

## Poverty Theory in Action:

### How Romesh Chunder Dutt's European travels affected his poverty theory, 1868-1893

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*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)

*Whatever is worth seeing or hearing in India, can be expressed in writing. As soon as every thing of importance is expressed in writing, a man who is duly qualified may obtain more knowledge of India in one year in his closet in England, than he could obtain during the course of the longest life, by the use of his eyes and his ears in India.*

James Mill (Mill, 1817, p.10)

What makes two political economists, albeit from different continents yet within the same empire and century, come to such opposing statements? Why does James Mill, who wrote one of the most widely read histories of British India, not feel the need to travel to India to observe and experience its economy? Why does Romesh Chunder, in contrast, feel the need to travel to England to understand its modernity? In this article, I answer these questions and how Dutt's travels affected his well-known poverty theory by analyzing and contextualizing Dutt's travels to Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I will investigate, more generally, how experiencing a foreign space may affect an economist's perspectives, theories and approaches. Traveling is when an economist leaves her home, her comfort zone to go see and experience another, foreign space. David Turnbull theorizes that travel writing is a way to make the distant and unfamiliar into the 'here' and familiar (Turnbull, 2003, p.289). Dutt's travelogue of three visits to Europe (1868-1871, 1886 and 1893) consists of letters he sent home in which he describes how the unfamiliar looks to him and how it makes him feel (Dutt, 1896).

Travelogues, the output of some travels, are a certain form of knowledge. The genre has a binary nature based on a premise of opposition between home and elsewhere (Boianovsky, 2018, pp.151–152).

Knowledge construction creates space, as Turnbull puts it, then it follows that travel writing produces a third space (Turnbull, 2003, p.273). 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. I reason that the third is an intermediary space where the economist merges the familiar with the unfamiliar, rendering perspectives that were held before forever altered.

Dutt's main research focus was understanding Indian poverty and how to bring modernity to India, which would exclude poverty. A growing number of Indians at this time, including Dutt, went to observe and better understand modernity in Europe. They also, however, discovered poverty in Europe, ultimately helping the anti-imperial narrative to destabilize the image of Britain as utopic (Codell, 2007). My focus here, as a result, is how Dutt's travels affected his thinking on poverty by examining the link between Dutt's travelogue and his economics' texts.

### **Section I – Theory in Action**

At the beginning of his *History of British India*, as quoted above, Mill argued that he does not need to travel to India to understand its past or present. "Some of the most successful attempts in history had been made, without ocular knowledge of the country, or acquaintance with its language" (Mill, 1817, p.9). Robertson never went to America and still composed its history (Mill, 1817, p.9). Mill thought he was more capable of writing India's history because

the man best qualified for dealing with evidence, is the man best qualified for writing the history of India. It will not, I presume, admit of much dispute, that the habits which are subservient to the successful exploration of evidence are more likely to be acquired in Europe than in India (Mill, 1817, p.10).

Observation was not sufficient: in a "so extensive and complicated a scene as India, how small a portion would the whole period of his life enable any man to observe!" (Mill, 1817, p.10). Instead, Mill reasoned that he could use travel accounts along with other materials that were so abundant in England to write

India's history. As Poovey forcefully argues, advocates of Indian reform at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century insisted that the “most reliable knowledge about this distant subcontinent could be produced not by the kind of eyewitness investigation that preceded legislation in England but by deductive or a priori reasoning, which proceeded from general principles about universal human nature” (Poovey, 2004, p.185).

Similarly, Karl Marx, who published some articles on India and theorized an Asiatic mode of production, used Jean-Baptiste Tavernier's *Travels in India* and Francois Bernier's *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, Mill's *History of British India*, Dutt's *The Peasantry of Bengal* and M.M. Kovalevsky's writings on the Bengal Social Science Association (among others) (Kumar, 1992, p.493). And yet, Marx traveled through France, Belgium and England as well as Algeria. Why not India?

Scholarship shows that relying on certain accounts can lead to narrow perspectives. For example, 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. Additionally, 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 seeing no need to experience India, Mill failed to see that these were moments of chaos and disorder, not necessarily the norm (Wilson, 2016, p.202).

Still today traveling seems controversial 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 history of economics literature on traveling economists has often focused 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). Yet there is a growing body of literature that looks at how traveling affects economists and their

ideas, for instance, Tjalling Koopmans' visit to the Soviet Union (Düppe, 2016), Douglas North's travels to Brazil (Boianovsky, 2018) and Milton Friedman's Brazilian trip (Boianovsky, 2020). The present special issue will provide further evidence and analysis to the discussion.

And yet, theory is an active exercise that implicates traveling somewhere unfamiliar. The Greek root of the word theory defines theorizing as something that involves leaving one's home (Boianovsky, 2018, p.152). Joseph Schumpeter labels Arthur Young's travels as "theory in action" (quoted in (Boianovsky, 2018, p.157). A traveling economist may indeed confirm or adjust a theory. As confirmed by Mary Morgan's study of Stolper's mission to measure the Nigerian economy and produce a development plan. Stolper's two year stay in Nigeria convinced him that traveling makes a researcher see the uncertainties on the ground (Morgan, 2008, p.5). Stolper traveled across regions and asked people about their economic activities, yields and production (Morgan, 2008, p.13). The "genuine social science observer," as Morgan labels Stolper, must rethink his theory when confronted with those uncertainties that can only be seen while one investigates and experiences the economy (Morgan, 2008, p.13).

Stolper and Dutt, unlike Mill or Marx, were able to produce that intermediary space by combining the familiar with the unfamiliar. As Stolper and Dutt both seem to endorse, the intermediary third space produced by experiencing a foreign space offers a wider perspective on how the world worked and could work. They understood that they were actors in the economies they traveled to. Stolper, for example, described how he ordered curtains for his apartment (Morgan, 2008). Dutt described how he rented a house for his family in London and how to hire help (Dutt, 1896, pp.107–108). As a contemporary of Dutt, Behramji Malabari, wrote, there is "no method so successful for [the study of human progress] as the comparative method" (S. Sen, 2005, p.200) – a sentiment shared by most Indian intellectual at the time.

Furthermore, there was a universalist project in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to demolish the Indian culture in order to impose liberal reform onto the colony (Poovey, 2004; Guha, 1998). As of the 1830s, the imperial strategy had moved towards educating the Indians in modern science or European knowledge. 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). There was a common consensus among the Indian elite that European education was a welcome progressive force in India (Seth, 2007, pp.3, 159). 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 19<sup>th</sup> century (cited in (Khodaiji, 2017, see also; Bayly, 2011; Seth, 2007; Sartori, 2008). 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 European or Western knowledge claims (Bayly, 2011; Sartori, 2008; Seth, 2007). Dutt took his final Arts examination in 1866 at the University of Calcutta (Gupta, 1911). The superiority of Western knowledge was a construct created by European dominance and the marginalization of India at the time (if not still to some degree present today) (Raj, 2007, 2000; Chatterjee and Hawes, 2008; Ramos, 2015). The imperial legacy lies also within the intellectual sphere.

One of Dutt's reasons for traveling to Europe then was 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). There is a hierarchy between European and Indian knowledge that produced a perceived unidirectional flow of knowledge from the core in Europe to the periphery in India.

More importantly, however, the imperial context meant that traveling to the empire's core became an "empowering act" (Codell, 2007, p.174). As several scholars have analyzed, the travel guides produced by Indian travels to Britain had more purpose than to serve as touristic handbooks (Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Harder, 2020; Gulfishan Khan, 1999; Burton, 1996; Codell, 2007). The travelogues proved that the imperial streets could be possessed by its imperial subjects (Burton, 1996,

p.133). The travelers declared themselves free to wonder and claim these areas as their own. Moreover, the Indians showed the British that they could also survey and critique Britain like Britain did to India (Burton, 1996, p.133). By writing about their travels, they were reversing the “hierarchy of periphery and core” in making hybrid forms of guidebooks, local histories, autobiography and ethnography (Codell, 2007). The Indians were welcomed both as guests and as British imperial citizens. They were not entirely outsiders, yet their “guest discourse,” as Julie Codell labels it, enabled the travelogues to remain invisible to the imperial power relations that they ultimately modified (Codell, 2007, p.186). Like Europeans had done to Indians for centuries, Indian travelers studied European subjects.

Although there has been research on Indian travelers during imperial rule (Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Harder, 2020; Gulfishan Khan, 1999; Burton, 1996; S. Sen, 2005; Codell, 2007; Fisher, 2007), there is little on the link between Dutt’s European travels and his poverty theory, to which I shall now turn.

## **Section II – Dutt’s Travels**

Dutt (1848-1909) traveled from a young age around Bengal with his father who was a collector for the imperial administration “and the relocations of those early days are among the pleasantest reminiscences of my life” (Gupta, 1911, p.12). “Those were happy pre-railway days” when a traveler traveled less, but “saw more of the country in those days, more of the villages, bazars and towns, the rivers, ghats and temples, which he passed” (Gupta, 1911, p.12). His father taught Dutt that traveling was both enjoyable and educational (Gupta, 1911, p.152). His father encouraged him to travel to England to finish his studies (Gupta, 1911, p.14). As a result, perhaps, Dutt’s travels were extensive, in both India and other continents. He would stay extended periods of time in England, taking shorter trips to neighboring European countries.

Dutt’s travels to Europe are documented in a travelogue, first published in 1872, based on three of his European trips (Dutt, 1896). He took the first trip to sit his Civil Service Exam in 1868-1871. The second to show his family Europe in 1886 and the third in 1893 when he took a furlough from his post to

travel to Europe, as yet another educational endeavour (Gupta, 1911, p.152). The travelogue consists of edited extracts from letters Dutt sent home during his trips, which includes detailed explanation of his experiences, encounters and impressions. 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). There are four editions: the third edition was published in 1890 and the fourth in 1896 (I cannot find the date of the second edition). I analyze 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.

Dutt was born into a Bengali family of British East India Company employees in Calcutta well known for their literary and academic achievements. In 1868, after finishing his examination at the University of Calcutta and “obtaining a scholarship of 14 rupees a month” (Gupta, 1911, p.14), he set off on his first travels to Europe with his friends Surendra Nath Banerjea and B.L. Gupta (Dutt, 1896, p.2; Gupta, 1911, p.17). They went to England to study with professors at the University College, London and sit the civil service examination of 1869 (Dutt, 1896, pp.16–20; Gupta, 1911, p.17). Dutt wrote in his travelogue that they ran away at night without permission from their guardians (Dutt, 1896, p.1). According to his biography, there seems to have been a conflict based on some misunderstanding between his uncle who had been his guardian since his parents had passed away, Rai Babu Shoshou Chunder Dutt Bahudur and his son, Suresh Chunder Dutt (Gupta, 1911, p.7). Ultimately, “the hazardous step he had taken” paid off because Dutt succeeded in becoming the second Indian to be appointed an Indian Civil Servant in 1871 employed as an assistant magistrate and collector (Gupta, 1911, p.17; Wilson, 2016, p.340).

Dutt acknowledged that his travelogue did 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 included details about how to get from place to place, sometimes with exact departure and arrival times. He weaved in his impressions about fellow travelers 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, 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). Indeed, the secondary literature on Indian travel writing describes the travelogues as a mix of guidebooks, local histories, autobiography, and ethnography (Codell, 2007).

Dutt’s travels were extensive, stretching from Naples in Italy all the way to the North Cape in Norway. After Dutt and Gupta sat their exam in March 1868, 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. See figure 1 below to see all Dutt’s destinations.





*Figure 1 – Dutt’s destinations on three trips to Europe in 1868-1871, 1886 and 1893*

On Dutt’s second trip to Europe in 1886, this time via the Suez Canal, he travelled with his wife, four children and his brother. Dutt wrote 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).

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, organizing the reception, invited Dutt when they found out that he was in England.

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.

Also, on Dutt’s second trip to Europe, he went with two friends, including Gupta, on a guided tour to Norway and Sweden. They took a boat to Norway, then all the way to the northern most point in Scandinavia and finally they took a small tour in Sweden, to places like Stockholm and Gothenburg. He also visited 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. On the third European trip in 1893, Dutt returned to Cologne after 22 years, as well as visiting Frankfurt and Strasbourg to see the changes brought by the consolidation of the German Empire (Dutt, 1896, p.357).

The political and socio-economic context of these three moments, 1868-71, 1886 and 1893, were varied and complex. Nevertheless, it is useful here to briefly lay out the main contextual details and events during these trips. Dutt 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. Some details will come from his travelogue, others from secondary literature.

On his first trip from 1868 to 1871, Britain had been experiencing a steady increase in population and output 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 enfranchized many male householders, substantially increasing the number of men voting. The excitement on the street was “incredible” (Dutt, 1896, p.12). He described the “crowded” streets and the voters going to the booths to vote (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). “To a reflecting observer,” he wrote, “this interest which the

English take in politics has a meaning and a significance. Every man in this country considers himself as a constituent of a great nation, and therefore keeps an eye on the welfare of his country” (Dutt, 1896, p.13).

British trade was shrinking as of 1870, right around Dutt’s visit, while Britain had ranked as the world’s largest trading nation in 1860 (Baten, 2016). A couple of years after Dutt returned 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).

On the second trip in 1886, things had gotten even worse. Dutt discussed the “depression in trade” and how there was a general pessimism around British progress (Dutt, 1896, p.127). The “better times” were not coming, wrote Dutt (Dutt, 1896, p.127). There were large reserves of capital uninvested and high unemployment resulting in increasing poverty (Dutt, 1896, p.127). Dutt described 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 cited “pessimist thinkers and writers” that theorized that 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.

Dutt experienced another election during his second trip in 1886 (Dutt, 1896, p.131). Unlike his description of the previous election when he primarily described the emotions of seeing his first British election, Dutt focused on the political debates of this second election. He explained how 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 last voyage 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 1890’s. With this brief description of Dutt’s documented travels to Europe and the political and socio-economic context, I will connect the travels to his well-known poverty theory. His travels inevitably affected the way Dutt saw modernity and poverty, the question to be answered in the following section is how.

### **Section III – Poverty Theory in Action**

Dutt, along with his contemporaries, traveled to Europe, among other reasons, to see and experience modernity (Dutt, 1896; Codell, 2007). They had an overarching goal to understand why India was so poor – the opposite of modern Europe. It is unsurprising then that there were few Indian travelers that did not remark on the poverty they saw in England (Burton, 1996, p.134). Travelers, like Dutt, saw and wrote on the everyday lives of the lower classes and on the inside of working class homes (Burton, 1996, p.134). How then did Dutt’s travels affect his understanding of poverty?

On Dutt's first trip to England as a 19 year old, Dutt did not miss the pockets of poverty. The West, according to Dutt, had created "neat," "regular," and "beautiful" spaces (Dutt, 1896, pp.6, 9, 83–84), but "how much more has it yet to do" (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). "It is really painful to reflect on the amount of suffering of the poor in this country" (Dutt, 1896, p.43). 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). Many people lived in overcrowded housing with limited food, causing some to die from hunger or cold, especially during the winter months (Dutt, 1896, pp.27–28, 43). The cold climate, thought Dutt, made the English urban poor worse off than Indians (Dutt, 1896, pp.28, 43).

On his second trip with his family in 1886, the situation had only worsened. Britain and Europe were suffering from the Long Depression. According to Dutt, there were two million unemployed, pushing more people into poverty, alcoholism and violence (Dutt, 1896, pp.127–129). A factory owner from Bristol that Dutt met 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 (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). "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

Christiana, 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.

Dutt’s writings on poverty can be contextualized within a growing number of reports on poverty at the time. Like many other Indian travelers, but also English interlocutors, that started to bring forward observations of poverty, Dutt would have seen the poor on the street. As Revest shows, there was little segregation between the rich and poor at the time (Revest, 2003). There was a growing number of interlocutors who felt a need to observe and understand the way the poorer classes lived. For instance, Dutt’s description of the urban poor’s habitat is similar to George Sims’ description in his influential ethnographic study *How the poor live*, first published as a book in 1883. (The work is listed at the end of Dutt’s travelogue as suggested further reading.) Sims (1847-1922) was a journalist particularly interested in reform to better the lives of the poor. Sim wrote of a room in the slum:

The woman, her husband, and her six children live, eat, and sleep in this one room, and for this they pay three shillings a week. It is quite as much as they can afford. There has been no breakfast yet, and there won't be any till the husband (who has been out to try and get a job) comes in and reports progress. As to complaining of the dilapidated, filthy condition of the room, they know better” (Sims, 1883, p.6).

As mentioned, Dutt similarly described the cramped and rundown living conditions of the poor in London with limited food (Dutt, 1896, pp.27-28,43).

Moreover, the growing poverty debate was later fuelled by the findings of Booth, which Dutt may have read. Booth studied poverty in east London in 1887. He categorized four different degrees of poverty, including monetary and other sociological issues such as housing and employment (Boyer, 2004; Davidson, 1995). If Dutt did read these accounts, then his traveling will have offered him the advantages of observation as well as access to more books that probably did not exist in India.

Data collection on unemployment was also starting to come into existence at this time. The unemployed were naturally some of the most exposed to poverty. This is where Dutt could have got his two million figure from, mentioned above. The Department of Labour Board of Trade established in the 1880s had started to collect data from trade unions on who received unemployment benefits (Boyer and Hatton, 2002)<sup>1</sup>. An unemployment index was published in the Board's monthly report, the *Labour Gazette*, as of 1893. The two million figure does not seem to be appear, nevertheless, the Board's index gave an average unemployment rate of 4.5% from 1870 to 1913, which would have been around 1.5 million people (Boyer and Hatton, 2002).

Indian travel writing became ethnographic studies of Europeans, ultimately debunking the utopic image of a progressive Europe. Traveling for Indians became another way to gain authority, objectivity and credibility and a genre where Indians could reverse the tradition of observing the other through an ethnographic study (Codell, 2007). Dutt's travelogue pushed at the original boundaries of the travel writing genre by observing the often-ignored poor areas in Europe and India. What Dutt found was not the utopic modern region that his education had promised him.

My answer to the question of how Dutt's travels affected his poverty theory would then be that the traveling offered him a method. Through his travels, he realized that theorizing poverty meant he had to observe it. Interestingly, both Dutt and Sims described their observations of the poor as journeys. Sims argued that it was necessary to "encounter misery that some good people think it best to leave undiscovered", which was "as interesting as any of those newly-explored lands which engage the attention of the Royal Geographical Society" (Sims, 1883, p.3). The journey to see "How the Poor Live," wrote Sims, was about giving the poor "a little scientific attention" in order to find "remedies" to cure poverty (Sims, 1883). Similarly, after Dutt's first trip to Europe, he traveled to rural Bengal to collect data on rural poverty. Dutt claimed that economists needed to see the rural poverty to understand and study it.

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<sup>1</sup> The data therefore excluded non-unionized workers and the unions that did not have benefit schemes (Boyer and Hatton, 2002)

In his first publication on those findings, he led his readers on a journey through the Bengali countryside (Dutt, 1874, pp.60–61). Dutt, in my view, is known as the founder of Agricultural Economics in India thanks to his travels to rural India and his subsequent theory on Indian poverty in the agricultural sector. His data collection in the rural parts of India became part of his major contribution explaining the causes of poverty and famines (Dutt, 1874, 1901).

Dutt's theory rejected the imperial discourse that blamed the famines on India's high population growth and dry climate. 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). This was not backed up by the statistics, argued Dutt. Population growth was slower in India than in many other countries, including Britain, and Britain was far denser than India (Dutt, 1901, p.17, 1902b, p.vi, 1897, p.132). Neither were droughts or lack of food to blame. "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, 1902a, p.23, see also, 1902b, p.51). 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 laborers who were unable to support themselves (Dutt, 1901, p.15, 1902a, p.58). Deaths from famines were double the normal rate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century experienced in India only a century earlier, despite an unchanged climate (Dutt, 1901, p.19, see also, 1902b, p.51).<sup>2</sup> Dutt collected data in the rural areas to theorize that droughts or supply shocks did not inherently lead to famines, but the droughts caused higher prices and thus a decrease in the access to food for a large group of Indians who were too poor to now buy the higher priced food.

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

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<sup>2</sup> For reference, the 1876-1878 famine reduced Bengal's population by a third and 10% of the total Indian population (Maddison, 1970, p.63).



consumption in India (Dutt, 1902a, p.99). He blamed excessive land taxes that led to rural indebtedness as peasants were forced to borrow from moneylenders. Additionally, there was an overall lack of savings that exacerbated starvation during famines and prevented peasants from investing in more efficient agricultural techniques (Dutt, 1901, pp.118–119). This relates to the drain theory, which gained popularity and support in this period, associated with Dadabhai Naoroji. The drain theory argued that Britain was not bringing modernity to India, as the civilizing mission promised, but draining India of its resources. Naoroji proved the impoverishment of India's economy and its people by calculating an income per capital in the late 1860s, among other figures, and comparing it to the costs of living (based on costs of feeding, clothing and housing prisoner inmates) (Naoroji, 1901, pp.31, 187–188, 1887, pp.41, 501; Newbigin, 2020). Marx made similar claims that British rule was causing Indian poverty, because, put simply, the British had destroyed India's innate economic structure, the Asiatic Mode of Production (Kumar, 1992). In short, Dutt's travels convinced him that India's poverty was primarily caused by the imperial regime.

Not only did Dutt establish an agricultural economics with a new method, but his poverty and famine theories are precursors to Amartya Sen's award-winning famine theory, published around seventy years later. Based also on rural data collection, Sen, like Dutt, 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 included Dutt's works in his list of references but did 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**

Indian travelers were given a utopic image of a modern Europe. They believed they needed to see modernity firsthand in order to understand it and bring it to India. Ultimately, however, the Indian travelers used travel as an empowering act by mimicking the act of studying the other like European travelers had done to Indians (often with a strong judgemental lens). What is more, for Dutt traveling had

become a natural habit. He grew up traveling and was encouraged to do so by his father, which seems to have convinced him that this was the principal method for understanding one's world. Dutt's trips to the poor rural areas were narrated as journeys into the countryside where he would collect data and theorize the causes of poverty. Dutt's rural travels launched a subfield of economics that would follow his method of traveling to observe and measure the rural subject.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Dutt's research was one of the first to highlight rural issues, such as land taxes and agricultural productivity, which inspired many later Indian economists. Dutt drew attention to the growing divide between rural and urban areas, and between intellectual and manual labour. His "championing of the cause of the voiceless agriculturist," as asserted by Jnanendra Nath Gupta, paved the way for agricultural economists like Radhakamal Mukerjee in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gupta, 1911, p.325).

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