

REFASHIONING IRAN

Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi

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Orientalism, Occidentalism and
Nationalist Historiography

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St Antony's Series



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Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography

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Persianate Europology

Perspectival knowledge

Recounting a situation experienced by most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century “Occidental” and “Oriental” travelers,¹ Mirza I’tisam al-Din, who journeyed to England in 1766–9 recounted: “The young and old gazed at my countenance and shape and I stared at their beauty and face. I journeyed for a spectacle and became a spectacle myself.”² Some 70 years later another Persian traveler, Prince Riza Quli Mirza, is reported to have turned abruptly to his translator and urged, “let us just sit down here on this bench, and look at these people passing before us.” Acutely aware that he was himself a spectacle, the Prince added, “[w]herever I sit they will be sure to come fast enough. I am as great a *tamasha* (rare show) myself, as anything here.”³ Commenting on this incident, his translator, the renowned Orientalist James Ballie Fraser, recalled, “And, sure enough, he was right. No sooner had we seated ourselves than the crowd began to gather round, passing and re-passing us in a manner that enabled us to see much more than we should have done had we been walking about; and my friend, now in a state of greater comfort, made free and amusing remarks.”⁴ Like Persian voyagers, Europeans also experienced the interlocking of gazes during their journeys to the “exotic Orient.” On a tour to the outskirts of Julfa in Isfahan on November 29, 1824, R. C. Money remarked:

In fact, in these busy and hurried scenes of life is much the same all over the world, whether in London or Paris, Pekin or Ispahan. Only here a Feringee [*Farangi*, European] creates a great stir. All run to look and stare; and I am induced sometimes to think that some malicious spirit had turned me into a curiosity, and that I am not what I am.⁵

Seeing oneself being seen, that is, the consciousness of oneself as at once spectator and spectacle, grounded all eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Oriental and Occidental *voy(ag)eurs'* narrative emplotment of alterity. The traveling spectators appeared to the natives as traveling spectacles; *voy(ag)eurs* seeking to discover exotic lands were looked upon by the locals as exotic aliens.

The anxiety and the desire to represent and narrate alterity were reciprocal amongst Asians and Europeans. The formation of modern European discourses on the Orient were contemporaneous with Persianate explorations of Europe (*Farang/Farangistan*).⁶ Asians gazed and returned the gaze and, in the process of "cultural looking," they, like their European counterparts, exoticized and eroticized the Other.⁷ In the interplay of looks between Asians and Europeans, there was no steady position of spectatorship and no objective observer. As understood by Asad Khayyat, the Lebanese companion of three Iranian princes who traveled to England in 1836, visitors and natives did not see things "with the same eyes." In Asad Khayyat's estimation, all narratives of alterity were perspectival and validated the cultural perspective of the reporter:

Some who are acquainted with the scenes through which their Royal Highnesses passed, and were in company with them at the time, will perhaps be astonished that they themselves saw not the same things which they described. To this it is but candid to reply, that their Royal Highnesses could not see with the same eyes as Englishmen, and being in a strange land, their language must seem to be quite *de traverse*, while yet it expresses the impressions which were made upon their own minds.⁸

There were recurrent European attempts to label as "uncivilized" those who did not see things "with the same eyes." Yet Persianate travelers narrated the spectacle of Europe and European onlookers reported the spectacle of the "exotic" Persians in their midst. The field of vision and the making of meaning were perspectival, contestatory, and theatrical.

Thus Oriental and Occidental travelers each saw themselves being seen and narrated the locals who narrated them. This conjunction of knowing subjects from different cultures, who gazed simultaneously at the Other and exhibited the Self, foregrounded the *transformation* of modern national identities. In these ambivalent encounters, the narrator-spectacles often fetishized the spectators and reduced them to visible signs of otherness.⁹ Through a process of projection and introjection, the visible features of the Other became loci for self-reflection and self-

fashioning for both Asian and European narrators.¹⁰ In this conjoined process the other served as a vantage for cultural mimicry and mockery.

As divergent strategies of identification and disidentification, mimicry and mockery were anchored in contesting local, regional, and global networks of power and knowledge. In the nineteenth-century Iranian political discourse, for example, identification with *heterotopic* Europe served as an oppositional strategy for the disarticulation of the dominant Islamicate discourse and for the construction of a new pattern of self-identity grounded on pre-Islamic history and culture. Mimesis (*taqlid*) did not signify only mindless imitation but was rather a strategy for the creative reconstruction of Iranian history and identity.¹¹ Correspondingly, Iranian counter-modernists represented Europe as a *dystopia* and thus sought to preserve dominant power relations and to subvert this oppositional strategy of secularization and de-Islamization. Thus mockery was not a “reactionary” and “traditionalist” rejection of Europe. By mocking Europe, counter-modernists were able to remake the Perso-Islamic tradition and culture in contradistinction to Europe. Both the secularist Europhilia and the Islamist Europhobia constituted Europe as a point of reference and created competing scenarios of vernacular modernity.

Persianate accounts of Europe, like Orientalist narratives, based their authority on self-experience and eyewitness accounts of alterity. Exotic others were observed and witnessed either at home or abroad. Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, for instance, was partly motivated by the visit of an Iranian envoy to France in 1715. Similarly, traveling Europeans ignited the imagination of the multitudes who viewed the exotic *Farangis* passing through their homeland. Among the multitude who surveyed the *Farangis* were the Indian and Iranian state-appointed *mehmandars* (guest-keepers), who were assigned to the distinguished foreign visitors.¹² James Morier (1780–1849), who traveled through India and Iran in 1810–12, described the *mehmandar* as “an officer of indispensable necessity in a country where there are no public inns, and little safety on the roads, for strangers” According to Morier, the *mehmandar* “acts at once as commissary, guard, and guide; and also very much in the same capacity as Tissaphernes, who in conducting the ten thousand Greeks through Persia, besides providing markets for them, was also a watch upon them, and a reporter to the king of all their actions.”¹³ J. P. Ferrier, who served as the Adjutant-General of the Iranian army, explained the notion of *mehmandar* as follow:

Foreign ambassadors, and European travellers of distinction, are generally favoured by the government with the attendance of a

mehmendar, whose task varies according to that of the person he is appointed to travel with. The English and Russians have in their treaties determined the rank of the *mehmendars* who are to accompany their ambassadors. The officer is responsible for all losses, accidents, and vexations that may happen to the person confided to his care; he rides forward to prepare all things necessary for his comfort and accommodation, which, by the terms of the *firman*, every village at which the party halts is obliged to provide gratis.¹⁴

Traveling in Iran between 1627 and 1629, Sir Thomas Herbert (1606–82) was assigned to Khwajah ‘Abd al-Riza, whom he identified as a harbinger.¹⁵ Sir John Malcolm, traveling in 1809, identified one of his *mehmandars* as Mahomed Sheriff Khan Burgashattee, who had shown him “a journal he had written for the information of the court by whom he was deputed, in order to enable them to judge, by the aid of his observations, what kind of a person and nation they had to deal with.”¹⁶ Sheriff Khan, whom Sir Malcolm described as “a keen observer,”¹⁷ reported:

What I chiefly remark is, that neither he [Sir Malcolm] nor any of the gentlemen sleep during the day, nor do they ever, when the weather is warm, recline upon carpets as we do. They are certainly very restless persons; but when it is considered that these habits cause their employing so much more time every day in business, and in acquiring knowledge, than his majesty’s subjects; it is evident that at the end of a year they must have some advantage. I can understand, from what I see, better than I could before, how this extraordinary people conquered India. My office is very fatiguing, for the Elchee [Ambassador], though a good-natured man, has no love of quiet, and it is my duty to be delighted with all he does, and to attend him on all occasions.¹⁸

The *mehmandars*, who as early as the sixteenth century closely observed the visiting Europeans, can be viewed as important authorities for the dissemination of knowledge about Europe and Europeans.¹⁹

Persianate voy(ag)eurs

Persianate travelers played a generative role in the development of Eurpology and the dissemination of “eyewitness” accounts of Europe. Persian speakers traveled to Europe as early as 1599 and kept records of their encounters with the *Farangi*-other.²⁰ Husayn ‘Ali Bayg, accompanied

by Antony Sherley, four secretaries, and 15 servants was dispatched to eight European courts in 1599. The four secretaries were 'Ali Quli Bayg, Uruj Bayg Bayat (also known as Don Juan of Persia), Bunyad Bayg, and Hasan 'Ali Bayg. The first three of these secretaries defected by converting to Christianity and respectively adopting the names Don Philip, Don Juan, and Don Diego of Persia. Don Juan wrote a memoir (1604), which was first published in Castilian, but no trace of the original Persian manuscript has been found.²¹

In the first decades of the seventeenth century, an Iranian woman journeyed to Europe. Teresia, daughter of Isma'il Khan, a member of the court of Shah 'Abbas, married Robert Sherley (1581?–1628) and accompanied him on two diplomatic missions on the Shah's behalf to Europe.²² It is reported that in February 1610 she landed "at Lisbon from Hamburgh" and "her lodging was appointed by order of the King of Spain in the Monastery of English Nuns..."²³ In the autumn of 1611 she visited England, where she gave birth to a son, Henry, who was named after the Prince of Wales.²⁴ She remained in England "about a year and half" and then returned to Iran via India. She departed for Europe for the second time in 1616, a journey that lasted until 1627. Teresia's return to Iran was prompted by the arrival of another Persian envoy, Muhammad Zaman Naqd 'Ali Bayg (d. November 1627), who challenged the credentials of her husband as the ambassador of Persia. Naqd 'Ali Bayg arrived in England in February 1626 with his son, Khwajah Shahsavar, and Khwajah's son Muhammad Shahsavar. Naqd 'Ali was granted an audience with Charles I on March 6, 1626.²⁵ To resolve the diplomatic confusion over the true ambassador of Persia, the King sent Robert Sherley, Teresia Sherley, and Naqd 'Ali Bayg back to Iran accompanied by his own envoy, Sir Dodmore Cotton. On the way back Naqd 'Ali Bayg and Muhammad Shahsavar suspiciously died before reaching India. Likewise Robert Sherley and Dodmore Cotton passed away after reaching Qazvin, the Safavid capital. "Teresia Comitissa ex Persia,"²⁶ described as "thrice-worthy and heroic lady," survived her husband and left for Europe after his death in 1628; she died in Rome in 1668.²⁷ The details of Lady Teresia's European voyages are not well known; but she must have provided invaluable information about Europe to the Safavids, who appointed her husband as a Persian ambassador to the "princess of Christendom."²⁸ In addition to these delegates, it is also reported that during 1642–3 Shah 'Abbas II, who appreciated European arts, dispatched a group of students to Rome to acquire Western painting techniques. It is believed that the delegation included Muhammad Zaman, also known as Paulo Zaman.²⁹ He joined the rank

of royal artists during the reign of Shah Sulayman and left an impact on Persian representational art.³⁰ The seventeenth-century delegations, like the later diplomatic missions, usually included secretaries, translators, and attendants.³¹ Both the high- and low-ranking members of these delegations became disseminators of knowledge about Europe. Likewise the defectors, who converted to Christianity, contributed to the formation of religious-based stereotypes and heightened the anxiety of establishing contacts with European Christians. Such anxieties became a defining element of the counter-modernist discourse.

Persianate knowledge of Europe increased in sophistication in the eighteenth century. Muhammad Riza Bayg (d. 1716) was one of that century's first travelers to Europe. As an envoy of the Safavid Shah, he reached Paris in February 1715, but skeptics like Montesquieu viewed him as an impostor. As a locus of public attention, Muhammad Riza Bayg was indeed a source of inspiration for Montesquieu's *The Persian Letters*. He had fallen in love with La Marquise Depinay Roussy, whom he married prior to his departure for Iran.³² Having outlived her husband who died when they reached the Iranian territories, Mrs Roussy-Bayg continued her journey to Isfahan, the Safavid capital, where she later remarried to her brother-in-law.³³ Not much is known about Mrs Roussy-Bayg but it is likely that she served as a native informant offering invaluable information about France and the rest of Europe to Iranian courtiers. Joseph Ēmīn (1726–1809), a native of Hamadan, was another traveler who visited England in 1751 and wrote an account of his life and adventures in English, which was edited by Sir William Jones in 1788 and printed in London in 1792.³⁴ In 1765, Munshi I'tisām al-Dīn, accompanied by Muhammad Muqīm, journeyed to England, and his *Shigīrf Namah* is one of the earliest available eyewitness reports of Europe written in Persian. Textual evidence indicates that Mirza Abu al-Hasan Shirazi had access to it when he wrote his *Hayrat Namah*.³⁵ Munshi Isma'il also visited England between 1772 and 1773 and wrote a travelogue, *Tarikh-i Jadid* (New History).³⁶ Many other eighteenth-century Persianates traveled to Europe but their reports and travelogues have joined the rank of other homeless texts. During his journey to Iran in 1821–2, for instance, James Morier reported that he had seen a book by Mulla Muhammad Isfahani, "who visited Europe, and England in particular, some sixty years ago, and who appears to have written a fairly succinct account of what he saw, with a short history of Europe and its political situation and divisions at the time."³⁷ Mulla Muhammad Isfahani, whose work remains unaccounted for, also wrote "a short notice regarding America, its discovery by Columbus, and its subsequent

revolutions."³⁸ An account of Europe and modern astronomy was also written in 1774 by Mir Muhammad Husayn (d. 1205/1790) who had visited France and England.³⁹ Like other eighteenth-century homeless texts of Persianate modernity, Mir Muhammad Husayn's *Risalah-i Ahval-i Mulk-i Farang va Hindustan* remains in manuscript form.⁴⁰ Mirza Abu Talib (1752–1806) also reported that while in Ireland he visited Din Muhammad Murshidabadi, who had written an autobiography and description of the customs of India in English.⁴¹

Among the Persianates who traveled to Europe during the first decade of the nineteenth century were Mirza Abu-Talib Khan (1752–1806) and Mirza Abu al-Hasan Ilchi (1780–1860), the Persian Envoy to the court of King George in 1809–10. Viewed as a "Persian Prince," Mirza Abu Talib traveled in Europe from 1799 to 1802 and was a locus of public gaze. Prior to his travel to Europe, he wrote *Lubb al-Siyar va Jahan Nama* (1208/1793), a general description of Europe and America, along with a brief outline of the works of Copernicus and Newton.⁴² Returning from his European tour, Mirza Abu Talib wrote a travelogue which was translated and published in English (1810), Dutch (1813), French (1819), and German.⁴³ According to Richard Herber (1773–1833), who reviewed the English translation of Mirza Abu Talib's travelogue in *The Quarterly Review* (1810), the book "appeared at a time, when the world, or at least all the idle part of it [England], was still on the stretch of curiosity, respecting His Excellency Mirza Abdul Hassan [Ilchi]." Herber began his review by noting that "[i]t is difficult to imagine any character whose first impressions would excite more natural curiosity, than an Asiatic traveller in Europe." Explaining the significance of the appearance of a report on Europe by a "boná fide Mahommedan," he wrote:

Now, when the ladies had once ascertained, by actual experiment, the length of a Persian's beard, and the texture of his skin and clothing; when their minds were pretty well made up what to think of their formidable guest, it was surely no unnatural desire to know that guest's opinion of them.

Herber viewed Mirza Abu Talib's travelogue as "a very agreeable present to the Western World," and hoped that in the East it would also "excite a spirit of imitation among those, who before considered the Europeans as a race of warlike savages."⁴⁴

Mirza Abu al-Hasan Ilchi, who traveled to England on a diplomatic mission in 1809–10, became "a gazing-stock for multitudes." His letter of May 19, 1810, to the *Times of London*, expressing "my thought of what

I see good and bad [in] this country," nurtured the public curiosity.⁴⁵ Convinced by the stereotypical views of Muslim men, a reporter noted that "His excellency has not availed himself of the Mussulman privilege which allows a plurality of wives. Although no man is more sensible of the beauty's power (as his admiration of our English ladies sufficiently evinces) he has (we understand from good authority) but one wife, and by her but one child."⁴⁶ The report added, "The progress which he had made both in speaking and writing English, within a few months, surprises all those who have the honour of his acquaintance; and we are assured, that he also converses freely in the Turkish and Hindoostanee languages."⁴⁷ On December 24, 1809, *The Examiner* reported that "Wednesday being the day appointed for presenting the Persian Ambassador to his Majesty, crowds not only assembled in the Park, but also in the streets leading to his Excellency's house, in Mansfield-Street, before twelve o'clock." In response to a countess's request "to obtain from me every information in my power concerning my friend the Persian," Lord Radstock wrote *A Slight Sketch of the Character, Person, . . . of Aboul Hassen*.⁴⁸ The extravagant "style of elegance" and expenditure for a "Dinner in Honour of the Persian Ambassador" at London Tavern, where the dignitaries toasted the "natural union between Persia and Great Britain," provided an occasion for political criticism in *The Examiner* (1810).⁴⁹

Mirza Abu al-Hasan Khan returned to Europe in 1819 and was again met with much public enthusiasm. Augustus de Nerciat reported, "During the residence of the above distinguished personage in Paris, he was so great an object of public curiosity, that he could not leave his hotel without being surrounded by a multitude of gazers."⁵⁰ Citing extracts from the French journals, de Nerciat quoted:

The Persian Ambassador, on returning the other day from a ride, found his apartments crowded by ladies, all elegantly dressed, though not all equally beautiful. Astonished at this unexpected assemblage, he inquired what these European Odalisques could possibly want with him. The Ambassador was surprised to find himself an object of curiosity among a people who boast of having attained the apogee of civilization; and was not a little offended at conduct which in Asia would have been considered an unwarrantable breach of good breeding.⁵¹

Interestingly enough, Mirza Abu al-Hasan had found Europeans wondrous enough to title the report of his 1809–10 travel "The Book of Wonders" (*Hayrat Namah*),⁵² a title connotatively similar to Munshi I'tisam al-Din's *Shigirf Namah*. Whereas in Europe Mirza Abu al-Hasan

was taken as evidence of exotic Persia, back in Iran his eyewitness report became evidence of self-experience in Europe. The exotic Persian of London became the narrator of the tales of the exotic *Farang*. James Fraser, traveling in Iran in 1821–2, reported that Mirza Abu al-Hasan “talks openly by name of the ladies of rank, duchesses and others, with whom he has had affairs of gallantry, and a whole host of minor females, some of whose letters he produces in Persian.” Disgusted by Mirza Abu al-Hasan’s representation of English women, Fraser added, “He produces, too, a miniature picture, which has been shown to the King as that of his mistress, without concealing the name; which, I regret to say, is that of a lady highly connected, and, I believe, considered respectable.”⁵³ Such accounts were also reported by James Alexander, who visited Mirza Abu al-Hasan in 1826.⁵⁴ Having visited Mirza Abu al-Hasan’s modern house, Fraser noted, “it was sufficiently apparent that he had picked up some idea of convenience, as well as other good things in England; he did not however approve completely of the plan of our English houses; he thought them deficient in ground space, and that the rooms were much too small.”⁵⁵

Impressed by Mirza Abu al-Hasan’s reports on Europe, in 1811 Crown Prince ‘Abbas Mirza sent two students to England.⁵⁶ Mirza Haji Baba Afshar, who studied medicine, returned in 1819 and was appointed physician to both the Crown Prince and the Shah.⁵⁷ In 1815, ‘Abbas Mirza sent an additional five students to England.⁵⁸ With the exception of Mirza Ja’far Tabib, these students returned to Iran in 1819. Among them, Mirza Salih had served as a guide to Sir Gore Ouseley’s delegation that reached Iran in 1811 and provided valuable information for the works of William Ouseley, William Price, and James Morier.⁵⁹ He also served as secretary for Sir Henry Lindsay-Bethune (1787–1851).⁶⁰ Like Mirza Salih, who was familiar with Europe and Europeans prior to his departure for England, Mirza Riza Muhandisbashi, also known as Muhammad Riza Tabrizi, was familiar with Napoleonic Europe and had translated an Ottoman book on this subject in 1807.⁶¹ Contrary to an established view, these students were well educated and familiar with Europe and Europeans prior to their departure for England.⁶² Muhammad ‘Ali Chakhmaqsa, another student, returned with his English wife Mary Dudley, whom he had married prior to his departure. Mirza Ja’far returned in the following year after the completion of his studies in medicine. Among these students, Mirza Ja’far and Mirza Abu Talib returned to Europe at later times.

Upon their return, the students made significant contributions to the building of new institutions and the dissemination of modern sciences.

Mirza Ja'far Mushir al-Dawlah Husayni authored a number of scientific treatises and taught mathematics and engineering.⁶³ Among his contributions is a comparative study of European and Iranian forms of governance.⁶⁴ He was appointed as the Ambassador to Constantinople from 1834 to 1844 and returned to England on a diplomatic mission in 1860. Likewise, Mirza Salih Shirazi returned to Europe in 1822–3 on a diplomatic mission. He founded *Kaghaz-i Akhbar* (1837),⁶⁵ the first Persian newspaper published in Iran, and wrote an influential account of the students' journey to Europe. Mirza Salih's travelogue offered a detailed political history of England and modern Europe, which included accounts of the English, American, and French revolutions. He published a version of his travelogue in the 1820s; and a selection from it was translated into English and published in 1824 in *Oriental Magazine*, a Calcutta publication, and reprinted in the *Asiatic Journal*.⁶⁶ Like his cohorts, Mirza Riza Muhandisbashi Tabrizi became an engineer helping the Iranian war efforts against Russia. Among his other accomplishments were translations of texts on Napoleon and the Napoleonic Wars.⁶⁷ In 1831, he also translated Gibbon's *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*.⁶⁸ The organized efforts of Mirza Riza and his cohorts were the manifestation of an emerging field of *Europloy* in Persian.

These and other Persian travelers, by constituting Europe as a differentiated site of analysis and gaze, produced a significant body of knowledge about European history, politics, culture, science, and economy. The knowledge about Europe, instead of constituting an isolated branch like Orientalism, was integrated into a general repository. The dialogic interaction of European and Persianate knowledge set in motion the dynamic process of modern cultural (trans)formations. Whereas European modernity actively suppressed the heterotopic context of its emergence, Persianate modernity celebrated its transformative conversance with Europeans. This active remembrance of the creative process of cultural hybridization and diversification is often misunderstood by the historians of modern Iran as an undifferentiated process of Westernization. Thus the rich textual sources of Persianate modernity, instead of being viewed as hybrid texts containing a double consciousness, are often dubbed as bad copies of originally European views and ideas.

The anthropology of modern Europe

Modern Europe was a topic of intense interest to Persianate travelers. They were all conscious that European ascendancy was a recent historical development and sought to uncover the mechanisms of societal change

in Europe. Writing in the late 1810s, Mirza Salih Shirazi argued that until 400 years ago the people of England were “wicked reprobates and blood-shedders” (*sharirah-i muḥṣid va khunriz*). Riza Quli Mirza believed that “in earlier times Europeans, particularly the English, were like wild beasts and animals and lacked industry.” Due to disorder and the extremity of oppression, the Europeans who were deprived of tranquility left for the New World and other islands. Writing in the 1830s, he argued that the new order in England emerged only about 250 years ago and viewed their newly-acquired wealth as based solely on commerce and industrial inventions.⁶⁹ The Persianate travelers’ understanding of mechanisms of change in Europe provided the imaginary scenarios for the transformation of their own society.

To elucidate the anthropological and sociological insights embedded in Persian travelogues, the following section focuses on Mirza Abu Talib’s evaluation of modern-age characteristics of the English in a section of his travel report devoted to “Virtues and Vices of the English” (*zīkr-i fazayil va razayil-i English*), which was written after the 1802 conclusion of his European journey. Using the taxonomy of philosophical ethics, Mirza Abu Talib divided his observations into broad categories of virtues (*fazayil*) and vices (*razayil*). He viewed these as “new age” (*jadid al-ʿahd*) characteristics with differential impacts on “the elite” (*akabir*), “the intermediates” (*mutavvasitin*), “the subalterns” (*kaminah-ha*), and peasants “whose diet consists solely of potatoes” (*khurak-i ishan munhasir bah putatus ast*). Conscious of the increased class “revenge and anomosity” (*bughz va idavat*) due to the “extravagence” (*taʿayyush*) of some and “hardship” (*taʿab*) of others, he forewarned of a great uprising like the French Revolution.⁷⁰

Mirza Abu Talib viewed “self-respect” (*izzat-i nafs*) as the first virtue of the English, particularly the elite. He argued that this quality was inculcated in individuals through “childhood education” (*parvarish saba*) and was maintained by the public censuring of those who lacked it. Consequently, the English were intolerant of “disrespect” (*bihurmati*) and were willing to sacrifice their lives and possessions in defense of their honor. “Acknowledgment” (*qadr-shinasi*) of individual achievements and “excellence” (*kamal*) was viewed as a second virtue. This elevated individuals’ opinion of each other and promoted their “national honor and credence” (*abru va ihtiram-i qawm*). But in other countries (*mulkha*) individual accomplishments, “even when a person’s excellence is proven” (*ba isbat-i vujud-i kamal*), remain unacknowledged because of the “false assumption” (*khiyal-i batil*) of individuals’ unexceptionality. He discerned an affinity between individual and national self-respect

and excellence. Whereas the recognition of individuals' excellence resulted in the "the production of honor and respect for [the English] nation" (*mawjib-i tawlid-i abiru va i'tibar-i qawm...gashtah ast*), the failure to acknowledge individuals' excellence in places like India had the adverse effect of contributing to the lack of regard for greatness (*'izam*), disrespect by foreigners (*biganigan ham ta'zim nakunand*), "the disappointment of artists" (*dilshikastigi-i ahl-i hunar*), and the nation's declining reputation and feeling of self-inferiority (*qillat-i abiru va hiqarat-i nafs dar qawm*).⁷¹ This linkage of individual and collective accomplishments was a novel contribution to Persianate modernity and modern subjectivity.

Mirza Abu Talib identified "the fear of law-breaking and the abiding of self-limits" (*hadd-i khish*) as the third virtue. The primary "civil benefits" (*favayid madani*) of this virtue was the promotion of "social cohesion" (*ittifaq-i jama'at*) and "the stability of collective and state power" (*paydari-yi quvvat-i millat va dawlat*). He argued that a "nation" (*qawm*) that possesses such a characteristic "will never regress" (*hargiz nazil nashavad*). The hesitation to "transgress the law" (*shikastan-i qanun*) contributed to "individual tranquillity" (*aram-i nafs*). This was achieved because of the "satisfaction with the imminently fulfillable desires and enjoyments" instead of "harboring distant wishes" that could not benefit the majority of the people.⁷² Linking the status of a "nation" (*qawm*) to "social cohesion," "civil benefits," and "individual tranquillity," Mirza Abu Talib's conceptualization transcended the conventional paradigm of Persianate political theory and its overwhelming concern with the stability of state and religion. His articulation of *millat*, *nafs*, and *favayid-i madani* (civil benefits) altered the conventional signification of these concepts. Applied to modern England, his notion of *millat* no longer signified a religious community. More significantly, his usage of *nafs* connoted "the individual" or "the subject" and not "the soul" as understood in classical Islamic philosophy.⁷³ In his evaluation of the English character, Mirza Abu Talib discerned a close linkage between the civil and communal welfare and the tranquillity of the individual.

The linkage of collective and individual welfare was embedded in a fourth virtue: "their rationalists' inclination for public welfare and aversion to public harm" (*righbat-i 'uqala-yi ishan bar favayid-i 'amm va tanaffur az muzzirat-i 'amm*). This inclination to public welfare was "essentially beneficial to everyone" (*mawjib-i fayidah-i zati-yi harkas*). Conversely, the lack of concern for public good was viewed as an "erroneous opinion and shortsightedness" (*zann-i ghalat va kutah-andishi*).⁷⁴

Offering an insightful understanding of modernity and consumption, Mirza Abu Talib explained the English's "enthusiastic endorsement of new mode" (*iqbal-i ishan tarz-i jadid ra*). He conceptualized modernity as *tarz-i jadid*, a phrase used to refer to poetic innovations introduced by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Indian–Persian poets. Applying *tarz-i jadid* to social innovations, Mirza Abu Talib argued that the desire for a "new mode" induced "the replacement of the older articles" (*tajdid-i asbab-i qadim*): "The renovation of forms of dress, furniture and other necessities have reached such an extent in London that the used articles of the previous year and season are abandoned and their possession and use is degraded." Cognizant of the aggregate effect of the desire to consume new commodities, Mirza Abu Talib observed that such expenditures were beneficial to "the manufacturing class" (*ahl-i hirfah*) and induced the rationalist "to ponder and innovate permanently" (*hamishah dar fikr va ikhtira'and*). The new innovations, in turn, resulted in cost and labor reduction. To illustrate how innovations led to labor reduction, he explained that "while fifteen male and female servants might be insufficient in an Indian household, due to the simplification of tasks a man and a woman is adequate here." The English desire for the "new mode" was explained by their inclination toward "task-facilitating instruments and appliances."⁷⁵

Concluding his observations on the "virtues of the English" (*faza'il-i English*), he explained their peculiar conception of "perfection" (*kamal*).⁷⁶ Having in mind the Islamicate notion of *kamal* as absolute perfection, he ascertained that the English "notion of *kamal* and human endeavor for its attainment is in essence based on a prior state and not the absolute." Elaborating this peculiarity, he reported that, according to the English, "if a human moves himself/herself from the state of an Ethiopian savage and cannibal and eventually reaches the state of the Philosopher Newton, there will be a time in the future that he/she will improve to the extent that in comparison, Newton will appear like the above mentioned Ethiopian." He explained this evolutionary and undisruptive progression as "a sequential and normal movement from a lower to a higher state." Disregarding his racist view of Ethiopians, Mirza Abu Talib keenly observed a European redefinition of *kamal* that displaced "spiritual *profectus*" with "worldly *progressus*." Writing on the modern notion of "progress," Reinhart Koselleck explains that, "The concept of progress was first minted toward the end of the eighteenth century at the time when a wide variety of experiences from the previous three centuries were being drawn together. . . . As part of a group, a country, or finally, a class, one was conscious of being advanced in

comparison with the others; or one sought to catch up with or overtake the others."⁷⁷ As an outsider, Mirza Abu Talib fully understood the significance of this conceptual innovation. Later Persianate observers of Europe internalized this concept and sought to explain the widening gap between the progress of Europe and the decline of their own society. This led to a *schizochronia*, or a fractured view of time of the self and time of the Other.

Mirza Abu Talib's list of English virtues was followed by a longer and more detailed outline of vices. "Prominent among their vices is the disbelief in religion and resurrection, and their inclination toward philosophy." He viewed "dishonesty" (*adam-i diyanat*) as an outcome of irreligiosity, particularly among the "subalterns of the land" (*kaminah-ha-yi mulk*). "Despite the fear of transgression against the law," he observed that "they never pass the opportunity of purloining and plotting to appropriate the property of the rich." For this reason, "the houses of nobility are always shut and they deal and speak only with their acquaintances." Observing that as yet "the ill effects of this [vice] are not apparent," he asserted that its prevalence could "affect the foundation of the government and have undesirable consequences."⁷⁸

"The arrogance induced by the past fifty years of power and good fortune" was listed as another modern vice. Due to price inflation and high taxes, he found England on the "verge of a protestation and an uprising" (*nalishi va qarib-i balva mibashand*) because of the high price of provisions and the imposition of new taxes." But due to arrogance, "they view as improbable imminent incidents and fail to prepare to avert them." Despite the vigilance of the police and arrangements to crush popular protestation, Mirza Abu Talib felt that the English government "fails to address the foundational problem" (*tadaruk-i asl nimi-namayand*). He asserted that such an arrogant neglect at the time of peace precipitates "high costs with the occurrence of the incident, as demonstrated with the [execution of the] late King of France, but then, it will be too late."⁷⁹ Like his contemporary Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Mirza Abu Talib was deeply impressed by the experience of the French Revolution. Whereas Kant saw the French Revolution as the "historical sign" of evolutionary improvement of humankind,⁸⁰ Mirza Abu Talib viewed it the exemplar of what is called the "age of revolution."⁸¹

A third vice was "passion for money and worldly affairs." He ascertained that "this characteristic is not harmful amongst them since they appreciate wealth and make utmost efforts to save." Protected by "security and legal arrangements" wealth and possessions were beneficial to their owners. But Mirza Abu Talib believed that passion for material

possessions “produced negative effects by fostering vile qualities such as jealousy, illiberality, and arrogance at times of weakness.” He expressed his own preference for generosity in a poem written for the enlightening of a person who preferred accumulating over spending money. In this poem Mirza illustrated that, unlike his rival, he preferred the treasure of Ms Grand’s love to the love for worldly treasures.⁸²

“Enormous desire for comfort and ease” was another modern vice. This only prevailed amongst the elite and the powerful and not among “the *bangis* as in India and the Ottoman Anatolia.” To illustrate the English desire for ease, he explained that his friends were often hesitant to help him with translations or mediate on his behalf. He reported that, whenever helped, aversion was so conspicuous in the continence of his British friends that he desisted asking for help. “If you carefully reflect, you will discern that the English have left absolutely no time for assisting friends and acquaintances.”⁸³ In comparison, he found the French quite courteous and willing to spend time with and assist others.

“Irritability and ill-temper” (*zud ranji va nizakat-i nafs*) was identified as a vice related to the desire for comfort and ease. Due to ill temper, the English were viewed as intolerant of “practical or verbal disagreements” (*harkat ya sukhani mukhalif mazaj az digari*). Mirza Abu Talib found this understandable in relation to “aliens” (*biganigan*) but inappropriate with regard to friends. For in his view “the tolerance of harsh and shrill words of friends” was a necessity of “civilization” (*tamaddun*). Mirza speculated that waspish temperament “would lead to the rupture of unifying links” (*mawjib-i qat’-i silsilah-i ittihad*) amongst the people and could bring about “the disintegration of the state” (*zival-i dawlat*).⁸⁴

Objectifying the English, Mirza Abu Talib observed that they “spend excessive time sleeping, dressing themselves, fixing their hair, and shaving.” To promote beauty, “they wear no less than twenty-five different articles of dress.” Taking into account the time spent on dressing, undressing, shaving, fixing hair, eating, entertaining, and sleeping, he calculated that they usually have no more than six hours left for work. The nobility, he observed, usually have only four hours for business. Critical of multiple layers of clothing, he viewed the coldness of weather as an unacceptable excuse for overdressing. If the English paid less attention to “beauty” (*zibayi*), they could easily reduce the layers from 20 to ten. He recognized as “unnecessary necessities [*luzum-i malayalzam*] the changing of day-wears to night-wears, daily shaving, and the norm of hair pressing.”⁸⁵

Another modern vice was “the multiplicity of needs and desires for pleasurable household appliances.” A major defect of this characteristic

was the wasting of invaluable time on shopping, changing, and installing despicable items in one's [living] quarters. Attention to such matters required "attentiveness to the essence of the self [*zat-i khud*] and natural inclination [*alaghah-i tab*] toward details." In Mirza's view such pre-occupations "cause the unfreedom of mind" (*mawjib-i 'adam-i azadi-yi khatir migardad*). While appreciating the comfort of tables and chairs, he suggested that the English could build their living quarters in a manner that would render the purchasing of chairs and tables unnecessary. Critical of English eating habits, he remarked that "more urgently they should give up excessive consumption of meats, drinks, and etc., unnecessary necessities that are contrary to reason and religion, and cause illness." Contrasting the luxurious life of the English with earlier empires, he wrote, "if one reflects on the history of Arab and Turkish conquests, two significant contributory factors could be identified for their victories: First, their minimal need for unnecessary equipment accounted for the rapidity of their movement, their freed nature (*azadi-i tab*), and their devotion of plenty of time to the acquisition of arts and sciences." The second factor contributing to these successful imperial expansions was their "minimal expenditures." These two factors reduced the costs of maintaining the empire and enabled the imperial rulers to cut taxes in half. By lowering taxes, "the people preferred them to their *ancien* rulers and befriended them." Mirza Abu Talib observed that "bravery and national unity (*ittifaq-i qawm*), cavalry, and weapons such as spears and arrows contributed to [Arab and Turkish] victories, but these alone could not account for rapidity of their conquests."⁸⁶

"Error in the recognition of the boundaries of sciences and languages" was identified as an eighth defect. Elaborating on this vice, he observed that "by learning a few words they consider themselves linguists and by learning a few scientific principles claim to be scientists and compose books on these subjects and print and circulate their nonsense." He noted that Greeks and the French had also confirmed his observation. Rejecting the assertion that "imperfect knowledge is better than absolute ignorance," Mirza Abu Talib argued that "their books do not contain [even] a fraction of accurate knowledge. It is indeed a misrepresentation and deforming of knowledge." He believed that "once these deformed views are imprinted on one's mind, [the person] will be incapable of accepting accurate knowledge." As an example, Mirza Abu Talib explained the negative impact of Sir William Jones's *Grammar* on students who sought his assistance: "My efforts to educate anyone who had studied that book prior to coming to me was rendered futile." He concluded that books like Jones's *Grammar* "are so abundant in London

that soon it will be impossible to distinguish exact books from the rest."⁸⁷

"Selfishness and profiteering" (*khud gharazi va qabugari*) was identified as another vice. He observed that "in the hope of personal benefit, they do not hesitate to cause extensive losses to others." Mirza Abu Talib explained that his personal experience in London was limited to interactions with owners of inns. "But the conduct in India of Colonel Hannay, Mr. Middleton, Mr. Johnson, and Dr. Blane gave me convincing proofs of it; for whenever they had any point to carry they would accept of no excuse from me; and having, by fine promises, prevailed upon me to undertake their business, as soon as they obtained their wishes they forgot their promises, and abandoned me to the malice of the enemy. Besides my own experiences in India, this [defect] is so evident that no one could doubt it."⁸⁸

Another modern vice was "the escaping of girls with their partners, the pre-nuptial copulation of wives and husbands, and the scarcity of chastity among women and men." These were caused by "the excess of women's freedom and the multiplicity of taverns and courtesans in London" (*kisrat azadi-yi zanan va vufur-i kharabat-khanah ha va favahish-i Landan ast*). To support this claim, he reported that there were 60,000 prostitutes in the parish of Mary-la-bonne in London. It was ironic that courtesans resided predominantly in districts with religious names like "Paradise Street," "Modest Court," "St. James Street," "St. Martin's Lane," and "St. Paul's Churchyard." Mirza observed that prostitutes usually resided near opera houses and theaters and that in such localities rooms were not rented to men.⁸⁹

Viewing their own culture as "flawless and proper," the English "rarely inquired into the advantages of customs and religions of others." Such self-congratulatory assertions were, in Mirza Abu Talib's estimation, "contrary to reality" (*haqiqat bar khalaq-i an budah*). As an example, he recounted being ridiculed for sleeping with his pants on instead of going to bed naked like the English. Having found the English natives unwilling to listen to his reasoned justification concerning his own cultural habits, Mirza abandoned the effort "to respond to their inquiries with logical explanation of the advantages of our own customs." Based on personal experience, he was convinced that "their mind [*dil*, literally "heart"] cannot be cleared of foolish imaginations and regrounded on a new truthful foundation." Having given up on reasoned comparative cultural discourse, he instead chose "to respond to them in their own fashion, which silenced them immediately." For instance, he responded to the ridiculing of Islamic ceremonies of pilgrimage (*hajj*) and

circumambulation of Ka'ba, by asserting that "it is similar to the Christianization of children via baptism in a church by clergymen." He proudly announced that during his European journey, "I offered thousands of such silencing responses."⁹⁰

Mirza Abu Talib viewed these defects as "new age" (*jadid al-'ahd*) vices. He attributed their appearance to "the abundance of affluence and the continuity of the government" (*kisrat-i nī'mat va tavatur-i dawlat*). He observed that as of yet no negative consequences ensued from these vices, in part because of English power and the prevalence of similar vices in neighboring lands. But he was convinced that the hesitancy of the English to acknowledge their vices paved the way to a detrimental future. Unwilling "to concede to these vices," the English were similar to "the contemptuous of India and the ignorant and arrogant Ottoman rulers." Compounding the ill effect of these vices was the English intolerance of praise for other nations: "If someone praises the ancient Arabs, Turks, and Iranians, they will deny the accuracy of these reports." He believed that "to a sharp intellect the weakness of their opinion is obvious."

Mirza Abu Talib attributed modern vices to "fashion" (*fashin*) and the frequent urge "to renovate the order of things." This habit was notable amongst Londoners who spent excessively on "unnecessary necessities most of which are lavish and intended for self-gratification" (*hazz-i nafs*). Observing the daily price inflation for carriages, horses, servants, theaters, balls, and masquerades, he argued that this promoted dishonesty (*bidiyanati*) and thievery since legitimate professions could not produce sufficient profits to support such expenses. He warned, "if they read incisively the books of history, they will learn that governments were overturned after the appearance of excessive expenses." Drawing a lesson from the colonization of India, he argued that in such an intolerable situation the English "could hand their land to rivals out of necessity like the people of Italy and India." Identifying the widening gap between the nobility and the lower classes as a cause of the French Revolution, he warned that extravagance, excessive taxation, and price inflation could similarly lead to "a great revolution" (*fitnah-yi 'azim*) in England. Such a revolution could bring about "the fragmentation of English power and the receding of their progress."⁹¹ In this sociological prognosis, Mirza Abu Talib did not take into account the function of colonial wealth in the lessening of social tensions in England.

As this detailed review of Mirza Abu Talib's understanding of contemporary Britain indicates, Persianate travelers were not gaping at an advanced culture. As keen observers of Europe, they were endowed with

a critical "double-consciousness." They critiqued European social settings with their own ethical standards and censured their own society from a European perspective. As anthropologists of modern Europe, they provide critical outsiders' perspectives on the emerging modern social ethos. These unexplored perspectives on Europe offer alternative sources for the study of modern European social norms. As critiques of their own societies, travelers like Mirza Abu Talib provided new perspectives on the dominant sociopolitical ethos. Fully aware of Europe as a significant new Other, travelers' oral and written reports of self-experience served as self-refashioning scenarios for Indians and Iranians.