

Poverty Theory in Action:

How Romesh Chandra Dutt's European travels affected his theory of poverty, 1868-1893

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ABSTRACT

The history of economics literature includes limited studies on how the act of travelling impacts economists and their ideas. Much fewer still on the travels of lesser known economists such as Romesh Chunder Dutt. Dutt (1848-1909) was the founder of Agricultural Economics in India, a civil servant in the imperial administration, a writer and an Early Nationalist fighting for Indian independence. On his first trip to Europe to sit the civil servant examination in 1869, Dutt was a part of a small minority of Indians travelling because the act of leaving one's home was still discouraged in India at the time. Dutt, on the contrary, thought travelling should be encouraged as it would deepen Indians' knowledge and understanding of modernity if they were to see with their own eyes the progress in Europe. Dutt returned to Europe two more times in 1886 and 1893 to show his family Europe, to see more of the continent and to teach at University College, London. Dutt was one of the first to understand that studying poverty required him to go to see the worst forms of it. Theorizing on poverty, Dutt's primary research interest, involved several actions, notably leaving his home. Some research has been done on his collection of data in rural areas in India. Little, if at all any, work has been done on how his European trips impacted his ideas on poverty. My article fills this gap by looking at Dutt's published travelogue of his European travels.

Travelling opens up our mind, broadens our ideas, enlarges our sympathies, and makes us better fitted to receive new impressions and new incentives to work.

Romesh Chunder Dutt (Dutt, 1896, p.165)

On Romesh Chunder Dutt's first trip to Europe, the mood was "gloomy" and "solemn" as he and his friend, B.L. Gupta, travel on the first leg of their journey by boat from Calcutta to Madras on 3-7 March 1868 (Dutt, 1896, p.2). Their plans were unknown to their friends and family. Traveling was discouraged at the time, making it unsurprising that Dutt writes in his travelogue: "our guardians would never have consented to our crossing the seas"(Dutt, 1896, p.2). In Dutt's mother tongue, the Bengali word for travel, *bhraman*, derives from the Sanskrit root word, *bhram*, and means to make a mistake or err (Sen, 2005, p.2). And yet, Dutt set off on a month long journey to take an exam, not available in India at the time, that would make him the second Indian ever to become a civil servant in the imperial administration, rendering the "almost impossible success" a reality (Dutt, 1896, p.2). In a context of such negative attitudes towards traveling, what persuaded Dutt to travel? Apart of the answer lies in the quote above: Dutt believed that travelling "broadens our ideas" and, further down the page, he writes that traveling is "one of the greatest sources of instruction and pleasure"(Dutt, 1896, p.165).

As an historian of economics, how do I then study how Dutt's traveling broadened his ideas, and what he learnt from the new impressions he experienced? First, to be clear about the basics: traveling is when an economist leaves her home, her comfort zone to go see and experience another, foreign space. I use David Turnbull's idea that travel writing is a way to make the distant and unfamiliar into the 'here' and familiar (Turnbull, 2003, p.289). The economists that document their travels write their thoughts, feelings, reactions on that experience. I study Dutt's travelogue consisting of extracts from letters he sent home during his three visits to Europe in 1868-1871, 1886 and 1893 respectively (Dutt, 1896).

Secondly, I need to identify the key components of a travelogue. There are a few different ways to conceptualise travel writing, however, one thing seems certain: the genre has a binary nature based on a premise of opposition between home and elsewhere (Boianovsky, 2018, pp.151–152). Moreover, travelogues are a certain form of knowledge. Thus, if knowledge construction creates space, as Turnbull (273) puts it, then it follows that travel writing produces a third space. There is the space the economist comes from, the space she visits and a third that is produced by her being in that foreign space. Some imagery may be helpful here. If an economist reasons from her armchair, as Harro Maas theorizes, then during her travels we can imagine that she brings a 'figurative' armchair with her (Harro Maas, 2011). We now have an economist in a foreign space with her armchair. We cannot ignore that the other space is undeniably changed, creating a new space. My focus is understanding that third space.

Finally, I assume that traveling has an inevitable impact on my protagonist. The assumption is supported by several other sources, most notably by Till Düppe who writes that “traveling is a form of experience that does not reduce to observation, [...] instead, the traveler faces, confronts, is exposed to, and is interrogated by, the foreign” (Düppe, 2016, p.82). What then does the act of traveling produce? I ask, more precisely, what knowledge on poverty did Dutt create through his travels? I answer the question by investigating the link between the two different types of sources – Dutt’s travelogue and published texts in economics.

Section I – Theory in Action

When reading the scant literature in the history of economics on traveling economists, there is a sense that the studies focus on how the economists impacted the receiving country, as opposed to how the travels affect an economist’s thinking – e.g. Hayek’s trips to Chile (Edwards and Montes, 2020; Caldwell and Montes, 2015). (There is an excellent exception by Düppe on Tjalling Koopmans’ visit to the Soviet Union (Düppe, 2016). As Boianovsky reminds us, travel has been controversial within knowledge creation in economics. George Stigler argues that you can learn more about the world in your local library, something Herbert Simon later coined the travel theorem (Boianovsky, 2018, p.151). The travel theorem is “an assertion that a little experience goes a long way” (quoted in (Boianovsky, 2018, p.151). If an economist can get more information from reading books, then local knowledge is perfectly transferrable over time and space. Economists like Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, James and John Stuart Mill, and Richard Jones seem to have agreed as they never felt the need to visit India to study her economy (Boianovsky, 2018, p.154). And yet, the Greek root of the word theory helps us understand that theorizing involves leaving one’s home (Boianovsky, 2018, p.152). Moreover, all theoretical discussions around how knowledge is produced point towards the fact that knowledge or theories are created through action.

Theory is an active exercise that involves traveling somewhere unfamiliar. Acting out theory seems necessary for understanding. From my own experience, a larger number of my students understand economic theories when I conduct exercises that have them ‘act out theory.’ For instance, they divide their labour while making paper aeroplanes, like Smith theorized after he observed a pin factory. My students figure out what diminishing marginal returns mean by stapling pieces of paper together. They quickly realise that dividing up labour is both efficient and boring, and more than one stapler per person is useless. Similarly, Joseph Schumpeter labels Arthur Young’s travels as “theory in action” (quoted in (Boianovsky, 2018, p.157). Experiences like in-class active exercises and travel produce a deeper understanding. As we are studying economists traveling, we can predict that additional things happen. A traveling economist may also confirm and/or adjust a theory.

The question now is how to examine those actions. I need to start by understanding the primary source. My primary source is the travelogue, which is a text about someone's travels with varying objectives. For instance, Dutt, as will be discussed more below, wrote letters home to tell his friends and family about what he experienced, which he later published as a book. The text ultimately involves three spaces – the first is the traveler's home space, the second is the traveler's destination and the third is the product of the traveler experiencing and taking part in the second space. Travel writing includes observations and anecdotal facts about the second space. Finally, a travelogue invariably includes comparisons between the first and second space, one of the products of the third space. Indeed, Dutt, along with his contemporaries, believed in travel particularly because the comparative method was essential for the study of human progress – one of Dutt's major research interests. As one Indian wrote at the time, there is "no method so successful for [the study of human progress] as the comparative method"(Sen, 2005, p.200).

Next, I need to understand how the observations and anecdotal experiences found in Dutt's travel writing are different than the kind found in published economics writing. Clearly, the anecdotal evidence found in travelogues are a different kind of data collection. I find Paul Cohen's concept of experience useful here, consisting of thoughts, feelings and behavior of immediate participants (Cohen, 1997). Cohen theorizes the personal nature of human experience, moving away from the detached context associated with research and laboratories. Along with identifying the different spaces and comparisons between them, I have thus identified examples of Dutt sharing his thoughts, feelings and interactions with other people. Finally, I link Dutt's experience with the theories in his published works to gain an understanding of how the travels impacted his thinking on poverty.

I need to make a final remark on my approach here. As said, I assume that travelling impacts a traveller's thoughts, ideas, theories. Much literature on meaning making would back up this assumption e.g. Mikhail Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). Consequently, I see no need to find instances of Dutt explicitly confirming that this or that experience changed his perspective on human progress or poverty. His experiences inevitably did. The question is rather how.

Section II – How and Why did Dutt Reject the Travel Theorem?

A brief biography of Dutt shows a life of varied and rich travels. According to Dutt, knowledge and understanding, it seems, could not only be acquired from books. Dutt (1848-1909) was born into a Bengali family of British East India Company employees in Calcutta well known for their literary and academic achievements. He was part of the first generation to graduate from an imperial university in India, finishing his degree at Calcutta University in 1866. Two years later, he set off on his first travels to

Europe with his friend Gupta on what felt like to him and their “wisest friends [...] an impossible undertaking”(Dutt, 1896, p.2). Dutt and Gupta set off on the voyage, despite the taboo of traveling in India at the time, to study with professors at the University College, London and sit the civil service examination of 1869 (Dutt, 1896, pp.16–20; Wilson, 2016, p.340). Dutt succeeded with his goal, becoming the second Indian to be appointed an Indian Civil Servant in 1871 employed as an assistant magistrate and collector (Wilson, 2016, p.340).¹ In 1883, he became the first Indian to be appointed district magistrate, eventually serving in Bengal, Burdwan and Orissa. He was the president of the literary association of Bengal during its founding year in 1894. He served as president of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1899 held in Lucknow, and he presided over the industrial exhibition held in Benares 1905 in connection with the twenty-first session of INC.

He wrote several works on history, economics and translations of Indian Classics into English (Gupta, 1911; Raychaudhuri, 2004; Rule, 1977; Mukherjee, 2010). In 1897, he became professor of Indian History at the University College, London. From 1898, he regularly contributed to famine and tariff debates in the internationally recognised alternative leaning newspaper *The Manchester Guardian*. His studies on deindustrialisation, the urban-rural polarization of India’s economy and rural (un)development was and is still a forceful argument in Indian historiography (Goswami, 2004). Through historical studies of India’s economy, Dutt argued that India had been deindustrialized and impoverished by the imperial regime (Dutt, 1902a, 1902c, 1902b, 1901). Dutt brought attention to the excessive taxes draining the Indian peasants of their already very little wealth, which exacerbated deaths during droughts leading to some of the worst famines in Indian history at the end of the 19th century. Dutt’s successful career and productive research activities earned him the labels of Indian economist, Early Nationalist and founder of Agricultural Economics in India.

Dutt travelled around Europe, he worked in England and visited several parts of his home country. He sees the need to travel – see quote at the beginning of this article – and so rejects the travel theorem. And yet, I have not found any research on how Dutt’s travels impacted his economic ideas. In fact, there is little research on Indian travels altogether, apart from Simonti Sen’s study of how Indian travelogues helped to conceptualise nationalism (Sen, 2005). Research tends to focus on European experiences in India – e.g. (Raj, 2000b, 2000a) I fill this gap by studying Dutt’s published travelogues of three different trips to Europe in 1868-1871, 1886 and 1893 respectively.

¹ The first Indian to be appointed in the Indian Civil Service was Satyendra Nath Tagore (1861-1941). He was a Bengali literary figure from one of the leading families in Calcutta during his time, most known for winning the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Dutt published a travelogue entitled *Three Years in Europe* first in 1872. He published three more editions adding other trips to the book – the third edition was published in 1890 and the fourth in 1896 (I have yet to find the date of the second edition). The travelogue consists of edited extracts from letters Dutt sent home during his trips, which includes detailed explanation of his experiences, encounters and impressions. The letters were not initially intended for publication. He was persuaded to publish them by his publisher, because the publisher thought it would serve as a good travel guide for Indians going to Europe (Dutt, 1896, pp.i–ii). I analyse the latest edition, which is the longest with 377 pages and eleven chapters. The first four chapters are about his first trip to Europe, which would have been the whole content of the first edition. Chapters five to ten are about his second trip, added to the third edition, and chapter eleven is about his third trip, added to the fourth edition.

In the preface, Dutt acknowledged that his travelogue does not meet the standards of typical travel writing, but agreed, nonetheless, to publish the letter extracts to fill the gap in the literature of Indian travels to Europe. He was explicit that it “may therefore serve as a guide-book to Indian youths intending to visit Europe, containing at the same time something more than ordinary guide-books profess to do, - viz. the views and opinions of a foreigner for the first time coming in contact with the noble institutions of the West”(Dutt, 1896, pp.i–ii). A part of the text certainly reads more as a diary, rather than a travel guide. Dutt includes some minute details about how to get from place to place, sometimes with exact departure and arrival times. He weaves in his impressions about fellow travellers on the same boat or excursion, and his thoughts, as well as those of his friends and mentors, on the political, socio-economic and societal context (e.g. he mentions “two sensational cases” of divorces in the English tabloids (Dutt, 1896, p.150). Other parts of the text, most noticeable as of chapter seven (Dutt, 1896, p.204), reads more like a travel guide, including practical information on things to see in a particular city, e.g. where the see-worthy sights are located in Paris or how to hire servants in London, historical information on different places such as Belgium and Sweden, and several sections on specific European wars, e.g. the Franco-Prussian War, 1870-1871 (Dutt, 1896, p.376).

In terms of travel itinerary, the reader gets an instant impression that Dutt’s travels were extensive, stretching from Naples in Italy all the way to the North Cape in Norway. As mentioned, Dutt and Gupta left on their first trip in March 1868 to sit the open competition for the Indian Civil Service the following year. After they sat the exam, they traveled to the south coast of England, visiting cities like Hastings. From July to September 1869, they traveled to Scotland, going as far north as Inverness, and stopping in the Lake and Peak Districts on the way back down to London. In June and July 1870, they traveled to Ireland and Wales, visiting, among other places, Belfast, Dublin, Limerick, Aberystwyth and

Milford Haven. In August 1871, they traveled to Paris, Germany, Switzerland and northern Italy, stopping in for example Cologne, Baden-Baden, Geneva, Lausanne, Milan and Venice.

On Dutt's second trip to Europe in 1886, he travelled with his wife, four children and his brother. Dutt writes at the beginning of chapter five that

The children gazed on the blue ocean and on every port that we touched at with much the same elasticity and buoyancy of feelings that I had felt in my first journey. To show them a little European life and civilization, to enable them to look around them a little in this great world of ours, was mainly the object of this second visit to Europe (Dutt, 1896, pp.97–98).

They were able to take the Suez Canal this time. Once in London, Dutt showed his family all the spots he had frequented during his first stay and they discovered some new places in Europe. He took his family to Littlehampton for some time at the seaside and he took a short trip to Bath, Bristol and Wells as a guest of the Colonial and Indian Reception. The exhibition committee invited Dutt when they had found out that he was in England. "The entire reception-business was arranged with a thoroughness, and with a degree of hearty hospitality which must have created a deep impression on the mind of every visitor"(Dutt, 1896, p.145). The exhibition aimed to show Europe that England gained a substantial amount from her imperial territories and to have its imperial visitors return to their territories with "sympathy and affection" for England (Dutt, 1896, p.145). Dutt visited several manufacturers and villages during his trip around West England with the Committee.

On the same European trip, Dutt and two friends, one being Gupta, go on a guided tour to Norway and Sweden. They take a boat to Norway, go all the way to the northern most point in Scandinavia and then do a small tour in Sweden, to places like Stockholm and Gothenburg. He also visits Holland and Belgium, for example, Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp and Rotterdam, and Germany, Austria and Italy, visiting, among other places, Hanover, Berlin, Dresden, Salzburg, Florence and Vienna. In 1893, Dutt makes his third trip to Europe visiting cities in Germany such as Cologne (again), Frankfurt and Strasbourg. See a map below of all the places he visited on these three trips. By this point in Dutt's career, he had realised that the problems with the imperial rule in India was not mere policies. The issues ran much deeper. Indians and Britons needed an intermediary that knew both places to foster better cultural communication – a goal he executed when he became professor of Indian history at University College, London in 1897 (Koditschek, 2011, p.298).



Figure 1 – Dutt’s destinations on his three trips to Europe in 1868-1871, 1886 and 1893
 (To look at full map including some markers with supplementary information, click here: *in construction*)

The political and socio-economic context of these three moments, 1868-71, 1886 and 1893, were varied and complex, because they deal with different time periods and territories. However, it is useful here to briefly lay out the main contextual details and events during Dutt’s these trips. He spent most of his time in England, so the paragraphs below concentrate on England with some mentions of other European countries if he travelled there or if he discussed events in his travelogue. Some details will come from his travelogue, others from secondary literature. From 1868 to 1871, Britain had been experiencing a steady increase in population and output partly thanks to the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and the rapid railway growth (Evans, 2016, pp.122, 127). Just a couple of months after his arrival in England on his first trip, there was a general election (Dutt, 1896, p.12). The 1868 election was the first election after the Reform Act of 1867 had passed that enfranchised many male householders, substantially increasing the number of men voting. Unsurprisingly then, Dutt describes excitement and wide engagement among the public during the election (Dutt, 1896, p.12). Indeed, it was the first time more than a million votes were cast – three times higher than the previous election of 1865 (Thorpe, 2008). The

Liberals, headed by William Gladstone, increase their majority over the conservatives again, winning on the “Irish question” (Dutt, 1896, p.131).

While Britain ranked as the world’s largest trading nation in 1860, trade was shrinking as of 1870 – right around Dutt’s visit (Baten, 2016). A couple of years after Dutt returns to India, the Long Depression starts which plummets Europe and North America into a depression from 1873 to 1896 (Park, 1997, pp.511, 516). The crisis started with financial failures in Vienna, quickly spreading across Europe and then to the United States. The general state of the Western economies was unstable: America had inflation, there was rampant speculative investment primarily in the railroads, Germany and America had demonetized silver and there was dislocation in Europe due to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871 (Randall E. Parker and Robert M. Whaples, 2013). Dutt wrote on this war several times in the travelogue describing the war as “sorrowful” (Dutt, 1896, p.42, see also 41, 302-303, 367). Germany managed to annex the former French region of Alsace and Lorraine in 1871. Dutt understood how Germany felt threatened by France and Russia, and thus needed to fight wars to show their strength. He spoke of the success Germany had had of uniting its territory, while uniting Austria seemed more difficult (Dutt, 1896, p.304). During this first trip, Dutt also spoke of the Japanese revolution and how it led to their independence in 1868/1869, which must have had great significance to him as an imperial subject (Dutt, 1896, pp.99–100).

In the second moment in 1886, things had gotten even worse. Dutt discusses the “depression in trade” and how there was a general pessimism around British progress during this time (Dutt, 1896, p.127). The “better times” were not coming, writes Dutt (Dutt, 1896, p.127). There were large reserves of capital uninvested and high unemployment resulting in increasing poverty (Dutt, 1896, p.127). Dutt describes how the “poor unemployed met in the Hyde Park and issued in a procession causing much destruction of property in London” in February 1886 and threatened to repeat in November of the same year (Dutt, 1896, p.127). Dutt cites “pessimist thinkers and writers,” with whom he does not necessarily agree, on why Britain is faring poorly. These thinkers theorized that Britain had managed to get ahead in manufacturing and experience rapid increases in wealth thanks to lack of revolutions and foreign invasion and the “wonderful enterprise of her sons” (Dutt, 1896, p.127). However, Britain’s success could not continue forever. The British monopoly over manufacturing was now threatened by other nations. For instance, France, Germany, America and even the British colonies such as Canada and Australia were protecting their domestic industries by charging tariffs on British imports. The two million unemployed have been pushed into “destitution by occasional acts of violence which cannot be good” (Dutt, 1896, p.129). Dutt heard similar pessimistic views when he visited factories in western England organized by

the Colonial and Indian Recaption (Dutt, 1896, p.129). Dutt also observed agricultural distress. More contextual discussion will follow in section III.

Dutt experiences another election during his second trip in 1886 (Dutt, 1896, p.131). This time the Liberals lost to the Conservatives, for the first time since 1841, on the Irish question. Dutt attended the debate on the Home Rule Bill concerning the potential independence of Ireland. With a majority of Irish members of the House of Commons demanding local legislative, there were two options either “grant the demand” or as the Daily News wrote at the time “to govern Ireland as India is governed,- with no regard to the nation’s wishes” (quoted in (Dutt, 1896, p.135). But this, argued Dutt, was impossible in a free country like Ireland (Dutt, 1896, p.135). During the final moment in 1893, Dutt wrote about his trip to Germany and how its empire had now been consolidated (Dutt, 1896, p.357). Germany gained industrial maturity by 1890, rapidly increasing the number of people engaged with machine building during the 1890s.

Thus far I know how Dutt rejected the travel theorem, now it is important to ask why. Why does Dutt feel the need to travel to Europe to learn about its modern society, when, as mentioned, European economists of his time and earlier chose (it feels like a choice) to not go to India. Instead, economists like Smith, Malthus, the Mills, and Jones were convinced they only needed their models and some Indian travelogues by Europeans (even though Smith thought little of travelogues) (Boianovsky, 2018, p.154). A disturbing example includes J. Mill’s narrative of India’s chaotic and brittle legal structure, and social relations, which was based entirely on accounts written by British officers, specifically judges and revenue collectors, clergymen and surveyors who complained of disorder and the vulnerable British power in India. The accounts were written in moments of crisis during, for example, disputes over revenue collection or arguments in court. For instance, J. Mill used Francis Buchanan’s account of Kanara after the Anglo-Mysore war when writing about Indian agriculture, and his understanding of Indian property rights came from a judicial official in Bengal. By accepting the travel theorem and seeing no need to experience India, J. Mill failed to see that these were moments of chaos and disorder, not necessarily the norm, and that the British actions intensified the disorder (Wilson, 2016, p.202). Dutt, along with other Indian economists of his time, understood this misunderstanding and subsequently felt the need to study their own economy from their own experience of living on the subcontinent.

Dutt would have disagreed with J. Mill’s inaction – he asks “why should we [...] preclude ourselves from one of the greatest sources of instruction”(Dutt, 1896, p.3). To some extent, it is unsurprising that Dutt, an imperial subject, would have such an opinion and take a different approach to research. At this time, if not even today, there was an unequal standing between Europe and the rest – knowledge production took place in Europe while the rest, if they were lucky enough, learned the

knowledge from Europeans. The imperial legacy does not only lie in the political and economic sphere. Apart from the material impact of imperialism, the Indians were also imposed European or Western, as Seth prefers, education (Seth, 2007). (Like Seth, I claim that we can bundle modern Western knowledge together in this context, despite the differentiation within it, because the different Western schools of thought share core presumptions, categories and background assumptions (Seth, 2007, pp.3, 8) Then Indians were blamed for only regurgitating that foreign knowledge without showing any capability of creating original thought (Seth, 2007).

As of the 1830s, the imperial strategy moved towards educating the Indians modern science or Western knowledge. The Anglicists and Orientalists initiated the debate around what education the Indians needed. The Anglicists argued that Indian schools should be taught in English and spread Western knowledge, while the Orientalists advocated for vernacular language and Oriental forms of knowledge instruction.² The Anglicists, who ultimately won the debate, claimed that English education would civilise native Indian society. The group was led by Thomas Babington Macaulay, the Secretary to the Board of Control under Lord Grey, 1832-1833, and a leading reformer in transforming the Indian education system.³ His *Minute on Indian Education* of February 1835 argued that only English should be taught in Indian schools along with the teaching of useful learning – synonymous with Western education according to Macaulay (Seth, 2007; Sen, 2005, p.7; Bayly, 2011). Subsequently, as of 1835, the Indian imperial rulers promoted Western education (Nurullah and Naik, 1943, pp.220–223; Kamerkar, 2000, pp.375–378; Jayapalan, 2000). The schools conducted classes in English “in which the alphabet was taught under the same roof with classes reading Shakespeare, the Calculus, Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, and the *Ramayana*”⁴ (*Report on Indian Education Commission*, 1882, p.18). Education was then further reformed in the 1850s. The initial despatch of 1854 aimed for education to diffuse “improved arts, science, philosophy and literature of Europe; in short, European knowledge” (Wood’s 1854 Dispatch, quoted in (Seth, 2007, p.2, see also; Nurullah and Naik, 1943, pp.220–223; Kamerkar, 2000, pp.375–376; Jayapalan, 2000). By the end of the 19th century, the imperial policies were now seen to have an additional role of educating the Indians in the ways of the West. An 1897 textbook wrote that the penal code, public works, railways, irrigation, schools, post office, the telegraph and a free press were enlightening the Indians (Seth, 2007, p.2).

² For discussions on the Anglicist versus Orientalist debate, see e.g. (Sen, 2005; Seth, 2007; Sartori, 2008; Bayly, 2011)

³ He went to India to serve on the Supreme Council of India, 1834-1838. “I see bloody and degrading superstitions gradually losing their power. I see the morality, the philosophy, the taste of Europe beginning to produce a salutary effect on the hearts and understandings of our subjects.” (Macaulay, cited in (Parliament of Great Britain, 1833, p.522). For more information, see (Wilson, 2016, pp.209–215)

⁴ The *Ramayana* is an ancient Indian epic poem.

India's first three universities of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras were established between 1856 and 1857, soon followed by additional universities in other parts of India (Nurullah and Naik, 1943, pp.218–236). The first matriculation examinations passed 219 graduates in 1857-1859, rising to 2,778 in 1881-1882.⁵ Dutt took his final Arts examination in 1866 at the University of Calcutta (Gupta, 1911; Bayly, 2011). The 1850s and 1860s saw the first generation of Indian graduates trained in Western political economy. For instance, Horace William Clift's *Elements of Political Economy* and J.S. Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* were the prescribed textbooks for history, law, politics and economics degrees at least until the end of the 19th century (see also (Bayly, 2011; Seth, 2007; Sartori, 2008)).⁶ The generation of Indian graduates that emerged – the legal profession, and teaching and government bodies of universities were predominantly Indian by the 1870s and 1890s (Gallagher et al., 1973, p.10; Wilson, 2016, p.309) – had been taught particular ways of meaning and discursive practices that adhered to the Western knowledge claims (Bayly, 2011; Sartori, 2008; Seth, 2007).

There was a common consensus among the Indian political economists as well as among the Indian elite that Western education was a welcome progressive force in India. One newspaper spoke of it as one of the most momentous events in history (Seth, 2007, p.3). The Indian economists agreed that Western education was the most important and valuable institution implemented by the imperial administration – only complaining that they were insufficient amounts of such education (Seth, 2007, p.159). Western education ultimately became the only conceivable mode of knowledge.

Ultimately, this led to a nation of Indians feeling inferior to the Europeans in more ways than just political and economic: Indians were treated and consequently felt intellectually inferior because they had no local knowledge (albeit incorrect). Dutt thus felt the need for him and his fellow Indians to travel to get a deeper understanding of modernity by seeing it with their own eyes. “For us, who are born and educated in India, it is also of incalculable advantage to see with our own eyes and to study with care the results of modern civilization in Europe and America, and to assimilate what is good in them with our national progress” (Dutt, 1896, p.165). The supposed inferiority or unequal footing of Indian knowledge seems to push Dutt to travel to see the, again supposed, superior European theories in action in order to legitimize his ideas, among others, on poverty in India. There is a hierarchy between European and Indian knowledge that produces a perceived unidirectional flow of knowledge from the core in Europe to the periphery in India.

⁵ In 1857, the universities of Calcutta and Madras passed 162 and 36 graduates in the final year examinations respectively, while Bombay University passed 21 in 1859. The number of applicants who sat the exams rose to 7,429 in 1881-1882 (Nurullah and Naik, 1943, p.227).

⁶ (‘Maharashtra State Archives, Elphinstone College Records, Volume 9, List of books’, n.d.) Cited in (Khodaiji, 2017)

To reiterate, the superiority of European knowledge is a construct created by European dominance and the marginalisation of India at the time (if not still to some degree present today). The imperial legacy lies also within the intellectual sphere. Dutt thus did not travel to Europe with the primary objective to lecture to the Europeans, as was and is often expected of European economists who travel to other regions – e.g. Hayek in Chile (Edwards and Montes, 2020; Caldwell and Montes, 2015). (There is an exception when Dutt is appointed professor of Indian History at University College, London in 1897 – as mentioned above.) He went to Europe to observe with his own eyes the European political and socio-economic context, and more specifically, as can be seen from his travelogue, to observe European modernity and the lack of poverty.

Section III – Poverty Theory in Action

Dutt's primary research interest was understanding how and why India's rural population were so poor. One of the reasons Dutt travelled to Europe was to gain a deeper understanding of modernity by experiencing it, but also of better understanding the opposite, poverty. He hoped that he "learnt from the every-day life [...] of Englishmen" (Dutt, 1896, p.46). In a work published in 1897, he juxtaposes the Queen's 1897 Jubilee in London with the sad scenes of Indian poverty (Dutt, 1897; Koditschek, 2011, p.306). Dutt felt like an outsider in a civilized Europe. One poignant passage about his feelings when he hiked to the North Cape with other German, American and English travelers reads as follows: "I will not conceal the pain and humiliation which I felt in my inmost soul as I stood on that memorable night among representatives of the free and advancing nations of the earth rejoicing in their national progress" (Dutt, 1896, p.174). Dutt experienced one space, coming from another, producing that inevitable third space of comparison and contrast. Despite the great advances of the West to create "neat," "regular," and "beautiful" spaces (Dutt, 1896, pp.6, 9, 83–84), "how much more has it yet to do" (Dutt, 1896, p.43). How then does the European poverty that he sees change or adapt his Indian theory of poverty?

On Dutt's first trip to England, he wrote that "it is really painful to reflect on the amount of suffering of the poor in this country" (Dutt, 1896, p.43). Many people live in poor housing with limited food, causing some to die from hunger or cold, especially during the winter months (Dutt, 1896, p.43). "The lower classes of England are in many respects very far off from what they ought to be" (Dutt, 1896, pp.26–27). The poor lack education, marry too young and have children before they can sufficiently provide for them and often turn to alcohol and violence (Dutt, 1896, pp.27–29). "The London labourer who has a large family, with his dissipated habits and often his unfeeling cruelty, is one of the most harrowing sights that civilization can hold up to your view" (Dutt, 1896, p.27). The houses are small, overcrowded, unheated and death ridden (Dutt, 1896, pp.27–28). In fact, the cold climate makes the English urban poor worse off than Indians (Dutt, 1896, pp.28, 43). At this time, Dutt saw that the rural

poor were better off. They had larger living quarters, more food thanks to their self-sufficiency and better relations with their landlords because rural areas were overall much friendlier environments (Dutt, 1896, pp.28–29).

On Dutt's second trip, however, the context had changed. Britain was suffering from the Long Depression, as was the whole of Europe. There were two million unemployed, pushing more people into poverty, alcoholism and violence (Dutt, 1896, pp.127–128). A factory owner that Dutt met in the western England during the Colonial and Indian Reception shared his thoughts on the crisis:

Do not think [...] from the pompous reception we have given you that we are doing well. On the contrary times were never harder than now. Our ships remain in our harbours, our manufactures find no market, our men are unemployed. And what is more, we do not see any prospect of fresh openings to our trade. All the markets are glutted, all nations are competing (Dutt, 1896, p.129).

There was also “agricultural distress” because farms were becoming less and less profitable as imported corn was cheaper (Dutt, 1896, p.130). Putting tariffs on the corn would not help either because it would only hurt the urban poor when they would have to pay higher food prices (Dutt, 1896, p.130). On the same trip, he observed the farmers' laborers as the “poorest classes in Norway and Sweden” (Dutt, 1896, p.193). In general, writes Dutt, “the Swedes are a patient and hardworking but a poor race and hence large numbers of them emigrate annually to America” (Dutt, 1896, p.193). Dutt witnessed a boat leaving the harbour in Christiania, Norway, with about 90 emigrants from Sweden and Norway. The experience “created a deep impression in [him]” (Dutt, 1896, p.202). Poverty was thus a reality in Europe, too.

In contrast, Dutt was “struck with the happy condition of even the lowest classes” in Switzerland (Dutt, 1896, p.92). Even the “poorest villages” have “beautiful and neatly varnished and printed wooden huts” (Dutt, 1896, p.92). “In neatness, in intelligence, and even in gentleman-like sense of politeness, the Swiss peasants presents a marked contrast to the peasantry of most other European countries, and notably England” (Dutt, 1896, p.93). The happy scenes “form an interesting sight to be seen only among the peasantry of this happy republic” (Dutt, 1896, p.93). Dutt does not go to theorize as to why Switzerland have managed to create such happiness and relative equality – although the word “republic” at the end of the passage may hint to the kind of political system that produces such progress (Dutt, 1896, p.93).

Dutt's main thesis in his theory on Indian poverty was that extreme poverty was not caused by the lack of food, but rather the lack of access to food. “It was not the want of food supply, but it was the want of money to buy food, which caused famines in localities where the crops failed”(Dutt, 1902b, p.23, see also, 1902c, p.51; Naoroji, 1977, p.60). Dutt made it very clear in his speeches in Glasgow, 1901, and Madras, 1902, that the gravest problem of India was the increasingly severe famines caused by the

impoverishment of the rural masses. Dutt agreed with the Famine report that there were stagnant real wages (Government Central Printing Office, 1898), along with rising food prices, which meant less access to food for especially farm labourers who were unable to support themselves (Dutt, 1901, p.15, 1902b, p.58).

Dutt's studies of famines proved India's extreme poverty. Dutt rejected the imperial discourse that blamed the famines on India's high population growth and dry climate. First, the Malthusian population trap, used by the imperial rulers to explain Indian famines, argued that famines occurred as an automatic mechanism to check population growth beyond the means of food production (Malthus, 1798; Dutt, 1874, pp.194–195; Commander, 1986; Ambirajan, 1976). To Dutt, however, India was not experiencing higher death tolls during famines due to a high population growth rate (Dutt, 1901, p.17, 1902b, p.92, see also; Naoroji, 1887, p.122). Dutt noted that population growth was slower in India than in many other countries, including Britain, and Britain was far denser than India (Dutt, 1901, p.17, 1902c, p.vi, 1897, p.132). Indeed, Dutt noticed the overcrowded poor households in Britain on his travels (Dutt, 1896, p.28). Second, Dutt rejected the idea that India was inherently prone to famines due to its dry climate. Deaths from famines were double the normal rate in the 19th century experienced in India only a century earlier, despite an unchanged climate (Dutt, 1901, p.19, see also, 1902c, p.51; Naoroji, 1901, p.19). For reference, the 1876-1878 famine reduced Bengal's population by a third and 10% of the total Indian population (Maddison, 1970, p.63). Additionally, India had cultivated wheat centuries before the English (Dutt, 1904, p.94).

Like Amartya Sen's famine theory, Dutt found that the lack of access to food was caused by politics and not some natural Indian weakness. Dutt observed how India was forced to export grains to England when grains were needed for consumption in India (Dutt, 1902b, p.99). Moreover, he blamed excessive land taxes that led to rural indebtedness as peasants were forced to borrow from moneylenders, and a general lack of savings that exacerbated starvation during famines and prevented peasants from investing in more efficient agricultural techniques (Dutt, 1901, pp.118–119). In fact, Dutt's theory here of extreme poverty is a precursor to Sen's analysis of famines a century later. Based also on rural data collection, Sen found that Indian famines were caused rather by a lack of access to food than a lack of supply (Sen, 1981). It is interesting to note here that Sen only includes Dutt's works in his list of references but does not cite him anywhere in the text and Dutt is not cited in his later book, *The Idea of Justice*, which is supposed to use (almost) exclusively Indian intellectual thought (Sen, 2009).

Conclusion

How do these European experiences of poverty impact Dutt's theory of Indian poverty? In my view, Dutt's travels gave him what he predicted "new incentives to work" (Dutt, 1896, p.165). There is a sense that Dutt was surprised to see such poverty, especially in England where it also seemed worse than in other European countries. Britain and Europe, despite its phenomenal progress, still had much work to do in bettering the lives of its people. All societies then had a duty to do something about poverty. Dutt did so by collecting data and studying poverty in India and by traveling to Europe to see the lack of it. And yet, he saw inequality had made some people poor in Europe, too. A person, like Dutt, who experienced both Britain, and some other parts of Europe, as well as India, could shed more light on the causes of poverty.

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