

Jūtē hain jāpānī kaprē inglistānī: Sayyid Ross Masood's Passage to Japan

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Among Sayyid Ross Masood's first impressions of Japan after two days in the country was that the scenery, except for Mount Fuji, was unattractive, the modern architecture copied from Europe was "hideousness itself," and the way people dressed was "ghastly in the extreme." He saw men "dressed in silken Kimonos, nevertheless go about with an ordinary English felt hat or bowler on their heads" or "wearing getas (wooden shoes), though dressed in extremely well cut English clothes. But then," he added, "they can easily ask me why I put on an Indian cap when I am otherwise dressed in European clothes to which, of course, I can give no adequate reply."¹ The thirty-two-year-old Director of Public Instruction for Hyderabad, India's most populous "Native State," had arrived in Japan in early April 1922, the time of cherry blossoms, after "a long voyage in a slow boat," nearly four weeks in an old Japanese steamer, the *Wasaka Maru*, from Bombay. Aside from brief excursions on shore at Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, and a fair amount of social interaction with fellow passengers out of "A Night at the Opera"—including a wealthy widow from Pasadena, California—he had spent his time reading up on Japan, particularly two large tomes, published twelve years before, called *Fifty Years of New Japan*.²

Ross Masood was on an official mission: to study the ways in which Japan had managed to develop a European-style educational system based on the Japanese language, to measure the success of the enterprise, and to determine to what extent Hyderabad and perhaps India could learn from Japan.³ Most particularly, he wanted to shore up the project, recently studied by Kavita Datla and Tariq Rahman, to create in the newly established Osmania University and

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- 1 Syed Ross Masood, *Travels in Japan; Diary of an Exploring Mission*, ed. Jalil Ahmad Kidwai (Karachi: Ross Masood Education and Culture Society of Pakistan, 1968), 22. Original ms. at King's College, Cambridge University.
 - 2 Shigénobu Okuma, ed., *Fifty Years of New Japan* (Kaikoku gojunen shi), edited for English by Marcus B. Huish (London: Smith, Elder, 1910). Full text of volume 1 is available at <http://www.archive.org/details/fiftyyearsofnewjo1okumuoft>.
 - 3 Kavita Saraswathi Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), 59–60.

related efforts an Urdu-medium educational system. Masood himself, though he knew great swaths of Urdu and Persian poetry—as well as French and some Italian—was very much a product of English education, starting with the so-called English House at the Aligarh College and culminating with a BA with honors in history from Oxford. (He got the name Ross after a British friend of his father). When he was seconded to Hyderabad from the Indian Educational Service in 1917, he was skeptical of the value and viability of higher education in Urdu, a project that was just getting under way.⁴ It was only after visiting Japan, he later said, that he finally cast off his doubts.⁵ But at the outset of his visit to Japan, it appears, he still had to be convinced that it was possible to run a modern educational system without relying on a European language.

More than half a century earlier, in 1869–70, Ross Masood's grandfather, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, had made a similar journey to England and had famously declared: "Those who are really bent on improving and bettering India must remember that the only way of compassing this is by having the whole of the arts and sciences translated into their own language. I should like to have this written in gigantic letters on the Himalayas for future generations."⁶ The M.A.O. College at Aligarh, founded in 1875, at first included an Oriental department, which was to teach history, geography, science, and mathematics in Urdu. Testifying to the Hunter Education Commission in 1882, Sayyid Aḥmad conceded that the experiment was a failure; Urdu, he said, was inherently unable to adapt to the requirements of "exactness of thought" that one could achieve in English.⁷

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi has observed that Sir Sayyid's project, as exemplified in the literary criticism of Aḥṭaf Ḥusayn Ḥālī in 1893—"still the most influential literary theoretical work in Urdu"—set forth the idea that there "were universal norms for literary excellence" and that "'universal' meant 'English' or 'European.'"⁸ Ross Masood's education flowed from that determination, but it summoned up conflicts and doubts. Such an education, he said after his visit to Japan, resulted in "people of my type who live in an entirely

4 Ibid. See also Datla, "A Wordly Vernacular: Urdu at Osmania University," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 5 (2009): 1117–1148; Tariq Rahman, "Urdu in Hyderabad State" *Annual of Urdu Studies* 23 (2008) 36–54.

5 Oral evidence before Father Blatter Commission (committee on university reform), Bombay, October 4, 1924, in the appendix to Masood, *Travels in Japan*, 186.

6 G. F. I. Graham, *The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), 132.

7 David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 205–7.

8 Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, *The Flower-Lit Road: Essays in Urdu Literary Theory and Criticism* (Allahabad: Laburnum Press, 2005), 136.

separate world of thought and culture from the members of their family. The education I have received is not national education.” A “national education,” he said, “should not alienate people of the same country”⁹

In Japan, there was no question that the educational system was designed to be “national,” and this, not just the purported “efficiency” of learning in one’s own language, was for Ross Masood its chief attraction. But it took him some time to reach this conclusion. Although he had letters of introduction to various officials and academics, he himself had no official or diplomatic status. On the contrary, he was at first treated with suspicion, followed by two policemen and asked repeatedly to produce his passport. The Prince of Wales was on a much publicized tour Japan, following his much-protested visit to India; Gandhi had just been arrested: “the police are after me,” he complained, “simply because I come from Gandhi’s country. I can quite easily understand how educated people can be turned into anarchists.”¹⁰ In response, Masood gravitated to the small Indian merchant community of Yokohama, mostly Sindhi Hindus, who provided him hospitality and guidance. He also called on the British consul-general there to save him from police surveillance.

A turning point came after two and a half weeks, on a day that started with a substantial earthquake. An English expatriate named Mabel L. Jones took him off for his first Japanese meal at an inn that also featured a garden with waterfalls. Miss Jones explained to him that Japan “copied things Western in the same way as they adopted Western machinery—with the sole object of cold utility and nothing else. That their own innermost surroundings, such as the one in which I then was, were the proper tests of the highly developed aesthetic culture of the Japanese race.”¹¹ She also told him that Japanese do indeed experience deep emotions but have learned to “master” them. The next day he attended a “fete” at an aristocrat’s garden and was charmed by the women in “exquisitely colored dresses.” And the day after that he went off to see the great Buddha statue at Kamakura and responded with “religious ecstasy . . . in spite of the centuries during which Islamic blood has flown through the veins of my ancestors.”¹² He was now open to Japan.

In the meantime, he had begun to make academic connections—a Japanese professor of Sanskrit, an educational official of the Kanagawa Prefecture, an Englishman who taught at the Imperial University. He prepared questionnaires to assist his investigations, visited schools and colleges, and eventually made

9 Father Blatter Commission, appendix to Masood, *Travels in Japan*, 202.

10 Masood, *Travels in Japan*, 23.

11 *Ibid.*, 40. The inn was Shosenkaku, Gotanda.

12 *Ibid.*, 44–45.

a number of good Japanese friends, male and female. He worked long hours taking notes, reading what he could find in English, and preparing his report:

To those to whom my account of Japan might appear as too eulogistic when compared with that given by many European and American authors—for, now that Japan has become a great commercial nation, many have begun to belittle her—my request is to remember that I am an Asiatic, and as such, have understood, perhaps in a more personal way than it is possible for any European American to understand, the exact weight of each obstacle which Japan has had to remove from her path in her march towards national unity and independence.¹³

Masood was not the first educator sent out from India to investigate the Japanese system. Nearly two decades earlier, W. H. Sharp, Professor of Philosophy at Elphinstone College, Bombay, had carried out a similar project; and though his work may have been out of date, Masood appears to have studied it carefully. Japan, according to Sharp, was entirely different from India, and besides its educational achievement, at least as of 1904, was problematic. Although Japan had the advantage of linguistic homogeneity, the writing system was hampered by its partial reliance on “the bog of Chinese ideographs.” “The copying of Chinese characters . . . may appeal to the aesthetic faculty, but as far as the intellect is concerned appears to be merely a strain on the power of observing and remembering minute differences.” It could not be compared, he argued, with “the discipline afforded by Latin and Greek.” In any case, whatever advantages Japan may have had, India was inherently unable to take a similar path. “Japan possesses an energy and initiative which can hardly be predicated of India, an energy due to the race-character as acted upon, partly by climatic conditions, and partly by her whole past history.”¹⁴ Sharp also noted that the

13 Syed Ross Masood, *Japan and Its Educational System: Being a Report Compiled for the Government of His Exalted Highness the Nizam* (Hyderabad-Deccan [India]: Printed at the Government Central Press, 1923), ii–iii. Available at <http://ia600308.us.archive.org/8/items/japananditseduca031578mbp/japananditseduca031578mbp.pdf>. Accessed July 2, 2014.

14 W. H. Sharp, *The Educational System of Japan*, Office of the Director-General of Education, Government of India, Occasional Reports no. 3 (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1906), 402–3, 405, 479–79. Available at <http://www.archive.org/details/educationalsysteeo/sharrich>. Cf. Masood, *Travels*, 147–56. About the same time that Sharp was carrying out his study, Muḥammad ‘Aziz Mirzā, a leading Hyderabad official, wrote an Urdu essay, “Japan aur ham,” that commented on Japan’s rapid transformation and its success in the

Japanese government spent more than five times per capita on education compared to the allocations made by the British government of India.¹⁵

Rabindranath Tagore, who visited Japan in 1916, three years after winning the Nobel Prize for Literature, drew very different conclusions about the comparison between India and Japan. Tagore told Japanese audiences that they were on the wrong course, that they must not forget their spiritual heritage, derived, by the way, from India. “The huge heterogeneity of the modern age, whose common bond is usefulness, is nowhere so pitifully exposed against the dignity and the hidden power of reticent beauty as in Japan.”¹⁶ On the whole, Japanese audiences did not appreciate the criticism.¹⁷

Initially, Ross Masood seems to have carried along some doubts expressed by Sharp and Tagore about what India might gain from Japan.¹⁸ But he was an open-minded and gregarious sort of person, able to break through cultural

Russo-Japanese War. It was true that India did could not complain Japan's unity: Hindus were divided into thousands of castes and Muslims also had hundreds of ethnic groups (*qaumen*); but the greatest difference was that Japan was independent and India was not. He concluded, however, that India's foreign rulers were sincerely interested in the country's progress. Muḥammad ‘Azīz Mīrẓā, *Khayālāt-i ‘Azīz* (Karācī: Anjuman Taraqqī-i Urdū, 1961), 114–21. ‘Azīz Mīrẓā's son, Sajjād Mīrẓā, principal of the Training College at Osmania University, was to accompany Ross Masood on a second and longer visit to Japan.

W. H. Sharp, *The Educational System of Japan*, Office of the Director-General of Education, Government of India, Occasional Reports No. 3 (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1906), 402–03, 405, 479; available at http://www.archive.org/details/educational_systeooasharrich Cf. *Travels*, 147–56. About the same time that Sharp was carrying out his study, Muḥammad ‘Azīz Mīrẓā, a leading Hyderabad official, wrote an Urdu essay, “Japan aur ham,” that commented on Japan's rapid transformation and its success in the Russo-Japanese War. It was true that India did could not claim Japan's unity: Hindus were divided into thousands of castes and Muslims also had hundreds of ethnic groups (*qaumen*); but the greatest difference was that Japan was independent and India was not. He concluded, however, that India's foreign rulers were sincerely interested in the country's progress. Muḥammad ‘Azīz Mīrẓā, *Khayālāt-i ‘Azīz* (Karācī: Anjuman Taraqqī-i Urdū, 1961), 114–21. ‘Azīz Mīrẓā's son, Sajjād Mīrẓā, Principal of the Training College at Osmania University, was to accompany Ross Masood on a second and longer visit to Japan. (Nawab Sa'id Jang, “Mas'ud Jang” in Jilil A. Kidwal, ed. *Muraqqa'at-i Mas'ud* (Karācī: Rās Mas'ud Ejukeshan enḍ Kulcar Sosā'itī Āf Pākistān, 1966), 160).

15 Sharp, 485.

16 Rabindranath Tagore, *Japan: A Lecture* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 14.

17 Stephen N. Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West; Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), chapters 2–3.

18 Passing references indicates that he was aware of Tagore's visit to Japan. *Travels*, 24, 59.

barriers and determined to enjoy himself. When he appeared at the police station and found the policemen practicing jujitsu, he thought he'd give it a try—and teach one of the policemen some Indian wrestling, “not that I know it.” Visiting the Sanskrit professor in a traditional Japanese home, he was comfortable sitting on the floor, though “in the Indian fashion, with my legs crossed in my lap.”¹⁹ Eventually he established a number of close Japanese friendships, particularly with Yasunari Tokugawa, a wealthy Japanese aristocrat who had studied at Cambridge and was a patron of European classical music.²⁰

But there was more to Japan's relevance to India than beauty and friendship. The ship that brought Ross Masood from Bombay to Kobe was part of a well-established route, started in 1893 by J. N. Tata. The Indian merchants he befriended were members of a longstanding community, mostly with roots in the other Hyderabad, Sindh, who were involved in extensive international trade networks in raw materials (cotton, leather, indigo, tin, and ivory), handicrafts, and mass-produced textiles. Some of these merchants, Masood noted, were long settled in Japan, spoke Japanese, married Japanese wives, and had children. Though very few of them were Muslims, Masood looked to them as compatriots and made them the base for his sojourn in Japan.²¹

One of the first expeditions that Masood made was to a large industrial exhibition in Venno Park. “There is no big or complicated machine which the Japanese do not make. Their progress in industries and technical things has been truly amazing and I feel deeply impressed. . . . I saw enormous turbines and circular saws for cutting steel, also hammers for crushing steel. The delicate machines, such as scientific scales and other instruments, too, of a very high order.”²² A visit later to the Tokyo Higher Technical School left him “a very sad man. India is 200 years behind Japan industrially.”²³

It was Ross Masood's task to understand the educational system that supported this industrial achievement. He was broadly interested in the structure of the school system as a whole, the way it was divided into units like primary,

19 Ibid., 33, 36.

20 Ibid., 82–83, e.g.

21 *Travels*, passim; Hiroshi Shimizu, “The Indian Merchants of Kobe and Japan's Trade Expansion into Southeast Asia before the Asian-Pacific War” *Japan Forum*, 17, no. 1 (March 2005): 25–48; Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 144–48. The Indian community of Yokohama was decimated and all their businesses destroyed in the 1923 earthquake, a year after Masood's visit.

22 *Travels*, 29.

23 Ibid., 74.

secondary, and university; specialized and technical education; administrative oversight; the qualifications, recruitment, and compensation of teachers; the ages of students; the differentiation by gender at various stages; and other details that he, as an educational administrator, considered significant. But most of all, it was his task to find out about the role of the Japanese language as the medium of instruction. And as an historian, he wanted to know how this all had developed in such a short time. The ultimate question was whether such an enterprise was possible in Hyderabad State, and perhaps in India as a whole.

The problem, of course, was that like his grandfather with respect to English, Ross Masood didn't know Japanese. First he had to understand something about the nature of the language, including its writing system. He read what he could in English and consulted English-speaking academics, and then tried to relate what he learned to Urdu. Then, with the help of a young female Japanese assistant, he set out to prepare a dictionary of Japanese counterparts of English technical terms that could serve as a model for one in Urdu. To show what the Japanese had done with Chinese characters, for example, he said that the Urdu word توین could be rendered as "2," "10," or دو دس. Another strategy would be to adopt and transliterate the English word, *pencil*, for example, as پنسل.²⁴

The writing problems with Chinese characters and other Japanese written forms were far more complex, he noted, but "Japan has overcome all the difficulties in her way; for, unlike us, she early realized that her very existence depended on her raising the cultural standard of her people, in as short a time as possible, to the level of that possessed by the most advanced and prosperous nations of the world."²⁵

Adapting Japanese to this new "cultural standard" was more than a matter of writing systems. To show the difference in syntax between Japanese and English, Masood gave an example of a short passage in English alongside its Japanese translation and a "literal English translation showing the order in which Japanese words are used—and then an Urdu translation (in Urdu script) of the same passage:

24 Masood, *Japan and its Educational System*, 174–75.

25 Ibid., 176–77.

English paragraph	Japanese translation	Literal English translation showing the order in which Japanese words are used	Urdu translation
<p>At the present day, Buddhism has sunk into being the belief of the lower classes only. Few persons in the middle and upper classes understand its <i>raison d'être</i>, most of them fancying that religion is a thing which comes into play only at funeral services.</p>	<p>Kono goro ni itarimashite, Bukkyo to mosu mono wa, tada kato-jimmin no shinjiru tokoro to nat-te, chuto ijo de wa sono dori wo wakimae-teru hito ga sukunaku; shumon to ieba, soshiki no toki bakari ni mochiru koto no yo ni omoimasu.</p>	<p>This period at having-arrived, Buddhism that (they) say thing as-for, merely low-class people's believing place that having-become, middle-class thence-upwards in as-for, its reason discerning-are people being-few, religion that if-one-says, funeral-rite's time only in employ thing's manner in (they) think.</p>	<p>فہمی زمانہ مذہب اس نو بت کو پہنچ گیا ہے کہ اس کے پیرو صرف ذہنی طبقے کے لوگ رہ گئے ہیں اور سوا یا اعلیٰ طبقوں میں معدودے چند ہی ایسے اشخاص ہو گئے جو اس کی کئی کو سمجھتے ہوں۔ ان میں سے اکثر کا یہ خیال ہے کہ مذہب ایک ایسی چیز ہے جو صرف تجہیز و تکفین کے وقت کارآمد ہوتا ہے۔</p>

Masood comments: "It will be seen from the above that the work of translation from the English language into Japanese is much more difficult than that of translation into Urdu... If their efforts have been successful, which they undoubtedly have been, I see no reason why ours [Urdu] too should not be equally successful, Especially when it is remembered that unlike Japanese, Urdu, belonging as it does to the Indo-Aryan family, has much greater affinity with European languages."²⁶

26 Ibid., 178-79.

While Masood did not attempt any further analysis—and made no effort to present a parallel transliteration and retranslation of the Urdu text—it seemed self-evident to him that the task of rendering the language suitable for modernity meant being able to transfer texts whole from English. The problem that interested him the most was “naturally that of coining the equivalents of Western scientific terms.”²⁷ He wanted to know the institutional system that developed such terms and the principles arrived at therefrom, but it isn’t clear from his writings that he ever really learned much about these questions. One of his major efforts was to compile a dictionary based on Japanese examples as a model for future efforts in Urdu: “These ideographs tire my eyes out. It is a fearful strain. But, I believe, my friends will be proud when they see the results of my labours and India will no longer be frightened to undertake the work of translating Western Science into Urdu. Till that is done, education will continue as great a sham as it is today. I shall devote all my life to the work of giving India that intellectual independence which her present false system of education has made her lose.”²⁸

When it came to implementing these earnest goals upon his return, Ross Masood appears to have focused more on the social and political context than on the linguistic details. For all his enthusiasm, he saw this as the work of people who were more learned than him. The report that he submitted the following year contained very little discussion of language. The first half of the 370-page book was a review of the history and contemporary political affairs of Japan, and most of the rest concentrated on administrative issues. Unlike his diary entry, he now put forth a clear image of the Japanese example that focused on Japan’s independence from foreign control, founded on a strong spirit of national unity and—something not mentioned in his diary—intense loyalty to the emperor. The educational system, as he now saw it, was designed to establish the emotional as well as intellectual foundations of Japanese nationalism. The question, then, was whether any of this was relevant to India—and more specifically to Hyderabad.

At the outset of the report, Masood compares Japan to Hyderabad, not to India: Japan is “considerably less than twice that of these Dominions, and its population more than four times as great.”²⁹ At the conclusion, he remarks that Hyderabad faces the same “difficulties” as “India as a whole”: the perhaps impossible task of creating “homogeneity.” But if it is to be tried, he argued,

27 Ibid., 179.

28 Travels, 85; I have not seen the dictionary and don’t know if it exists or if it had any influence on the work of the Osmania Translation Bureau.

29 Masood, *Japan and its Educational System*, 2.

that must be the work of the Department of Public Instruction of which he was the head. What he had learned from Japan was that there were three “forces” that could unite the people of Hyderabad:

1. Loyalty to His Exalted Highness the Nizām.
2. Love of the country
3. Knowledge of the official language.³⁰

With respect to language, Masood conceded that Urdu was not really the mother tongue of most of the population. There were in fact three other languages—Telugu, Kannada, and Marathi—that could claim larger numbers. But since Urdu was the official language it was the best choice.³¹ Challenged the following year in testimony before a committee on university reform in Bombay, Masood called for a system of vernacular education in all the major languages throughout India, up through the university level, with English as a compulsory second language in all of them.³² After all, if the University of Leiden could teach in Dutch, there was no reason why the languages of India could not be made viable for similar educational purposes.³³

Ross Masood’s journey to Japan can be seen as an effort to break free from the usual story of travel and observation as dominance. He discovered an Indian diaspora, he established genuine Japanese friendships, and, most of all, he saw in Japan proof that “Asiatics need not remain the slaves of the Western nations forever. I admire Japan, I love Japan,” he wrote his friend E. M. Forster, “even though it is purely materialistic greatness.” He sent his report to Forster, in exchange for some chapters of a work in progress about some British ladies travelling to India.³⁴

Masood wasn’t sure whether to glory in his cosmopolitan achievement or suffer from his hybridity. That he found freedom in Japanese authoritarianism, in the idea of transferring Japanese emperor worship to His Exalted Highness the Nizām, was just one suggestion of an unresolved quest. The matrix of language and thought, for him, remained European, and Europe remained the model for any possible future.

30 Ibid., 340–42.

31 Ibid., 348.

32 Father Blatter Commission (committee on university reform), appendix to Masood, *Travels in Japan*, 188.

33 Ibid., 196.

34 Masood to Forster, n.d. [between May–September, 1923]; Forster to Masood, May, 23, 1923, E. M. Forster Papers, nos. 126–27, King’s College Library, Cambridge University.

James Clifford begins his book *Routes* on “travel and translation” with that terrible scene in Amitav Ghosh’s great book *In an Antique Land* when the author, an anthropologist from India by way of Cambridge, gets into a shouting match with an Egyptian village imam about whether India or Egypt had bigger, better guns and bombs. “We were,” Ghosh says, “both travelling, he and I: we were both travelling in the West.”³⁵ Though there was no shouting and certainly no competition for military superiority, Ross Masood’s journey to Japan was also evidence of European imperial hegemony; it was also a journey to the West.

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35 Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1992), 236; James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4–5.

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