

## The Creation of Indian Imaginary in Elizabethan England: the idea of James Lancaster

India was for centuries one of the main British colonies, a source of raw materials and finished products. The relationship between the Subcontinent and England has been extensively studied and analysed from different perspectives. However, since the earliest studies, the focus has often been on the 18th and 19th centuries, the years of the Empire and the predominant presence in Indian political life. Only a very limited amount of research is currently available on the beginnings of relations between these two kingdoms. Early travel and connections have started to be subjects of study since the middle of the last century, focusing on travel memoirs and explorations. This research proposal would like to investigate an aspect that has not been deeply studied yet: the transmission of news and its importance for the English political rise in India. What information did the English merchants and travellers have about the Indian subcontinent from the second half of the 16th century and how much had this information influenced the conquest of India? Similarly, was there a propaganda campaign to encourage English settlement in the Mughal Empire?

For my investigation, I would start from these two questions to wonder the concept of communication and its influence in the history of Aglo-Indian relations between the 16th and 17th centuries.

Through the course of history, the monarchs of the Tudor dynasty proved to be expert manipulators of information, carrying out a series of moves that today would be called *propaganda* in order to assert their figure and power. They managed to create stable and strong kingdoms, despite the conditions in England after the War of the Roses. During my bachelor I analysed the propaganda used by the Tudors to stabilise their kingdoms, which proved to be very complex and multifaceted, manifested in paintings, coins, architecture and of course legislation and literature. During my MA, I also tried to investigate the first contacts between India and England, analysing the Calendar State of Papers- Colonial documents between 1589, the year of the first official expedition to India, and 1612, the year of the foundation of the factory of Surat. Moreover, I have tried to explore the subsequent attempts of English historiography, in the imperial age, to reflect on India and the origins of the English presence in the sub-continent from Robert Orme to Thomas Babington Macaulay passing through James Mill, whose work had great influence in directing the nineteenth-century imagination on the English history of India. My analysis has certainly not excluded more recent historiographical perspectives such as those of authors such as Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Romila Thapar, who have been a point of reference for a new approach to the study of sources and for a change in the fundamentally "Eurocentric" perspective of previous historiographical reflection.

I would like to unite and extend this two research, trying to investigate the processes that led to the English decision to create a permanent colony in India and how the English used propaganda to establish themselves in India. For this current research proposal, I would start from the news that circulated in England about the Asian continent during the sixteenth century, through the diplomatic relations - although conflicting - with the Iberian and Mediterranean powers. The work will also include the activities of agents, spies and merchants who were considered key mediators at home for the influx of news and 'warnings' from the main continental trading posts. Therefore, a focus will be given to the complex concept of verification of the circulation of important works such as *The Suma Oriental* of Tomè Pires, and finally on how the demand and consumption of oriental and Indian products, such as cotton, spices, carpets, may have influenced the processes of idealisation of a territory. I would then provide an analysis of the documents and sources produced by the first travellers, hence, the accounts published in Richard Hakluyt's famous collection *Principal Navigations* (1559), as well as the wide production of sources published during the nineteenth century such as the letters received by the East India Company (*Letters received by the East India Company*. 1896. Vol I. Ed Danver F.C. and Vol II -III 1897 ed. Foster W.) or the numerous publications promoted by the Hakluyt Society concerning travels to the East (ex. *The Voyages of Sir James Lancaster to the East Indies. With Abstracts of Journals of Voyages to the East Indies During the Seventeenth Century and the Voyage of Captain John Knight (1606), to Seek the North-West Passage or The Travels of Pietro della Valle in India From the Old English Translation of 1664*). Finally, I would identify the information that the English themselves wanted to transmit about themselves to the Mughal Empire, in order to accredit themselves as privileged commercial interlocutors. This would be done through a comparison between other European competitors (Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch), for example through the architecture of the palaces they built in Surat or through the diplomatic activity of more or less official agents and intermediaries who established relations with the local rulers (through the "policy of gifts" or through outright corruption).

It would be interesting to devote part of the work to maps, investigating which ones circulated in England and which ones were produced there. An example of this is the Indian world map of 1770 by an unknown author, conserved in the Staatliche Museen in Berlin, in which it is possible to grasp the idea that the Indian populations had of Europeans.

In this way, I would like to have an exhaustive picture of the forms of propaganda and the progressive 'construction' of mutual knowledge, of the information network that accompanied the start of the English presence on the Indian continent, bringing together these two worlds that were so drastically distant at the time.

## **Originality of the research in relation to the state of the art**

Many historiographical developments in the last fifty years have led the historians to question the methods of study and analysis they have used up to that point. History has re-embraced a dialogue with other disciplines such as literature, geography and the social sciences. In addition, new ways of seeing the world led to questions being asked about the methods of interpretation that had hitherto been used, and to a search for connections rather than differences between peoples and distant lands. Sanjay Subrahmanyam's 2014 book *Connected Worlds* represented a central turning point for the study of Asia in relation to Europe. In addition to these two small historiographical revolutions, there is also a new idea of studies that no longer takes into account the main written sources but also - and most importantly - material sources as a starting point for innovative and little addressed analyses.

This research would like to fit into this new and lively field of study which I personally find very fascinating and stimulating. It would take into consideration an already substantial literature: on the cotton trade, on the evolution of the city of Surat, on Elizabethan propaganda, on the vision of the Orient in Elizabethan theatre and so on. My work, however, would have the ambition to try to take a perspective, at least in part, original, in order to combine all these studies and look for a *fil rouge* based on communication and manipulation of information. Both the concepts could represent a field of study not fully explored yet that could thus open a new window of interpretation and analysis. Nevertheless, the field of news studies is a gain new strength of research. At this very moment, Professor Brendan Doodley is leading a research group to investigate new sources for the European dimension of early modern news, integrating Ireland and elsewhere into the network of circulation, from 1550 to 1700. This project is well-known EURONEWS, it is funded by the Irish Research Council and is hosted by University College Cork in collaboration with the Medici Archive Project.

The word 'connections' is the central point of this research: connections between events, nations, disciplines. Historical research is moving in this direction, driven by a changing world that is increasingly looking for connections rather than differences. My project fits perfectly into this new approach but with a yet not fully explored point of view.

## **Pathways to work**

As it can be seen, the work is very complex and with a wide variety of sources. I believe that a research - in order to be as complete as possible - should not only use written sources but should range over various types of sources. I certainly do not exclude the use of memoirs, letters and travel reports already mentioned above and expand this preliminary bibliography as much as possible by searching for new sources in English archives and libraries. However, because of its strong multidisciplinary thrust, my analysis would also

like to embrace and research cartographic, literary, pictorial, architectural and numismatic sources wherever possible. We know, for example, that Henry VII used a particular coin for international trade in which he represented himself in such a way as to affirm his figure. This type of particularities coming from the study of daily lives will represent an example of how the research will be conducted.

I hope that this study proposal of mine can be included in the study programmes of the EUI, in order to analyse the Anglo-Indian encounter from another point of view, in the sign of a more global and topical perspective, through the comparison of historical experiences, connections, contacts, exchanges. The entanglement between several disciplines and the search for historical and logical connections between different sources, together with new approaches to the study of sources are all elements that have fascinated me since the beginning of my undergraduate preparation and that I hope to be able to continue, refine and develop in such a stimulating, formative and high scientific level environment as in the research programmes of the Institute.

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