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Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Calcutta,  
founded by Mrs. Pascoa Barretto de Souza, 1834

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Response to the questionnaire: "Stationary Women Moving Through the World: The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Calcutta, founded by Mrs. Pascoa Barretto de Souza, 1834"

#### **About the Author**

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## Questionnaire

# Stationary Women Moving Through the World: The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Calcutta, founded by Mrs. Pascoa Barretto de Souza, 1834

Mrinalini Rajagopalan

In 1835 Pope Gregory XVI received a petition from Mrs. Pascoa Barretto de Souza (1775–1856) inviting him to consecrate the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which had been completed the previous year.<sup>1</sup> The recently widowed Barretto de Souza came from the wealthy Luso-Indian Barretto family of Calcutta. Besides seeking the pope's blessings for her church, the letter made clear her generous endowment of a Catholic church at a time when that denomination was being overshadowed by the Anglicans.<sup>2</sup> Despite being built to serve the Catholics of Calcutta, the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus bears a strong architectural resemblance to the

Anglican St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London. Designed by James Gibbs and completed in 1726, the architectural elements of St. Martin's—a broad neoclassical pedimented portico, a facade with five bays, and a multi-tiered and tapering steeple—became popular across India in the early nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Modest Scottish parish churches in Bombay, Madras, and Meerut and larger Catholic churches like Barretto de Souza's built between 1815 and the 1830s echo the visual composition of St. Martin.<sup>4</sup> Eight years after she wrote to the pope, in the winter of 1843, Barretto de Souza stood at the entrance of her church to welcome Bishop Borghi (an Italian Capuchin serving as the Vicar Apostolic of Agra from 1839 to 1848), who celebrated a Pontifical High Mass followed by the choir singing Mozart's Mass, No XII.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the global interconnectedness of nineteenth-century India, with both men and women playing roles in creative expression, the discourse of mobility (the voluntary choice of moving through space and time) is particularly fraught when writing women's histories; this is hardly because women were not mobile and did not travel. In addition to the patriarchal sanction to move from the father's to the husband's house, we know that Buddhist and Jain nuns traversed the South Asian subcontinent on foot as part of their religious practice; that elite women moved with traveling courts and sometimes accompanied their male patrons on military expeditions; and that women pilgrims journeyed across geographies and cultures that seem daunting even to the contemporary subject. Yet the question that lingers about the aforementioned story is: Did the prestige, wealth, and elevated social rank of women like Barretto de Souza translate into a vicarious form of mobility that expanded their sphere of

<sup>1</sup> Names of many of the Indian cities mentioned here have been changed as part of a recent "vernacularization" process. In this piece, however, I continue to use the proper nouns that were current during the historical period under study: Calcutta (now Kolkata); Bombay (now Mumbai); and Madras (now Chennai).

<sup>2</sup> Archivio Storico Propaganda de Fide (Rome), Scritture Congressi Indie Orientali, Vol. V, 443–447. Letter dated 7 May 1835.

<sup>3</sup> It is not clear why the architectural schema of St. Martin in the Fields's facade was adopted so widely by church builders in India. One pragmatic reason may have been that institutional buildings such as court houses, libraries, and town halls were being constructed all across India in the same neoclassical idiom as St. Martin-in-the-Fields. Local masons and contractors in India might therefore have found the architectural language of that church easy to translate in the Indian context. Another more cultural explanation might be traced to the desire of Indian Catholics to bridge the divide between their community and the Church of England by adopting an overtly Anglican architectural language for their churches.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, St. Andrew's Church Bombay (1815), St. George's Church, Madras (1816), St. John's Church, Meerut (1821), and St. Andrew's Church, Madras (1821).

<sup>5</sup> "The Durrumtollah Church," *The Bengal Catholic Herald* (Calcutta: P.S. D'Rozario & Co., 1843), 340.

influence and experiential knowledge beyond their domiciles? In other words, might we think about histories of mobility outside of physical movement and/or displacement?

In this piece, I have chosen to respond to the following provocation forwarded by the editors: “Within your field, where do you see the greatest potential or need for the implementation of concerns related to mobility and exchange?” I propose a pressing need to consider histories of mobility for those who remained stationary, either by personal choice, social expectations, or individual circumstance. At stake in such an intervention is the dismantling of the concept of mobility that continues to be embodied in gendered and racial privilege. Feminist geographers have long critiqued the masculinist affect and male postures that belie the history of mobility.<sup>6</sup> For example, Mona Domosh has shown that the origins of the discipline of geography in the nineteenth century cannot be separated from the imperialist tropes of the intrepid European male “explorer” of the colonized world. Domosh further argues that while colonialism brought European women the opportunity to travel outside their homes and homelands, their mobility was instrumental to reinscribing colonial brutality and oppression.<sup>7</sup> If the histories of mobility, travel, and exploration are thus caught up in the experience of gendered, racial, and class privilege and imperialism, how do we make room for someone like Barretto de Souza’s founding of a Catholic church as an act of faith *and* mobility—the agency to travel between, without physical movement, the world of Luso-Indian Calcutta and the Catholic metropole of Rome? If the archive of Barretto de Souza is scant, as archives of women usually are, and provides little clue of her aspirations to mobility, how might we recast the discourse of movement to include subjects like her in a more productive way? One way to do so might be by placing Barretto de Souza in creative tension with her male contemporaries whose own prodigious mobility was enabled by the global networks of the nineteenth century.

Consider, for example, the author of this watercolor of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Charles D’Oyly (1781–1845). D’Oyly was an officer of the East India Company and dilettante artist in his spare time. At the time that this painting was made, he held the post of Senior Member of the Board of Customs, Salt, Opium and of the Marine. Salt and opium were both global commodities exchanged in a market monopolized by the British in the early nineteenth century. Barretto de Souza’s father, Luis Barretto, and uncle, Joseph Barretto, had founded a shipping insurance company in Macau in 1797 and profited richly from the opium trade between India and China.<sup>8</sup> D’Oyly, Barretto de Souza’s father and uncle, the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and St. Martin-in-the-Fields, the pope and Bishop Borghi were thus interconnected in global networks where commodities like salt and opium, neoclassical and late Georgian architectural vocabulary, clergy, and colonial agents moved from one part of the colonized world to the metropole. While Barretto de Souza may herself appear stationary in this aggregate juggernaut of motion, it is only because the discourse of mobility as it currently stands elides her agency in these routes of movement.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Sophie Bowlby, Jo Ford, and Suzanne Mackenzie, “Feminism and Geography,” *Area* 14, no. 1 (1982): 19–25; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Mona Domosh, “Toward a Feminist Historiography of Geography,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 16, no. 1 (1991): 95–104.

<sup>8</sup> Roy Eric Xavier, “Luso-Asians and the Origins of Macau’s Cultural Development,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 57 (2017): 187–205.



**Figure 1**


Charles D'Oyly, "Curch. Entrance to the Dhurumtolla," 1848, (Views of Calcutta and its Environs) © The British Library Board (X 666, Plate 7).

I conclude my note on mobility by offering a visual reading of the term as it appears in D'Oyly's painting. In it, Barretto de Souza's church serves as an architectural backdrop and its spire as an exclamation point to the busy foreground of the Dharamtala bazaar. An Indian rides a horse at a fast clip, outpacing the slower carriage carrying two European women and one man as they head across the dusty square. D'Oyly produced numerous picturesque scenes of architecture and landscape during his time in India.<sup>9</sup> Complimenting his prolific artistic abilities, Bishop Reginald Heber wrote "[D'Oyly] says India is full of beautiful picturesque country, if *people would but stir a little* from the banks of Ganges, and his own drawings and paintings certainly make good his assertion."<sup>10</sup> Here is D'Oyly wishing for Indians to be mobile because he found their stationary postures disruptive to the otherwise "picturesque" frame of his vision. Barretto de Souza's global connections to the Vatican due to her faith and to England vis-à-vis the architecture of her church offer one way to make the histories of mobility more capacious. Another arrives in the form of the immobile or obstinately anchored "native" body that thwarts D'Oyly's colonial longing for a perfect, picturesque frame. I contend that it is precisely from these sanguinely stationary (Barretto de Souza) and stubbornly immobile ("natives") bodies that new epistemologies of mobility can emerge.

<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of how the "picturesque" served as a visual domination of the colonial landscape for European artists, see Tapati Guha Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) and Nicholas Dirks, "Guiltless Spoliations: Picturesque Beauty, Colonial Knowledge, and Colin Mackenzie's Survey of India," in *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, ed. Catherine Asher and Thomas Metcalfe (New Delhi: IBH Publishing Co. 1994), 211-233.

<sup>10</sup> [emphasis my own] Reginald Heber, *Narrative of a Journey: Through the Upper Provinces of India from Calcutta to Bombay, vol. 1* (London, John Murray, 1828): 314.

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