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**For the Record:  
An Educational Memoir in Late Colonial India**

SUMMARY: Mary Bhore's *Some Impressions of England* (Bhore 1900) forms a record of her travel to England and the basis of her argument for women's education in India. While Bhore does not openly criticise the empire, her account of her experiences as well as her very presence in England invert the logic of imperial relations by turning the colonial subject into the ethnographic observer. Her memoir is not unlike the writing of the "England-returned" men and women in late-colonial India, but it shows a curious absence of the personal. Drawing on Foucault's "Self Writing", I will argue that Bhore's text is as much "a narrative of the self" as it is about a shaping of the other; in other words, it is an attempt to turn her own experience into a kind of guide for her readers.

KEYWORDS: Empire, memoir, self writing, education, Mary Bhore

These are just women's books. Do you want them?

(Ambai 1993: 492)

[C]ommentators have found remarkably little to say about record offices, libraries and repositories, and have been brought face to face with the *ordinariness*, the unremarkable nature of archives, and the everyday disappointments that historians know they will find there.

(Steedman 2001: 9)

From the 1970s, feminist scholars have been turning to the archive to look for texts by women, texts that would challenge the literary canon and reshape linear and discrete understandings of national histories. Despite this ongoing scholarly work, rejuvenated by a more recent "archival turn" in historical studies, women's writings, the archives of women's organisations, and the ordinary artefacts of women's lives (letters, photographs, material possessions) remain understudied and

therefore underrepresented in narratives of empire. Scholars like Tanika Sarkar, Antoinette Burton and Geraldine Forbes have been working towards restoring some of these forgotten texts into the history of late-colonial India, and more recent publications have added to this growing body of research (Nijhawan 2013; Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley 2015). My essay focuses on one such forgotten text, written by a woman who herself is nearly forgotten, published at the turn of the century: Mary Bhore's *Some Impressions of England* (Bhore 1900).<sup>1</sup>

This is a slim publication that chronicles the period from 1898 to 1900, when Bhore was a student at Somerville College, at the University of Oxford. I will analyse the text both as the representation of a colonial encounter and as a colonial encounter in itself, for it crystallises a moment where the writer is as much the observer as she is the observed colonial exotic subject. The article will show how this text presents not only a negotiation of empire more broadly, but also a negotiation of Bhore's own imperial subjectivity at a time when it is put under pressure and scrutiny. Located at the very heart of the British empire, this account of Bhore's experiences in England provides evidence of how "imperial power was staged at home" (Burton 1998: 1). In relating her experiences, Bhore challenges imperial power relations even when she avoids open criticism; this is not particularly surprising, given the context of both when it was written and the audience it was written for. The critique then takes subtle forms and is evident partly in the fact that this encounter subverts the usual pattern of such interactions by taking place not in some far-flung territory of the empire but in its centre, and partly in the fact that this time it is the Indian subject turning an ethnographic eye on the colonial master. Building on this, my argument will consider Bhore's *Impressions* as self writing, drawing in particular on Foucault's use of the term, and concluding that Bhore's memoir is

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Bhore's name is alternatively spelled as Mary Bhor and Marie Bhor in various documents and in references made by scholars. However, for the sake of consistency and greater accuracy, I will keep the spelling used on the front cover of *Some Impressions of England*.

as much “a narrative of the self” as it is about a shaping of the other; in other words, it is an attempt to turn her own experience into a kind of guide for her readers. This form of writing becomes particularly relevant when thinking about writing from the empire for it expands the possibilities of how texts based on lived experiences but rejecting an autobiographical interiority might be read. Approaching Bhore’s text in this way then supplements Burton’s argument about colonial encounters “at home”, by turning inside out conventional understandings of autobiographical writing as well as the persona of the autobiographer.

In her formative study, Anjali Arondekar turned to the colonial archive in her attempt to recover the recursive traces of sexuality, noting the importance of archival aporia as well as the politics of archival presence (Arondekar 2009). This attempt to retrieve Bhore and her writing deals with similar questions of presence and absence, and the politics of representation: who gets forgotten and why? Who remains silent and who is allowed speech? In my analysis of Bhore’s *Impressions of England*, I hope to do justice to both what she herself is attempting to record (of herself, of her experiences, but also of her readers) and to bring her writing into the record of Indian history at the turn of the century.

### **Looking for Mary Bhore (1865?–1913)**

Mary Bhore was the daughter of Rao Saheb Ramji Gangaji Bhore, a second-generation Christian. Ramji Gangaji Bhore was born a high-caste Hindu, converting to Christianity as a young man in 1846 (American Marathi Mission 1882: 60).<sup>2</sup> It may be assumed that he became increasingly important in the Christian community in Maharashtra, and particularly Bombay, for he was conferred the title of “Rao Saheb” in 1888 “as a personal distinction” (Lethbridge 1893: 450). Anagol

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<sup>2</sup> The precise details of Mary Bhore’s life and family history are difficult to find and verify, so this attempt at a biography is necessarily patchy; I have noted my sources and tried to cross-check them where possible.



Fig. 1. Portrait of 'Miss Marie Bhor, Hon. Representative for India', ca. 1900, photographer unknown, black-and-white photograph (from *Lady's Pictorial*).

notes in her short biographical sketch of Mary Bhore that she benefited from the English education she had received as a young girl, as well as the relatively liberal background provided by her parents. “In the 1890s, she held a highly paid appointment as the governess to the princesses of Baroda” (Anagol 2005: 234), and in 1898, Bhore travelled to England for further study. She enrolled as a student in the Michaelmas Term of 1898 at Somerville College, University of Oxford, to study English Literature and remained there for one year. She then went to London for a short period to study kindergarten methods at the Fröebel Training College, which provided teacher training in Friedrich Fröebel’s reformed educational methods that emphasised holistic development and play.<sup>3</sup>

In 1900, upon returning to India, on the invitation of the Friends’ Liberal Association of Poona, Bhore gave a lecture on her experience of England, which was subsequently transcribed and published as the text now available to us as *Some Impressions of England*. It was also published in serial form in the *Indian Ladies’ Magazine* from January 1902. This was an English-language women’s magazine founded in 1901 and edited by Kamala Saththianadhan. Explicitly targeting a readership composed of a small group of elite Indian women who were fluent in English and European women who were interested in Indian women’s issues, its stated aim was to “serve as an effective link between European ladies and their Indian sisters’ (“Introduction”, *ILM* 1901a: 2).<sup>4</sup> Bhore was in the position to be asked to deliver this lecture because of her role as the First Assistant of the Poona High School for Native Girls, and the *Indian Ladies’ Magazine* describes her as a “well-known Indian Lady educationist”

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<sup>3</sup> Ann Taylor Allen provides an account of Fröbel’s methodology, as well as the relationship between early twentieth-century feminism and the kindergarten movement more broadly, noting that it was Fröbel who “reconfigured kindergarten teaching [...] as a female mission” (Allen 2017: 2).

<sup>4</sup> For more on the *Indian Ladies’ Magazine* as well as the larger network of women’s magazines in the period, see Puri forthcoming.

(*ILM* 1901b: 149). Over the following years, she went on to become the Directress of Female Education in Baroda and head of the Female Training College at Poona (Burton 1998: 226).<sup>5</sup>

The fact that this lecture was delivered in English and later serialised in the *Indian Ladies' Magazine* suggests something about Bhore's intended audience. The early pages of *Impressions* note that this was an audience that met every Saturday to "listen to the disquisitions of the most distinguished men in the Presidency" and so her "talk" would be "something simpler and lighter" (Bhore 1900: 1). While she stipulates that her focus will be the "social life of the English, the Education of the Women, and their influence on the life of the nation" (Bhore 1900: 2), it is clear from her justification—this is what interested her most "as a woman" (*ibid.*)—that this is an audience formed mostly of men, used to listening to monologues by other men. In speaking to them about "women's issues", Bhore is then explicitly making a claim for the significance of these matters to larger public life. This is also likely to be an anglicised audience, as well as one that might have included British civil servants and their wives; in other words, an audience that would be strikingly similar to the community of readers that the *Indian Ladies' Magazine* was attempting to form in its pages.

Writing in English then becomes a means of speaking back to the imperial centre, to a wider audience of anglicised Indians and British residents, but it is also a choice that implicates Bhore in the creation of an anglicised persona. In some ways her Christianity allowed her a mobile subjectivity that could straddle her Indian identity as well as her sense of British subjecthood, both in India and in England. As Lahiri notes, it is this combination of Christianity and womanhood that allowed women like Bhore to receive the hospitality that she is so impressed by in England: "they were not perceived by the British establishment as representing a challenge, whereas Indian male

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<sup>5</sup> See Barnita Bagchi's work on the history of education in India, especially the role of women educationists, for a broader context for understanding Bhore's position and career.

students (specially in the twentieth century) were regarded as both a sexual and a political threat” (Lahiri 2000: 76). However, placing this choice of language in the context of the Bombay Presidency adds another layer of complexity. Meera Kosambi and Padma Anagol’s work has shown the scope of women’s writing in Marathi in the period, both in terms of genre and style as well as an increasingly politicised consciousness. Indeed, there are striking parallels between Bhore’s *Impressions* and Pandita Ramabai’s Marathi travel memoir about her three-year-long visit to the US. An activist for women’s education and the improvement of the status of widows, Ramabai’s *The Peoples of the United States* (1889) is a singular account of her unusual life. In introducing this text, Kosambi notes that her warm and friendly reception in the US was based on the fact that “[a]s an English-educated Christian, Ramabai was similar enough to be ‘one of us’” but “her Brahmin mystique, dress, and diet, and her Sanskrit learning made her different enough to be exotic” (Kosambi 2002: 192). It is this combination, so akin to Bhore’s experience, that allowed her to turn an ethnographic eye to American culture while maintaining a staunchly anti-British stance. It is likely that Bhore would have been familiar with Ramabai’s work, and modeled herself in relation to her in some degree. But while writing in Marathi gave Ramabai a wider audience, she remained simultaneously an insider and an outsider: upper-caste, English educated, knowledgeable in Sanskrit and Sanskritised Hindu traditions, but a Christian convert. Both writers’ bifurcated perspectives then result in dual loyalties, but for Bhore her colonial identity was as important as her Indianness. Her decision to write *Impressions* in English is pragmatic, but also says something about her imperial subjectivity that chooses to express itself in the coloniser’s language that she had mastered so well.

Besides this memoir of her life in England, Bhore also wrote a number of articles in Marathi and English on female education in India. Anagol argues that these articles were central to the birth and development of the women’s press in Maharashtra, but Bhore went even further by offering encouragement and friendship to other



women who were starting their writing careers by reviewing books, writing biographies of famous contemporary women, and establishing “interpersonal bonds comparable to those developed between British and American feminists during the early nineteenth-century feminist movements” (Anagol 2005: 103). Anagol also notes that Bhore wrote a novel in Marathi, *Pushpakarandak* (“Basket of Flowers: A Homily”), which was published in 1890. I have not been able to trace this text though it does raise interesting questions about her choice to write fiction in Marathi rather than English, and her status as a bilingual writer.

In her career trajectory as an educationist, Bhore is not unlike the other “England-returned” young men and women who went to study at various institutions of higher education in Britain before returning to India. While Indians had been travelling to the imperial centre all through the nineteenth century, by the early twentieth century so much of this migration was led by the desire for educational attainment that the England-returned man had become an easy cliché. It is one such English-educated young man that Krupabai Saththianadhan mocks in her novel *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life* (1892) for his arrogance and affectation: “a dark-looking young man, dressed tightly in English clothes, very self-confident, and with an air of swagger which showed that he thought himself *somebody*” (Saththianadhan 1998: 82). On its publication, *Saguna* was immediately seized upon by contemporary reviewers as the first English novel written by an Indian woman and literary historians since have continued to repeat this hyperbolic claim.<sup>6</sup> Rooted in the context of Indian Christian communities and written rather self-consciously in English, it shows an unease with the protagonist’s various overlapping identities: an Indian subject of the British

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<sup>6</sup> This is reflected in Oxford University Press’s 1998 scholarly edition of *Saguna*, edited by Chandani Lokugé, which changes the subtitle from *A Story of Native Christian Life* to *The First Autobiographical Novel in English by an Indian Woman*. This renaming again emphasises this claim to be the “first” as well as the autobiographical nature of the novel which was not immediately apparent in the original title.

empire, the Christian daughter of Hindu converts, a precocious and studious girl who yearns for a medical education in England. Sathianadhan's discomfort with the pattern of imperial engagement evinced by the description of the young man sits awkwardly alongside her heroine's aspiration for the same. Cruelly thwarted, Saguna marries instead of continuing her studies. Sathianadhan's depiction shows how the very inequality of opportunity between men and women testified to the fact that these were members of an increasingly influential elite who found their newly-acquired status rather advantageous on their return.

In her study of the England-returned, Sumita Mukherjee argues that “[t]heir prestige, their new outlook and their ability to interact with the British governing classes in India were instrumental in allowing them to assume positions of power and authority” (Mukherjee 2010: 3). This of course, as Mukherjee points out, is closely linked to Macaulay's minute of 1835 that declared the need for an English education as crucial in the creation of “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Macaulay 1920: 116). This education was thus meant to strengthen colonial hegemony and act as a further disciplinary mechanism by training “interpreters” between the British administrators and “the millions whom [they] govern” (Macaulay 1920: 116). We see the effects of this approach in the writing of many of the England-returned students, who frequently chronicled their travel in memoirs and autobiographies. The long and uncomfortable journeys that they had undertaken not only widened their range of experience but also situated them as subjects of a larger empire. A key function of these writings was to fashion their identity, asserting a confident sense of Indianness alongside a more carefully negotiated imperial subjectivity. But even more importantly, in writing these memoirs they could put on display a new self that was entirely “modern” (Mukherjee 2010: 6). The genre of the biography or the memoir, in the Indian context, was perfectly suited to this construction of modernity, and in many ways Bhore's travel to England follows this familiar pattern. However, the fact of her gender differentiated her in important ways, and I will return to this later.

## The politics of representation

While *Some Impressions of England* remains a textual record of Bhore's colonial encounter, it is important to remember that imperial ideologies are negotiated not just in imagined spaces but also in actual physical sites. Bhore's presence in England has left few traces, but we can still spy her in records of council proceedings and women's magazines. A remarkable experience that she leaves out of her memoir is her attendance at the meeting of the International Council of Women (ICW), held in London in July 1899. Founded in Washington D.C. in 1888, this was a large international organisation working for women's rights. While Flora Annie Steel attended the meeting as the Acting Vice-President for India, the report of the proceedings lists "Miss Marie Bhor" as an honorary representative for India.<sup>7</sup> The report also notes that around ten Indian women who were then present in London had been invited to attend the meeting "as silent representatives of the great numbers of their countrywomen" (ICW Report 1900: 33). This silencing of the Indian women, even as they are meant to be represented, continues when the President of the council, the Countess of Aberdeen, calls upon "Mrs F.A. Steel to speak for the women of India, who were represented on the platform by Miss Marie Bhor, a Parsee lady now studying at Oxford, and several other Indian ladies in native dress, who had been brought together for the occasion by the kind assistance of Miss Manning" (*ibid.*: 71).<sup>8</sup> Though Bhore was perfectly capable of speaking at the meeting, she

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<sup>7</sup> Steel was a prominent and prolific writer who spent twenty-two years in India as the wife of an Indian Civil Service officer, and became deeply involved in various enterprises for Indian women's education. As Tim Allender notes, though Steel was genuinely interested in the lives of Indian women, in her writing and particularly in the guide book she wrote with Grace Gardiner, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (1888), her manner was both "emotionally remote and racially separate" (Allender 2016: 1).

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Adelaide Manning was closely involved in the setting up of the London branch of the National Indian Association, and became its Honorary Secretary in 1877 as well as the editor of its journal.

and her fellow Indian women receded into mere stage decoration in their unusual native dress. Misidentified as a “Parsee Lady”, her role, and that of the other unnamed Indian women, is to give legitimacy to the proceedings taking place in their name and add an element of novelty to the event. Indeed, Steel shows no hesitancy in speaking at length, despite repeating the well-worn caveat of being only a woman, and her manner remains supremely imperial.

As Ralph Crane and Radhika Mohan point out, Steel’s feminism is “tinged with imperial elitism” and “her sense of authority over Indian women is taken for granted” (Crane and Mohan 2013: 48). The tension between a “vision of international female equality and imperial suffragism” (Burton 1994: 194) in the outlook of British suffragists frequently led to the marginalisation of native women, with this being “an unusually personal, as opposed to a textual, example of this kind of silencing” (Burton 1994: 195). While Burton tries to recuperate Bhore, noting how she had probably given a speech at the congress, was presented to the queen in connection with the ICW festivities, and sang at National Indian Association soirees (Burton 1994: 195), this moment of speechlessness is worth remembering. The woman who emerges from Bhore’s writing is thoughtful, intelligent and articulate, and recounts experiences that encourage these qualities in her. This particular incident then feels anomalous, sitting uneasily besides the picture of social interactions she paints in *Impressions*.

At the same time, this is not an example of complete erasure, and Bhore reemerges from this silencing in a memorable photographic portrait included in the proceedings (Fig. 1). Reprinted from *Lady’s Pictorial*, it is a photograph of a young woman in modest dress but with a gaze that looks directly at the camera.<sup>9</sup> She wears little jewellery besides the bangles on both hands and her hair is closely combed back. This stark simplicity is mirrored in the plain, pale sari with its thin border and the demure blouse. This is an image of the modern

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<sup>9</sup> The *Lady’s Pictorial* was a women’s magazine aimed at middle-class readers and frequently included articles on women’s role in the public sphere.

Indian woman, one who is marked by her intellectual and her spiritual qualities, rather than any outward signals of wealth, beauty or family affiliation. In this photograph, Bhore is not reduced to an example of Eastern femininity, interesting to British readers because of her foreignness and the unchanging ideal of demure Indian womanhood. She is not simply there to be observed and examined, rather she takes the liberty to look back, defiantly meeting the gaze of those who look at her. Even though she may have not been allowed to speak up for herself at the ICW meeting, or at least all traces of her speech at the meeting have been excised from the official proceedings, her photograph records her palpable and unflinching presence.

### **Recording some impressions**

Bhore's speech is restored in *Some Impressions of England*, which is both the memoir of a journey undertaken as well as a complex ethnography of late-Victorian British culture and society. Rozina Visram's pioneering work has shown that the presence of Indians in Britain goes back at least as far as the earliest days of the British empire in India, and a growing body of historians and literary scholars of empire have argued that colonial subjects were adept at recasting themselves in relation to the customs and practices they found in England. In letters, journals, newspaper articles, travelogues and memoirs, these travelers left behind written records of their encounters that show how they "worked to transform themselves (variously, temporarily, and often unstably) from objects of metropolitan spectacle to exhibitors of Western mores, and displayed for audiences (both public and private, Indian and British) exactly how unmannered and coercive Western "civilisation" could be" (Burton 1998: 3). These men and women often acted as the most exemplary models of that civilisation, even while feeling on its margins and negotiating its terrain in ways that were not always straightforward or easy. Bhore follows this pattern, adopting and accepting without question the everyday conventions she witnesses. However, despite this lack of overt critique, the very fact of her presence in England and her attempt to record her experience disturbs

the hierarchies of empire and challenges the very basis of imperial power relations. Edward Said has called the intellectual work of writing back to the empire “the voyage in” (Said 1994: 216), drawing on the ideological function of the voyage motif in European literature (especially literature about the non-European world). Said’s metaphor is striking, for it brings together the figurative with the actual in a way that suggests how Bhore’s writing, like the writing of the England-returned, without explicitly expressing a single anti-colonial sentiment, unsettles imperial paradigms.

While it needs to be considered alongside the writings of other England-returned men and women, Mary Bhore’s *Impressions* was also part of the emerging literary tradition of Indian women’s autobiographical writing. Bhore writes in her own voice, using an “I” from the very beginning of her speech; however, the self that emerges from Bhore’s text is fleeting and reticent for the most part. She begins her lecture by noting her embarrassment at having been asked to speak, and justifying her acceptance of the “honour”:

I felt myself quite unequal to the task of addressing so critical and intellectual an audience [...]. I, however, laid the soothing unction to my soul that the surfeit of good things to which you have been treated so long, had perhaps begun to fall on you, and that your intellectual palate might not be unwilling to turn to something simpler and lighter. Therefore it was that I assented to the proposal. To dignify what I have to say to you with the title lecture would be a misnomer, a talk would be more appropriate. (Bhore 1900: 1)

Her speech is marked by hesitations, partly caused by the fact that she is not a “learned gentleman” and partly by rhetorical convention, the socially expected modesty a woman speaking in public is supposed to assume (Bhore 1900: 1). She presents her “talk” as “general impressions”, that would focus on the subjects that most interested her “as a woman” (*ibid.* 2). At this point, the uncertain tone of the first person speaker gives way to the seemingly objective, ethnographic gaze of the newly arrived traveller. Bhore registers that “surprise and bewilderment were [her] chief feelings for some time after arriving in England”, but this is not because it was grander than

what she expected (*ibid.*: 2); indeed, England had already been part of her mental landscape through her reading of magazines and books, as well as conversations with friends and relatives who had visited the country. The surprise came from experiencing the lived reality of English domestic life. As a consequence, she expends much energy trying to describe the ordinary day of an English woman, her role in and influence on the family, and her “influence on the life of the nation” (*ibid.*: 2). This speech then becomes an attempt to relate, in as objective a way as possible, the customs, habits, and mutual differences of these people that she had observed at close range during her English sojourn. In this, it mimics and reverses the tone used by generations of missionaries, imperial administrators, and European travellers in their accounts of India.

Besides a passing mention of how those she meets respond to her presence, a young Indian woman studying in England, her focus remains on the English people she encounters.<sup>10</sup> She is particularly observant of the everyday workings of “a well regulated family” (*ibid.*: 3) with its “well ordered nursery” (*ibid.*: 11), and the “higher form of manners” (*ibid.*: 13) taught from an early age to children of both sexes. But what is most remarkable to her is the freedom and training given to women from childhood onwards, so that the girls she meets when studying in Somerville College took the “complete freedom” newly granted to them as if it were “the most usual and natural thing” (*ibid.*: 19). The purpose of this education was sometimes for professional reasons, but more frequently, she notes, these young women were “buil[t] up with healthy minds in healthy bodies, fit to be the associates and companions in future life of the young men who are being prepared by the country to do the great work of the British Empire” (*ibid.*: 21). In this triumphant admiration of the imperial ideal of health and duty, Bhore becomes the perfect British subject, successfully inculcated by the logic of Macaulay’s claims about anglicised

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<sup>10</sup> She notes that everyone she met, “were all interested in my having come from India and in learning anything about it” (*ibid.*: 8–9).

Indians. Drawn to Indian men studying for the Indian Civil Service that she met in London, she “anxiously inquired” how they liked English life, feeling some sympathy at their “horror at having to return to a country in which life was comparatively so uninteresting and uninteresting” (*ibid.*: 35). These England-returned men, along with men who had received an education in India modelled on European guidelines, were often cited as the reason for extending a modern education to Indian women. Not only would this education elevate their intellectual abilities, but make them better suited mates to their educated husbands, capable of running well regulated households.

In this call for her Indian readers to admire and emulate the ordered workings of English family life, and by extension the ordered nation, Bhore is not only articulating a straightforward support for the British empire but engaging with a more complex set of discourses and ideas about the shared category of colonial subjecthood. The fond memories that Bhore shares about the time she spends with particular families and friends in England—friends who invited her to stay with them in the country (*ibid.*: 3), the students and tutors at Somerville (*ibid.*: 19–20), those who welcomed her to their social gatherings in Oxford (*ibid.*: 21), the generous and benevolent millionaire’s wife (*ibid.*: 23), the enormously wealthy but brave girl who disguised herself to work at a jam factory so that she could understand the lives of the poor (*ibid.*: 25)—reveal that imperial encounters were not always conflictual. Indeed, they could often lead to the forging of real friendships, enabling the formation of what Leela Gandhi calls “affective communities”. It is by recalling these affective bonds that allowed her to enter into the intimate lives of newly-made foreign friends that Bhore can articulate a shared commonality between her and them, between the colonised Indian woman and the imperial English woman. From this vantage point, she can then gesture towards that which remains unspoken in this text, but is noticeable in it nonetheless: a desire for claiming equal subjecthood. Sukanya Banerjee makes a powerful argument about imperial citizenship prior to decolonisation, noting that it is textual narratives rather than legislative enactments that



allow us to better understand it in this period of late-colonialism. While the legally defined category of citizenship did not exist in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century, texts like Bhore's insist upon the position of their writers as subjects of the Crown, standing alongside and equal to the English men and women of the metropole.

### Self writing

Despite this narrativisation of the self as an imperial subject and the ethnographic eye of Bhore's text, *Some Impressions of England* disappoints as a personal and intimate account because it reveals little about Bhore herself. What Mukherjee calls the "modern" genre of autobiography (Mukherjee 2010: 6), Dipesh Chakrabarty connects to the "public and private rituals of modern individualism in India in the nineteenth century" (Chakrabarty: 8), for the modern individual is "supposed to have an interiorized "private" self that pours out incessantly in diaries, letters, autobiographies, novels" (*ibid.*: 9). However, he observes that the numerous autobiographical accounts in India since the mid-nineteenth century have been "remarkably "public" when written by men" and "tell the story of the extended family when written by women" (*ibid.*). Bhore's memoir, though refusing to reveal her self as an "endlessly interiorized subject" (*ibid.*), does not fit this gendered model entirely. She does not write about her personal and familial life, but she does situate her personal experiences in public, though often feminised, spaces.<sup>11</sup> Bhore's *Impressions* then occupies an odd space within the genre of the autobiography in general, and Indian women's autobiographical writing in particular.

However, approaching Bhore's memoir by way of Foucault's "Self Writing" provides an insight into the absence of the personal. In this essay, Foucault expands his interest in how subjects transform themselves through the disciplinary technology of writing by

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<sup>11</sup> Banerjee makes a similar claim for Cornelia Sorabjee's autobiography, *India Calling*, through which Sorabjee presents herself as "an autonomous professional citizen" (Banerjee 2010: 132).

conducting a detailed analysis of Greco-Roman and Christian technologies of the self. The argument that Foucault builds through a meticulous and imaginative historical reading rests on a particular form of self writing called *hupomnemata*, or the notebooks or journals kept by ancient Greeks. While scholarship on the autobiographical genre often takes St Augustine's *Confessions* (c. 400) as marking the beginning of the form, Foucault draws our attention to the *hupomnemata* as another precursor of the autobiography.<sup>12</sup> In doing this, Foucault is shifting the terrain of the argument which sees the autobiography as personal and confessional, to something that though deeply personal, is not just about self-fashioning but also practices of self-formation that could be held up as examples to others. As he explains, *hupomnemata* were commonplace notebooks, sometimes created by private individuals but could also be public registers, where one might note useful quotations, events that had been witnessed or various reflections. These served the function of memory aids, but more importantly, "[t]hey constituted a material record of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering them up as a kind of accumulated treasure for subsequent rereading and meditation" (Foucault 1997: 209). In other words, they were "a material and a framework for exercises to be carried out frequently: reading, rereading, meditating, conversing with oneself and with others" (Foucault *ibid.*: 210). What is essential to these *hupomnemata* is that they are not just inward looking; they are as interested in creating

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<sup>12</sup> As Jill Ker Conway notes, St Augustine's *Confessions* set up the classic pattern of Western narratives that are impelled by the internal development of the male hero, though it is with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1781) that this hero is secularised (Conway 1998: 7–8). Indeed, it is Rousseau's Enlightenment man, led by an innate, natural morality and mannerism, who marks the beginning of a new social and political type, as well as a new mode of autobiography. In the context of nineteenth-century India, Chakrabarty notes unequivocally that "autobiographies in the confessional mode are notable for their absence" (Chakrabarty 1992: 9), though Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley's edited book challenges this assumption by expanding the definition of what might count as autobiographical writing.

the individual who is writing as they are in setting up a reciprocity with the reader encountering what is written.

This becomes an important intervention in the scholarly work done on autobiography because it short-circuits the linearity between the autobiography as a confessional mode to the autobiography as a performative mode, as a kind of textual practice that relies on exposing a secret, hidden self in order to create a self that can be publicly displayed. This kind of argument has been usefully deployed by scholars working on women's life narratives in particular. As Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley maintain, "[f]or a genre that is inherently confessional", notions of performance and performativity allow us to explore how women writers conceptualise the self in South Asia (Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley 2017: 1). Interrupting this seemingly fluid movement from confession to performance brings into question how a non-confessional text presents a self. Returning again to Foucault:

However personal they may be, these *hupomnemata* ought not to be understood as intimate journals [...] They do not constitute a "narrative of oneself"; they do not have the aim of bringing to the light of day the *arcana conscientiae*, the oral or written confession of which has a purificatory value. The movement they seek to bring about is the reverse of that: the intent is not to pursue the unspeakable, nor to reveal the hidden, nor to say the unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already-said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self. (Foucault 1997: 210–211)

Foucault is emphatic that this kind of self writing is neither about keeping forgetfulness at bay, not about confessing hidden thoughts and feelings. It is not intimate, even as it is personal. Its role is not to unearth something that has been buried deep, but to give expression to what is known, what one has heard, what one has witnessed. The fact that this is not simply about creating a "narrative of oneself" has a two-fold consequence: such a text allows both a shaping of the self and a shaping of the other.

Bhore's *Impressions*, like many of the texts written by the England-returned, attempts exactly this. I call it an "educational memoir" because it is told in the first person and is narrowly focused on a two-year period of study. There is no attempt to conceal that this account is based

on her personal experiences and indeed, it is precisely because she has undergone these experiences that she can assume the authority to speak about them in this manner. However, in mining her personal experience to write what is finally a guide to higher education and domestic life in England, she has to walk a tightrope between recognising her position as remarkable (for the insight she has had into English society) and yet entirely unremarkable (for all she writes about is ordinary and mundane). It is exactly this ordinariness of experience that allows her to hold it up as exemplary: because this is a representative experience, the lessons learned from it can be abstracted and held up as maxims.

*Some Impressions of England* is not an inward exploration, but a record of specific encounters that have shaped a particular kind of self and, most importantly, collating them in a memoir can shape its readers in a particular kind of way. In presenting a detailed description of family life in England and the kinds of freedoms afforded to English women from their infancy, Bhore takes a positive view on English women's habits and experiences, holding them up for a similar appraisal by her readers. In the final pages, her essay marshals these observations about a foreign, though familiar society, to make a strong argument for the education of girls in India. At this point, the memoir explicitly becomes an advice manual. She finally concedes: "I do not say all English women are perfect and that there are no faults in their society" (Bhore 1900: 36). However, she makes a plea for the education of Indian women on the same lines as she has observed in England for English girls, so as to give Indian girls the opportunity to exercise their innate "brightness of intellect" and "strength of character" (*ibid.*: 37). Drawing attention once again to herself as a woman speaking about women's "pursuits and sphere of work" (*ibid.*: 38) to an audience that is largely male, she concludes with the importance of seeing this as essential work for both men and women. The final lines of her speech are given over to Tennyson, with the frequently-quoted stanza from "The Princess" (1847) which ends: "If she be small, slight natured, miserable,/ How shall men grow?" (*ibid.*: 39). A poem about a heroic and unconventional princess who establishes a women's

university before finally falling in love with a prince, who had entered it in disguise, and settling into a happy marriage, it was often referred to in Victorian appeals for women's education. By ending on this note, Bhore not only shows herself as an educated and cultured woman but also aligns herself with ongoing transnational debates about women's changing role in the public and private spheres, a debate that the readers are encouraged to participate in.

## Conclusion

Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, Bhore uses her travelogue to give voice to her experience as an Indian woman visiting the heart of the empire. It is an encounter that is shaped both by her gender and her Christianity, and further mediated by her clear admiration of English domestic life and the culture of easy socialisation between men and women. Despite the absence of any anti-colonial sentiment, I have argued that this is an Indian woman "writing back" to the empire, observing and describing the imperial metropole, instead of being the object of the colonial gaze. Attempting to piece together her biography reveals that even her presence at the International Council of Women meeting in London was entirely marginalised in official proceedings, except for the unexpected portrait from which she looks out with unflinching directness. Bhore herself does not record what must have been a memorable experience in her memoir perhaps because of the sting of this erasure. However, this memoir is less personal than one might expect though it does fit within the pattern of similar writings by England-returned men, and less frequently women. Adapting Foucault's notion of self writing to Bhore's *Impressions* is then an attempt to bring a different perspective to bear on this kind of writing, for it is a conceptual frame that shakes up the usual ways in which autobiographical writing has been seen as confessional or performative. Read through Foucault's paradigm, Bhore's text is about a kind of self-formation that can be held up as an exemplar to its readers: both in the sense of being a model to look up to and a typical example.

I began this article with two epigraphs: one from the feminist writer Ambai and the other from the historian Carolyn Steedman. Both writers here are speaking about the archive, and while elsewhere they recognise the lure of the archive, the expectation and desire it creates, in these lines they speak of its ordinariness and its silence. In Ambai's short story, the library and its collections are slowly turning to dust, but certain kinds of documents are consigned to that fate more quickly than others. The disinterested, slightly disapproving librarian stows these "women's books" on unreachable shelves that are never dusted, and the dust-coated books then by extension themselves become detritus. Steedman's archival work brings her face to face with the disappointments of the archive, but in a slightly different sense from Ambai's dismay. What the historian most frequently finds in "record offices, libraries and repositories" is the mundane stuff of everyday life. In many ways, Bhore's text is completely unexceptional. However, recovering traces of her presence in fin-de-siècle England and restoring the contexts for reading the short record of her sojourn bring her back to history, offering us another account of what it meant to be a female colonial subject who was able to turn the lens back on to the empire.

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