UOS Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities (UOSJSSH)
ISSN# Print: 2224-2341, Online: 2310-0249 Volume: 4, No. 2 (Winter, 2015)

The First Indian Author in English

Dean Mahomed (1759-1851) in India, Ireland and England

By Michael H. Fisher, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 200, Pages, 368, Rs. 250.00

This book primarily is a biography and deals with the life, times and works of Dean Mahomed (1759-1851). Dean Mahomed lived a varied life. In 1769, following his brother and father, he joined English East India Company's Bengal Army and served as camp follower and subaltern officer till 1784. In this capacity, he traveled along the Ganges River up and down and visited number of places. In 1784, he immigrated to colonial Ireland and married an Anglo-Irish woman. In 1807, he again immigrated to London in England and later got himself settled in Brighton till his death in 1851. After his immigration to Europe in 1784, he shaped his own career and autobiographical works in an innovative way and "published them for the people among whom he lived". In this way he has been considered *the First Indian Author in English*.

The time of Dean Mahomed (1759-1851) was a period of utmost importance in the history of India and British imperialism. On the one end if it was an age of Reason and Enlightenment and most of the modern trends in thoughts and thinking owe their stability to this age, on the other hand it was an age of European expansionism in Asia and Africa. It was also an age of transition of political power in India from Mughals to English East India Company. In this regard modern researchers have focused this period in different ways, i.e., imperial policy, imperial administration and Anglo-Indian relations. However, these researches are almost constructed on European, particularly British sources. The modern researchers, especially Americans are of the opinion that these sources present a one way, the British view of Indian affairs, constructed on the foundation of imperial motives. In this understanding, the indigenous Indian population was depicted as a barbarian and uncivilized herd and under the moral obligations of "white men's burden" the British had "struggled hard to make the Indians civilized." Eric Stokes, Dobson, Jonathan and a number of other

researchers are of the opinion that in this understanding the British looked at India with "an imperial eye." The perception of Indian affairs and British Indian policies was guided by an "illusion of Permanence" of British Indian Empire. They wrote on India to provide a mask of legitimacy to Indian conquest.

The author of the book, Michael H. Fisher, seems to be extending the same arguments. Mr. Fisher is a professor of History at Oberlin College, Ohio, USA. Pre-war of independence British India is a potent field of historical studies for him. He has also written *The Politics of the British Annexation of India and Indirect Rule in India: Residents and Residency System 1764-1857*. However, the nature of British conquests, rule and administration in India; the role of Indian people in the extension of British rule in India; the place of Indian people under the Company's administration; the mutual relations of Indians and British under the company's rule; Indian Society under the Company's rule; influence of colonialism and imperialism on British society and place of Indian people in colonial Britain appear to be the central questions for his research. As Dean Mahomed lived a long and varied life in India, Ireland and England, so the author seems to be going through all these questions by the study of his life, times and works as *the First Indian Author in English.*

The central thesis of Mr. Fisher is that there is a "tendency to regard European imperialism as a one-way flow of people and power." The role of Indian people in strengthening the British imperialism in India generally has been neglected. However, the examination of Indian sources such as Dean Mahmomed's life and works provide a somewhat different picture. The Indians contributed a lot in fostering the Anglo-Indian society and British rule in India. They also enjoyed a respectable status in the colonial Britain through the performance of skills peculiar to Indian. Making Dean Mahomed a case study, he tries to prove that the establishment of the British Empire in India was primarily a work done by the Company's Indian servants and they had to suffer more hardships than the British. "Despite their subordinate position Indians did much to shape virtually every aspect of the British presence in India." The author exemplifies that in

1771 there were only 187 British officers in the Bengal Army. The real force working behind the conquests the Company's Bengal Army was tens of thousands of Indian people like that of Dean Mahomed to whom the services of commercial army were more beneficial as compare to the declining Mughal Empire and its constituent states. By republishing Dean Mahmomed's *Travels,* he wants to prove that the British had intentionally ignored the role of Indian people just to exaggerate the role of British officers in India. However, the potent Indian people like Dean Mahomed won a respect even in the colonial Britain inspite of a negative depiction of Indian character in Europe. On the same way, Dean Mahomed's Hidoostani Cofee, Shampoo Surgery and Indian Bathe also won a great appreciation

The author has very simply divided the book into eight chapters. The first is "A Text and Life of Dean Mahomed". The travels of Dean Mahomed are published in second chapter, as a new and first Indian source, for the study of history of the Company's rule in India. The third chapter deals with "The World of Eighteen Century India". The subsequent five chapters deal with Dean Mahomed's life in Bengal, Ireland, London, Brighton and his legacy, respectively.

The author seems to be establishing a view of all aspects of British India and colonial Europe by studying the life and times of Dean Mahomed as *the first Indian Author in English*. The book can also provide a glimpse of General American view of British Imperialism; which seems to be an apology for the American War of Independence against the British. Understanding the mutual relations and determining the mutual influences of Indians and the British, the author seems to be underestimating the role of ruling elite in mutual relations and influences.

As a whole the book is a well-researched academic work, having a potential of becoming a primary source in the history of imperial India and Europe. The publication of *the travels of the Dean Mahomed* as a part of this book can attract the attention of linguists and common people towards this book. However, the use of some abbreviations in the text can create some problems for the common readers. On the other hand, written in simple

descriptive way, it contains a glossary for Indian terms in addition to the glossary explained in *the Travels of Dean Mahomed*. A number of illustrations, plates, photos and maps along with sketch also included in the book to prove the central theme as well as to facilitate the readers' understanding. A well-established list of sources, supported by acknowledgements seems to be adding a lot to the authenticity of the work. The paper and printing is very soft and the book is also allotted an ISBN. The quality of research and paper prove the price of book justified.

Dr. Muhammad Shafique Bhatti is a Professor of History, Department of History, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan.