Shakarbar”; “Description of Uch Sharif.” These all appear in v.3, 1834.
Louise Pratt’s term “autoethnography” to Mohan Lal’s travel writings. Pratt has proposed that in contrast with European ethnographic texts, autoethnographic texts are composed by the other “in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations” in a process that involves “collaborating with and appropriating the idioms of the conqueror.” It seemed that Mohan Lal could not, or did not want to, give up his connection to the older, more romantic, style of writing.

In the first edition of his book Mohan Lal calls himself a munshi, but in the preface to the second edition he is at pains to explain that he was not Burnes’s munshi: that post was actually filled by Mohamed Ali of Bombay, while he himself was Burnes’s Persian secretary. Burnes writes in the preface of his travelogue, “I was also attended by a native Surveyor, Mahommed Ali, a public servant, who had been educated in the Engineer Institution of Bombay.”

He goes on to declare that

I also took a Hindoo lad, of Cashmere family, named Mohun Lal, who had been educated at the English Institution at Delhi, as he would assist me in my Persian correspondence; the forms of which amount to a science in the East. His youth and his creed would, I believed, free me from all danger of his entering into intrigues with the people; and both he and the Surveyor proved themselves to be zealous and trustworthy men, devoted to our interests.

It is clear that over time, and when he was preparing his book for a wider English audience, Mohan Lal decided to stretch the truth about his role on the trip and reinvent the role he had played. The English term “secretary” would have been more appealing at this point since it was grander than the traditional munshi. In the first edition, Mohan Lal is also apologetic about his limited knowledge of English, as well as his abilities to be a travel writer:

When I quitted Dihli, I did not know how to keep a diary, or to put down the names of places; but by copying a few pages of the journal for Mr. Burnes, I immediately possessed myself of the way in which the memorandums of a journey are preserved.

This display of modesty is absent in the second edition, presumably because by then he had gained a great deal of confidence in his abilities in English, as well as his position as a traveler. Apart from the different prefaces, the main differences between the texts of the first and second editions of Mohan Lal’s work include noticeable stylistic changes, deletion of the Persian or Pashto originals of poetry and inscriptions, and the addition of the European part of his travels that he undertook later. Thus, there are two levels of comparisons that can be made here: one between the accounts of Burnes and Mohan Lal, and the other between Mohan Lal’s two versions of his narrative. I will do a bit of both in this paper, providing instances where reading the two versions against each other can prove to be a fruitful exercise.

On the eve of his journey, on 20 December 1831, Mohan Lal went to say goodbye to a British friend affiliated with the Delhi College, Mr. B. Fitzgerald, who was ill in bed, and a very affective interaction took place that is more reminiscent of partings in Persian romances; he writes:

[Mr. Fitzgerald] took me in his arms, sighed, and told me he was very sorry for our separation, but hoped that I should have a successful journey. He gave me a great deal of advice, and told me to be assured of one thing, that this enterprising spirit of mine would secure to me the esteem and admiration of all Europeans, and even my own countryman. We shed a flood of tears at parting, which he seemed to feel very much.

Mr. Fitzgerald died about three weeks later, much to Mohan Lal’s sorrow. The display of emotion on Mohan Lal’s part when he left his friend and then heard about his death appears to be sincere, but the reader of his narrative is never quite sure when he is performing a certain scripted role, as of two lovers parting in a Persianate narrative or a poem (ghazal). There are several other instances of such affective responses to people.

Right from the moment of leaving home, it is clear that Mohan Lal’s identity was not fixed, perhaps even to himself, but appropriately malleable for his mission. While traveling in the Mughal and Sikh domains, he was most often taken for a Westerner, as when in Shikarpur, Sindh, he is called a “Farangi” [European] by people in the bazaar. In Peshawar people thought he was an Englishman, not a Kashmiri, “though my clothes were not like an [sic] European’s.” These statements suggest that it had more to do with his physical features, or being in the company of Europeans, that he was often mistaken for one of them. But he did not always correct people’s mistakes about who he was. There was a playfulness about his chameleonic identities as we see on the threshold of Central Asia, in the small village of Khail-i-Ak-

13. Travels into Bekhara, xi–xii.
14. Travels into Bekhara, xii.
17. Travels, 301.
18. Travels, 46.
hund [Akhun Khel], on the road between Kandahar and Kabul where Hindus would have been a minority, he writes, "I saw a Hindu making his bread, and said to him, "Ram, Ram," which is a compliment. He was quite astonished to hear this, and at the same time to see me in the Afghan dress." In his early travels Mohan Lal retained his own Kashmiri Hindu cook and servants, eating separately from Christians and Muslims, a practice that he gave up later. Over time he seemed to be drawn to Islam, though he also flirted with the idea of being a Christian.

While in Iran, where there were far fewer Hindus than in Afghanistan, Mohan Lal managed to blend into the local populace, as in the holy city of Mashhad. On September 14, he describes a little adventure:

I attempted to examine the bath at Mashhad, where none but Mohammedans are allowed to enter. I nearly risked my character, as the merchants, who suspected me to be a Christian, in the late journey, were present; but, luckily, for me they could not recognize me in the Persian attire, which I had purposely put on.

He could naturally not play these games in official circles. In late February 1833, he described a very cordial meeting in Mashhad with His Royal Highness 'Abbas Mirza, the Qajar crown prince and great proponent of modernization, just before the latter's untimely death. 'Abbas Mirza addressed him as the "Indian Mirza" and "asked me whether I was a Sunni or Shia, and that was my name. 'I am the friend of Panjtan, or five persons,' was my reply. 'Abbas Mirza was highly glad to hear this." Very often such vague references to his own religious and communal identity not only allowed him to infiltrate various groups, but also be embraced by them. It would seem that the local people figured out what he was not, without worrying about what he was, as illustrated by a somewhat touching episode:

The Mohammedans in Mashad, who became friendly with me, though they knew that I was a stranger, having no prejudices, were exceedingly delighted by my Persian knowledge, which they considered peculiar to their tribe. One Persian, who was respected by the party, sighed, and said, if I would be a Shia, or follower of Ali, he would willingly marry me to his daughter, who would be the mistress of a great fortune after his death. I smiled; and he again said to me, "Do not you think that the enlightened creed of the Shias will place you in heaven? You will gain nothing in other creeds, but repentance."

19. Travels, 324.
22. Travels, 186.
24. Travels, 23.
25. Travels, 27.
sical Persian poetry on cities and in travelogues, thus it is not surprising that Mohan Lal draws on this trope in his narrative. Needless to say, such a lyrical feature is absent in Burnes’s travel book.

As Mohan Lal exited the Indian subcontinent and entered the larger Iranian world, his remarks on women became conspicuously absent as he was drawn into an easy homosociality in a society where he had to depend entirely on his Persianate cultural orientation and was less protected by either his own background or his colonial employers. The unspoken rules of comportment and masculinity, conditioned by the rules of the popular Persian love lyric, the ghazal, where an expression of same-sex love signified multiple levels of friendship and fealty, allowed him to interact easily with individuals of varied backgrounds and social groups. In Peshawar, the cultural frontier of the two worlds, Mohan Lal performed this ritual with Khwajah Mohammed Khan, the governor’s son:

He came to my place, bearing a watch in his hand. After compliments, he sat upon my bed, and talked a long while with me in the Persian language with the utmost politeness. He was richly dressed, and had a shawl turban on his head, which increased his beauty. He is a very sharp boy of fifteen, and knows poetry. He recited a number of Afghani, or Pashto, and Persian verses; the following is a translation of one of the former [by Rahman Baba], which he prevailed upon me to write, and keep as a remembrance. He took a copy from me of some Hindi verses, which were full of love, and told me, when I returned back to my native city, I must remember to write him a letter.19

The recitation of poetry in several languages facilitated a smooth passage for our author, allowing a familiarity with local males who would otherwise have regarded him as an outsider.

A similar incident took place later in the trip, when in Mashhad he was drawn to a boy of sixteen or seventeen years of age named Haidur Ali, in the service of the Qajar Prince Abbas Mirza:

His countenance was graceful, and his elevated eyebrows over his heavy eyelashes looked very singular and charming. His white cheeks and ruby lips showed the delicacy of all his limbs. His curled locks, behind his ears, hung on a marble neck, and his eyes were azure. I have never seen a boy of such beautiful appearance and elegant manners. When he took leave of me, he said he hoped that we should meet again. We rose up and kissed each other, according to the custom of Persia. I praised his locks, which hung like black snakes on his white face; he laughed and repeated the following verse: “The lock


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of the Persian and the waist of the Indian are curling.”30

To anyone familiar with the conventions of classical Persian literature and the world of the literary mahfil (gathering), these exchanges would seem to be trite and almost scripted in following the ritual of establishing intimacy and friendship between two people. Mohan Lal seemed to dwell comfortably in the ideal romantic world of the lover and beloved of the ghazal, where the cult of the beardless youth was a staple feature of courtly love.31 But such Persianate values could sometimes clash with those being inculcated by his newly acquired training in English in the service of the British Empire.

About a month after his encounter with the Iranian youth Haidur Ali in Mashhad, Mohan Lal was in Herat, hosted by a chieftain Sardar Din Mohammad Khan. During his sojourn the host “told me to examine a youth, twenty years of age, who had represented himself as an English scholar. The youth, whose name was Sarkhush, was found to be a liar and deceiver, from the very first question put to him.” Although Sarkhush had the right characteristics worthy of a young Persian beloved, he failed in other ways:

He possessed a fund of Persian knowledge, and was the author of some poetry. He has several very singular habits; for instance, whenever he talks, he puts his little finger sometimes on his lips, and sometimes on his chin. When he speaks, he raises and again lowers the eyelids of his beautiful dark eyes; after that, he closes them suddenly. He asked me to take him to India, and recommend him to some gentleman for a good situation. I answered him, “If you are a good Persian writer, you will get a good situation; otherwise, all these [sic] your effeminate actions, instead of gaining the favor of gentlemen, will cause them to dislike you.”32

It would seem that Mohan Lal’s revulsion to the young man’s unmanly behavior was brought on by the latter’s violation of the norms of courtly conduct (adab) and ethics (akhlag) when he lied about his language proficiency in English. In the end, he did not measure up to either Persianate or British standards. These experiences were an important part of Mohan Lal’s travel experiences and he did not excise them from the second edition of his travel book, when he sought to reinvent himself as a worldly individual who had received an English education.

In addition to the admiration of beautiful women and young boys, an-

30. Travels, 195.
31. I discuss the figure of the beardless youth in the context of Persianate travel writing by women in my article, Sharma 2013, 119–31.
other prominent feature of classical Persian literary texts that Mohan Lal also favored was the rhapsodic description of places, chiefly the topography and architecture of cities. While in Kabul at the tomb of the Mughal emperor Babur (r. 1526–30) who had taken the kingdom of Delhi, Mohan Lal is transported by the beauty of the garden housing the emperor’s tomb, Bagh-e Vafa. He writes that he was “meditating whether I was dreaming of paradise, or had come into an unknown region.”33 Burnes, for his part, was also enthralled by the place: “I have a profound respect for the memory of Babur, which had been increased by a late perusal of his most interesting Commentaries.”34 After quoting from the emperor’s memoirs and offering a brief description of the place he declares, “I do not wonder at the hearts of the people being captivated with the landscape, and of Babur’s admiration; for, in his own words, its verdure and flowers render Cabool, in spring, a heaven.”35 Mohan Lal also mentions the memoirs of Babur. “We are highly indebted to the English translation of Babur’s Memoirs, which gives us valuable intelligence of the whole country of Kabul.”36 Thus, although Mohan Lal could have read the Chaghatai Turkish text Tuzuk-e Baburi in its sixteenth-century Persian translation, like his British companions he knew it as a guidebook through its recent English translation.37 In his first travelogue he provides the Persian text of two inscriptions: one in a marble mosque built in the time of Shah Jahan located in the same garden complex, and one on Babur’s tomb itself.38 He left these out in his second travelogue, as he did with all such inscriptions and Persian verses, presumably hoping to reach a wider and more general audience for the London edition. Combining his new knowledge with the conventions of traditional romance, he goes on to give a brief account of Kabul’s history as the ancient Bactria, along with the mythical connection of Farhad, the legendary Persian character from the love story of Khusrau and Shirin, to the place.

Mohan Lal did not usually provide details about the physical journey it-
wrote their accounts in Persian, and Yusuf Khan Kambalpoo, who was the first to write a travel book in Urdu. Mohan Lal’s style shares the Persianate features discussed above with them, but there is something new in his work as well. A marked shift in the abandonment of this style can be seen a couple of decades later in an English autobiography by another mushti Lutfullah Khan (b. 1802). Published in 1857, this book also includes a small section on travel to England at exactly the same time as Mohan Lal. Lutfullah’s remarks as a young man on his proficiency in English and physical appearance are reminiscent of Mohan Lal too:

I could read and write in the language well enough, and spoke it so well that some of my English friends often jestingly interrogated me whether both of my parents were natives of India, or one of them English, for my complexion and accent, said they, were different from the natives. I thanked them with a smile, and said their compliments were more than I deserved.

Lutfullah, however, did not seem to have performed his identities in the same way as Mohan Lal.

Mohan Lal’s representation of himself was part of the negotiation of various identities in the milieu of the peculiar social and historical mosaic of early nineteenth-century India, where the Mughal dynasty and courtly culture were witnessing their twilight and the colonial project was already underway in a large part of the subcontinent. While attention is rightly focused on his position as one of the earliest among anglicized Indians, a circumstance that allowed him easily to cross social boundaries and find a new role for himself in the Great Game of the nineteenth century, his Persian-language skills and Persianate cultural orientation were equally important factors in his self-redifinition. Persian was still a relevant language in nineteenth-century India and it was Mohan Lal’s knowledge of classical Persian poetry (sha’rī) and courtly conduct (adab) that allowed him to cross the frontier between India and the larger Persian world to its northwest, rather than just his knowledge of English, as claimed by his mentor, Charles Trevelyan, who triumphantly declared in the preface to his protégé’s book:

In the person of Mohan Lal we proved to the Mohammedan nations beyond the Indus our qualification for the great mission with which we have been intrusted, of regenerating India. We convinced them

that we are capable of producing a moral change infinitely more honourable to us than any victory we have achieved. 

It is no surprise that Mohan Lal was received cordially by rulers such as Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Lahore, Amir Dost Muhammad in Kabul, the Qajar crown prince ‘Abbas Mirza in Mashhad, Queen Victoria in London, and Kaiser Wilhelm Friedrich IV in Berlin, as well as by a host of other people from disparate backgrounds. All this attention doubtless complicated his sense of his own importance, but in the end, although he comfortably donned different masks, he was disillusioned as a long-cherished courtly way of life with Persian as the lingua franca faded into the annals of history before his eyes.

Mohan Lal played a central role in the so-called First Anglo-Afghan War of 1838–41 after which his more successful work, a voluminous biography of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan (d. 1863), Life of the Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul (London: Longman, 1846), was written. In contrast to this work’s newfound importance, his travelogue is hardly looked at now. The details of his later life have not been properly recorded. Apparently he became disillusioned with the way he was treated by the British and retired at the early age of thirty-four. According to his biographer, “he was swept away by the love of wine and women. He could not devote himself to a pursuit, whether politics or pleasure, half-heartedly; it possessed him entirely.” Sir Alexander Burnes met a more gruesome end during the Afghan war. While serving in Kabul as Resident, in 1841 he was hacked to pieces during the political turmoil. Mohan Lal was there with him but was able to hide out and save himself, no doubt due to his ability to adapt to different cultural contexts. Although Mohan Lal would never achieve the fame and notoriety that a traveler such as the adventurous Sir Richard Burton did, his disguises allowed him to explore different worlds and also gave him the confidence to publish his travelogue for a wider audience. Traveling at a very young age had a profound effect on his self-fashioning and confidence. In the places that he visited in the Persianate world, especially those that had a link to the Perso-Islamic or Mughal past, he was an explorer; but he was also a traveler, to quote James Buzard “roaming free of imposed borders and limitations” who “veer[ed] into those fertile fields for the imagination which lie to one side or the other of the tourist’s [or explorer’s] usual path, there to discover secret significances and unsuspected spurs to deep feeling – cultural treasures” such as Mughal gardens and tombs, Timurid mosques and palaces. Unlike

43. This work has been most recently reprinted as Seamless Boundaries: Lutfullah’s Narrative beyond East and West.
44. Lutfullah 2007, 120.
45. Travels, xiv.
47. Buzard 1993, 35.
Burton for whom “the [British] empire was founded on nothing but naked power,” for Mohan Lal it was the proper successor to the pluralistic and syncretic culture fostered by the Mughals, and did not impose a single identity on its subjects.

Although Persian was fast losing ground to Urdu and English, in Mohan Lal’s time it was still an essential component of the repertoire of skills that administrators and their assistants had to offer prospective employers. More than just Persian now, it was the Persianate cultural orientation found in Urdu and Hindustani that allowed people of various classes to interact with each other. Mohan Lal’s travel book, as an early example of a genre that is situated between multiple traditions, can be appreciated and understood as a Persianate work in English, and the author’s representation of himself is part of the negotiation of various identities in the milieu of the peculiar social and historical mosaic of early nineteenth-century India. He deliberately sought ambiguity in terms of his own identity and social relationships, often approximating the role of the poet-lover in the Persianate ghazal, which allowed him to view and record the world around him in a lyrical mode, drawing on the distinctive features of several literary and cultural traditions. But in the end, he was betrayed by all of them and English as a replacement for Persian as the official language did not fulfill the potential it had held earlier. Similar to Halide Edib, the Turkish writer whose life a century later was enmeshed in a sea of political upheavals and who forms the subject of Roberta Micallef’s essay in this volume, Mohan Lal drew on his knowledge of the Persianate past to make sense of a changing world. In his encounters with historical places and eventual disillusionment, he is also like the protagonist of Polidori’s novel analyzed in James Uden’s essay, in that ultimately he is unable to reconcile the past with the present. But while it lasted, Mohan Lal was an imaginative and lively travel writer, who revealed in the attention and fame that travel brought him.