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**Of Myths and Modernities: Literature by the Christian Converts of  
Nineteenth-Century Bengal**

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vorgelegt von  
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## Notes on Transliteration

অ	a	ক	ka	ত	ta	স	sa
আ	ā	খ	kha	থ	tha	হ	ha
ই	i	গ	ga	দ	da	ড়	ṛa
ঈ	ī	ঘ	gha	ধ	dha	ঢ়	ṛha
উ	u	ঙ	ṅa	ন	na	য়	ya
ঊ	ū	চ	ca	প	pa	ৎ	ṭ
ঋ	ṛ	ছ	cha	ফ	pha	ং	ṃ
এ	e	জ	ja	ব	ba	ঃ	ḥ
ঐ	ai	ঝ	jha	ভ	bha	ঁ	ˆ
ও	o	ঞ	ñ	ম	ma		
ঔ	au	ট	ṭa	য	ya		
		ঠ	ṭha	র	ra		
		ড	ḍa	ল	la		
		ঢ	ḍha	শ	śa		
		ণ	ṅa	ষ	ṣa		

I have followed the standard conventional transliteration of the Bengali into Roman based on script. The vowels and the consonants are represented by their respective equivalents as listed in the table above. However, there are some other points to be noted as follows:

1. If the inherent vowel is omitted in pronunciation, this is marked as '.  
For example, আমরা would be written as *ām'rā*.
2. The hasanta is represented as -dot- in the middle of the line [·]. For example, ছট্ ফট্ should be written as *chaṭ·phaṭ·*.
3. The apostrophe in a word is retained as such. For example, ক'রে is written as *ka're*.
4. When two words sound similar but are written with dissimilar *mātrās*, the *mātrās* are denoted differently. For example, বৈ with the *mātrā* is denoted as *bai* whereas with বই, where the vowel does not appear as a *mātrā* is written as *bai*.

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## Introduction

We are all aware that English education in the first phase elicited a crisis in our society. Then the entire *samaj* was in tumult and the educated were ruffled. The ritualistic practices of the Indians were an adult's infantile play—this country never had high ideals, no true understanding of God—this realization made us cringe with shame. Thus, when the *kul* of the Hindu *samaj* was falling apart, when the educated class with pained hearts was turning its face away from their motherland, when disrespect towards the motherland was making us vulnerable to the attacks from outside, at such a time the horror the Christian missionaries created in our society is still not completely eradicated from our minds.

Rabindranath Tagore. *Yiśucarit*.<sup>1</sup>

Nineteenth-century Bengal has been identified as the defining moment for India as it not only hosted the Bengal Renaissance but arguably catapulted Indians into 'modernity'.<sup>2</sup> The Bengal Renaissance stands as a mammoth cultural signifier, unassailable, and always in excess of itself. With the Bengal Renaissance the 'West' had 'arrived', everywhere, within the west and outside, in structures and in the minds of both the colonizer and the colonized. The founding agents of this colonial modernity were the Western influences that generated welter in the social, cultural and political spheres. Religion, in particular Christianity, is habitually perceived as one of the key agents of this churning.

History, says, Partha Chatterjee is always informed by the present.<sup>3</sup> The putative 'secular' present that sings of the colonial past has read religion as a taboo subject that remains in the realm of a pure sign, which never speaks but is spoken about. Although the modernity in India was arguably occasioned by the colonial domination, its character has been far from monolithic. Banishing religion from modernity and the separation of church and state<sup>4</sup> has been one of the founding

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<sup>1</sup> Thākur, Rabīndranāth. 'Yiśucarit' (1910). *Rabīndra Racanābālī*, Vol. 13. Kalikātā: Biśvabhāratī, 1995: pp. 333-341; p. 335.

<sup>2</sup> One of the most prominent Bengali historians, Jadunath Sarkar, had remarked in 1928: 'The greatest gift of the English, after universal peace and the modernization of society, and indeed the direct result of these two forces—is the renaissance which marked our 19<sup>th</sup> century. Modern India owes everything to it.' Sarkar, Jadunath. *India Through the Ages, A Survey of the Growth of Indian Life and Thought*. Calcutta: S. C. Sarkar and Sons, 1944 (1928); p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. 'Introduction.' Eds. Partha Chatterjee and Anjan Ghosh, *History and The Present*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002: pp. 1-18; p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Max Müller's conception of Religionswissenschaft or 'the science of religion' was in response to the ideology of enlightenment that sought to dismiss religion as irrational. Christianity in India is also

principles of the modernity of the West.<sup>5</sup> The Indian modernity or modernities<sup>6</sup> even as it accepted Enlightenment rationality failed to exile religion from its foundational discourse, instead foregrounded it as the seminal crisis of civilization.<sup>7</sup> Owing to the rather chequered history of sustained conflicts between religious communities, religion in India has been often read as a historical constant, a fixed consciousness, which has been tainted repeatedly with the colours of treason and fragmentations.<sup>8</sup> While the independent nation state insisted on secularism,<sup>9</sup> the Hindus were

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understood in terms of missionary activism as opposed to the secular British (or other colonial powers) state. However, some studies have reflected on the Protestant influence in the secular politics of British state. Robert A. Yelle in particular argues that the functionality of the British colonial state relied on the Christian notion of the 'canon': 'an exploration of the manner in which discourses regarding law, religion, and language in colonial India each reflected, in parallel fashion, the dream of a "canon", a perfect language that could mediate between universal and particular, and between British colonisers and Indian colonised.' Yelle, Robert A. 'Images of Law and Its Others: Canon and Idolatry in the Discourses of British India.' *Culture and Religion*, 6. 1 (2005): pp. 181-199; p. 181.

<sup>5</sup> Richard King points out that the foundations of modernity were often based on binaries; 'society vs individual, science vs religion, institutional religion vs personal religion, secular vs the sacred, rational vs the irrational, male vs female' and these helped to 'explain away' religion in 'terms of a higher-order meta discourse.' King, Richard. *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and 'the mystic East.'* New York: Routledge, 1999; p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> The character and the progress of Indian modernity in chronological terms have been difficult to document, however, it has been stressed that nineteenth century with its premium in inter-cultural exchanges accelerated the process of modernization. Commenting on the period spanning 1740–1800, George D. Bearce says: 'Before the full European impact, eighteenth century India had a culture which was different in its conceptions, values and aims from European culture. The Indian fulfilled his cultural aspirations within well defined patterns, and cultural change was slow, even imperceptible during a long period of time. Novelty was no spur to the Indian artist; perfectibility was not meaningful; and the aesthetic standards were very different. Indians had quite different conceptions of their learned men, artists, and poets. The learned man was honoured when he pursued his highest religious aspirations, and unlike his counterpart in Europe did not necessarily accumulate new knowledge and propound new ideas; poets and artists likewise utilized traditional materials for their creations and followed time honored rules in their crafts.' Bearce, George D. 'Intellectual and Cultural Characteristics of India in a Changing Era, 1740–1800.' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 25. 1 (1965): pp. 3-17; p.4.

<sup>7</sup> In fact many including Ashis Nandy and Dipesh Chakrabarty have argued, the defence mechanism of the Indians against the colonizers was to adopt the strategy of defining the essence of the nation as spiritual. Brian Hatcher has reasoned that in fact the nineteenth-century Bengali bourgeoisie shaped an understanding of Hinduism based on the Vedanta (which was the closest to the Christian doctrine of monotheism). Hatcher, Brian. 'Bourgeois Vedanta: The Colonial Roots of Modern Hinduism.' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. 75. 2 (June 2007): pp. 298–323. Nandy, Ashis. *Intimate Enemy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989. "The Difference: Deferral of (A) Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal." *History Workshop*, 36, Colonial and Post-Colonial History (1993), pp. 1-34.

<sup>8</sup> William Gould argues for the state of constant religious conflicts in the history of India. Gould, William. *Religion and Conflict in Modern South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. C. A. Bayly contends that contrary to popular opinion that communalism was a product of the colonial rule, communal conflicts between at least the Hindus and the Muslims were commonplace since the eighteenth century. Bayly, C. A. 'The Pre-History of "Communalism"? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860.' *Modern Asian Studies*, 19. 2 (1985): pp. 177-203.

<sup>9</sup> It has often been insisted that secularism is a nineteenth century Indian construct and not adopted from the West. For example, see Tejani, Shabnum. *Indian Secularism: a Social and Intellectual History, 1890-1950*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. Eds. Needham, Anuradha Dingwaney, and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan. *The Crisis of Secularism in India*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2006. Embree, Ainslie Thomas. *Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in Modern India*. Oxford: University of California Press, 1990. Nussbaum evaluates the contemporary politics of India to show

presumed to be more Indian than the followers of 'foreign' religions like Islam and Christianity<sup>10</sup> (cases in point might be the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 and the sustained violence against Christians in tribal Orissa).<sup>11</sup> The later scholarship concerning the nineteenth century has often read religion as a fragmenting agent, equating religious belief with religious ideology.<sup>12</sup> It is therefore no wonder that in the 'continuous narrative of national progress'<sup>13</sup> the religious question has remained an anomaly.

In particular, the scholarship concerning colonial oppression and resistance in the Indian context of religious consciousness has always been the loner.<sup>14</sup> This tenacious relationship between religion and modernity was largely fuelled by the Orientalist's interest in India<sup>15</sup> and an enormous attention in the civilizing mission of

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how religion has continued to threaten the fabric of Indian democracy. Nussbaum, Martha. *The Clash Within, Democracy, Religious Violence and India's Future*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> The process of equating denationalization with the proselytizing character of Christianity might have been a result of the upsurge of political movements in present day India. To quote David C. Scott: 'We have noted that in the present Indian context it is important to recognize that conversion and baptism are all too commonly seen as part of a movement of "denationalization" and hence tend to strengthen the communalistic interpretation of Christianity. When the "depressed classes" awaken to their rights and begin the struggle for social and economic equality, and when the members of the "aboriginal" tribes, who have been peacefully secluded for centuries from the main stream of Indian nationalism, join with others in demanding their rights, fundamentalist groups and the monied classes oppose such moves. A forceful means of instigating opposition is to raise the cry of "denationalization". This is particularly effective when such movements for human rights are inspired by Christians, who are accused of "extra-territorial" loyalties, and whose religion is considered "foreign".' Scott, David C. 'Baptism in the Indian Context—An Event of Separation or Human Solidarity?' *The Christian Century*, (1990): pp. 103-108; p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> For an engaging review on psychology behind the Hindutva question in secular modern India see Banerjee, Sumanta. 'Hindutva: Ideology and Social Psychology.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26. 3 (1991): pp. 97-101.

<sup>12</sup> See for example, Vishwanathan, Gauri. *Out of the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief*. New York: Princeton University Press, 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation.' *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge Routledge, 1990; p. 221.

<sup>14</sup> While Hindu symbolism formed a crucial part of the narrative of Indian nationalism, Christianity was always deemed unsuitable for nationalist aspirations. Therefore the participation of the Indian Christians in the nationalist movement meant that they had to 'indigenize.' As Geoffrey Oddie has pointed out: '[i]nitial focus is on the ideas and agenda of a small number of the Indian Christian educated elite who endorsed the aims of the Indian National Congress founded in 1885, and who, having suffered from European control and dominance in the churches, could appreciate, all the more readily, the need for a genuine partnership and collaboration between Indians and Europeans. While they argued that national regeneration would come only through the values associated with the Christian movement, they had also to demonstrate that Christianity itself was not specifically European and that Indian Christians had a genuine commitment to India and were not "foreigners" alienated from their own culture. Not all Indian Christian nationalists were involved in the political movement, some placing emphasis on conversion or on indigenization.' Oddie, Geoffrey. 'Indian Christians and National Identity, 1870-1947.' *The Journal of Religious History*, 25. 3 (October 2001): pp. 346-366; p. 347.

<sup>15</sup> Kopf, David. *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

India.<sup>16</sup> This chimes with the substantial bulk of studies on the Bengal Renaissance which represents it as the age of reform where external agencies (often Christianity) fostered the reworking of Hinduism in order to launch its revival as the logic of nationalism.<sup>17</sup> Christianity has since been accorded functional buoyancy in the discourses of colonial modernity, even when it has been routinely banished from historical nationalist utterances. Obvious from the opening quote of Tagore is the grudging accommodation of Christianity in the discourses of colonial modernity as an explanatory springboard, habitually used to explicate external influences.

The increasing interest of Europe in India coupled with a growing missionary presence made Christianity a salient discourse in the nineteenth century. As the religion of the 'other'<sup>18</sup> it was representative of the civilizational ethos of the West. Although religious polemic had been a constant presence in the philosophical discourses of Hinduism since antiquity, the discussions on religion and especially in relation to Christianity produced an unusual effect; the creation of the 'general audience'.<sup>19</sup> With street preaching and broadcasting of tracts coupled with a surplus production of cheap print, Christianity came to occupy a public space. But as an intellectual presence, Christianity was dominated by an elite cerebral discourse that read Christianity as a Western epistemological trigger, thereby initiating a discourse of *bhadralok*<sup>20</sup> religious dissent. While most studies on politics and sociology admit

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<sup>16</sup> See for example, Mann, Michael. "'Torchbearers Upon the Path of Progress': Britain's Ideology of a 'Moral and Material Progress' in India." Eds. Harald Fischer Tine and Michael Mann. *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission*. London: Anthem Press, 2004: pp. 1-28.

<sup>17</sup> Bhatia, Varuni. *Devotional Traditions and National Culture: Recovering Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Colonial Bengal*. Unpublished Dissertation. Columbia University, 2009; p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Robinson, Bob. *Christians Meeting Hindus, An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India*. Nottingham: Regnum Books International, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Conlon, Frank F. 'The Polemic Process in Nineteenth-century Maharashtra: Vishnubawa Brahmachari and Hindu Revival.' Ed. Kenneth W. Jones. *Religious Controversy in British India, Dialogues in South Asian Languages*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1992: pp. 5-26.

<sup>20</sup> 'An important product therefore of colonialism and its relations of production, the term *bhadralok* has nonetheless been somewhat difficult of definition, encompassing as it does a considerable heterogeneity with respect to social (including caste) position, relationship to commercial enterprise and bureaucracy, and intellectual and cultural values. Derived from the Sanskrit word *bhadra*, which has been glossed severally as refined, privileged, and propertied, *bhadralok* (respectable men, gentlemen and generally Hindu) were distinguished from *chhotolok*, or the lower orders. They were broadly divided into the *abhijat* *bhadralok*, who had acquired their fortunes in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as business agents of the British, and the *grihasta* or *madhyabitta* *bhadralok*, a middle-income group characterized by English education, professional occupations, and salaried (rather than entrepreneurial) status. It is the latter group that has come to be associated most powerfully with the term *bhadralok*.' Roy, Parama in *Keywords in South Asian Studies*, Ed. Rachel M. Dwyer. <http://www.soas.ac.uk/southasianstudies/keywords/file24800.pdf>. Accessed on 21. 01. 2013. I am aware of the complexities that the loose and expansive term *bhadralok* can denote and I take cue from Brian Hatcher to understand the term in its entirety. To quote him, 'the category of the *bhadralok* speaks of a peculiar nexus between ascriptive group status and bourgeois individualism. That is, while many *bhadralok* were from high-caste (Brahmin and *kayastha*) families, not all of them

to the active participation of the 'cross' in the reformist discourses of the day, literature is often orphaned.

This dissertation explores a facet of this influence in the unique literary culture of nineteenth-century Bengal by shifting the emphasis on the marginal yet powerful literary corpus of Christian converts.<sup>21</sup> The marginality of this corpus is defined by its relative absence from the canonical literary histories. It is however, problematized by the elite social location of the converts (upper caste/class and Western educated). This corpus will provide a unique entry point (both as an insider and outsider) into the making and unmaking of a Bengali bhadralok literary culture. I turn to the pages of a literary past, reading into the silences to understand not just conversions but the after-life of conversions. I will attempt to view the nineteenth century through a prismatic lens and problematize the way Indian literary studies frame the nineteenth century, highlighting the influence of the choices of the religious in the colonial modern consciousness. In the process, I also endeavour to evade the focus on the powerful triumvirate that governs most studies on Christianity in colonial India, namely, the missionaries, the colonial state and the native converts. As a result I bypass what Robert Fox Young calls 'the encounter studies'.<sup>22</sup>

While the dissertation promises to locate itself in the interstices of the religious and the literary and examine the corpus of the Christian converts it has been limited to the Hindu upper-caste converts. This selective ordering of the corpus of the literature is informed by the fact that the emerging literature of Bengal (both English and Bengali) profited immensely from the contributions of the upper-caste Hindu converts to Christianity. There were sectarian theological responses on

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were. Some of the most important among the Bengali nouveaux riches during the early nineteenth century were, in fact, men of lower-caste status who had achieved wealth and reputation through their financial dealings: 'what united them was the "shared educational commitments".' Brian A. Hatcher. *Bourgeois Hinduism, or the Faith of Modern Vedantists*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008; p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> Deleuze and Guattari had enumerated that: '[t]he three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of the language, the connection of the individual and the political, the collective arrangement of utterance. Which amounts to this: that "minor" no longer characterizes certain literatures, but describes the revolutionary conditions of any literature within what we call the great (or established).' Deleuze, Gilles, Félix Guattari and Robert Brinkley. 'What is minor literature?' *Mississippi Review*, 11. 3 Essays in Literary Criticism (1983): pp. 13-33; p. 18. The corpus of our concern is defined by the first two parameters but falls short in the third one. The minor literature that we talk about is in fact part of the larger tradition and has been appropriated as such and not given autonomy as a minority literature.

<sup>22</sup> Fox Young, Robert. 'Can Christians be Bhaktas? A Sanskrit View from Central India, c. 1850.' *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, 21 (2008): pp. 56-62; p. 56.

the part of the Muslims in Musalmani Bengali<sup>23</sup> (a mixture of Arabic, Persian and Urdu with Bengali)<sup>24</sup> but there were very few literary responses by Muslim converts to Christianity (of which none contributed to the literary canon significantly) as opposed to the upper-caste Hindu converts.<sup>25</sup>

While this body of work in retrospective literary historiographies may not have been identified by their religious index, I contend in this dissertation that this literature in its unique use of Hindu mythology sought to chart a distinct narrative tradition within the master narrative of colonial modernity. The assertion is informed by an understanding that the literary choices were indeed often formed and shaped by the porous category of religion. One of the main points of my dissertation is the perceived contradiction of the Christian converts looking for inspiration in the depths of Hindu mythology.

I argue that nationalism together with a new vision of mythology as a national property dissociated from its religious affiliation enabled such an engagement. I further argue that the nationalist movement which gained momentum by the end of the nineteenth century and the first failed attempt of the partitioning of Bengal in 1905 blunted the possibilities of religious dissent that the better half of the nineteenth century fostered. The changing equations of religious dissent moved away from individualistic rebellious efforts to mass movements in the 1930s; prompting a re-evaluation of the literary culture in Bengal. My work therefore proposes to contribute to the studies on the bilingual literary cultures re-

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<sup>23</sup> Tony Stewart reminds us that the linguistic ordering in terms of language is a modern construct and did not exist in middle Bengali. 'Yet many texts from the older period do not lend themselves to such easy marking, not only in the common Bengali folk genres such as pāncālī and pālā gān, but in romance and semiepic, and even certain overtly religious speculations and instructional manuals. Among the latter, it is the Sufi literature that is perhaps most difficult to interpret because of the mixture of technical and nontechnical terms from sometimes unexpected sources, but other less overtly religious genres have adopted similar lexical strategies, so the analysis of the Sufi approaches should yield insights into the full range of forms.' Stewart, Tony. 'In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Hindu-Muslim Encounter through Translation Theory.' *History of Religions*, 40. 3 (2001): pp. 260-287; p. 263.

<sup>24</sup> I use David C. Curley's definition of Musalmani Bengali as a distinctive linguistic presence since the age of the *Mangal kabyas*. Curley, David L. *Poetry and History: Bengali Mangal-kabya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal*. New Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2008; p. 25. James Long in the first catalogue of Bengali books identifies 'Musalman-Bengali Literature' as a distinct category. He identifies this language (a mixture of Bengali and Urdu) as 'boatman's language'. Long, James. *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Works, Containing a Classified List of Fourteen Hundred Bengali Books and Pamphlets, which have been issued from the press, during the last sixty years, with occasional notices of the subjects, the price, and where printed*. Calcutta: Sanders, Cones and Co., 1855; p. 94.

<sup>25</sup> Ahmed, Rafiuddin. 'Muslim-Christian Polemics and Religious Reform in Nineteenth-century Bengal: Munshi Meheru'llah of Jessore.' Ed. Kenneth W. Jones. *Religious Controversy in British India, Dialogues in South Asian Languages*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1992.

introducing the religious as a crucial axis of enquiry.

Religion and in particular Christianity becomes an important denominator in at least the representational realm or modes of cultural production in the time span concerned, of which literature forms a major bulk, where it is debated and consumed relentlessly. Therefore, I have tried to examine religion in the nineteenth-century Bengal as not merely a metaphysical or a sociological category but a larger performative category. In an age which was defined by the 'explosion' of print, it was imperative to constantly perform the 'act' of belonging in a larger matrix of representational excess. This allowed for new relationships and community lines to be drawn and re-drawn and as Dilip Menon opines, with colonialism the 'religious imaginary' overtakes caste and kinship ties as the 'new collective'.<sup>26</sup> This phenomenon is further complicated as categories of the cultural and the religious constantly collide, coincide and contradict each other. In these actions, religion emerges not only as an important political denominator but gets enforced as a larger literary choice. In their liberal use of Hindu mythology, the Christian converts not only negotiate conversion as an 'irreparable break' but directly participate in the crucial dialogue between literature, history and modernity. Therefore, this study occupies an in-between space defined by well-established paths on either side: nineteenth century literary histories and Christianity as religio-political rupture. To fathom the specific problematic of the corpus of the Christian convert literature it is important to highlight the particularities of Christianity in Bengal.

### *Bengal's tryst with Christianity: The historical background*

The advent of Christianity in Bengal was late considering that it had already arrived at the Malabar Coast in the first few centuries AD. In fact it is believed that the people of the Southern part of India received their gospel from Thomas, the apostle.<sup>27</sup> According to the traditional lore, St Thomas was supposed to have come to Malabar in 52 AD and was eventually killed by some Hindu priests in 72 AD in Mylapore. Since then Christians from Persia and Mesopotamia have found their

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<sup>26</sup> Menon, Dilip. 'Religion and Colonial Modernity: Rethinking Belief and Identity.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37. 17 (2002): pp. 1662-1667.

<sup>27</sup> Fernando, Leonard and G. Gispert-Sauch. *Christianity In India: Two Thousand Years of Faith*. New Delhi: Penguin India, 2004. Brown, Leslie. *The Indian Christians Of St. Thomas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

way to the shores of Southern India in the fourth century AD.<sup>28</sup> Bengal's first encounter with Christianity materialized at the end of the sixteenth century when emperor Akbar in the year 1579 granted a *firman* allowing the missionaries to operate in Bengal. According to Jadunath Sarkar, the Portuguese were master pirates and soon set up their posts along the coasts of lower Bengal. Often hired by local kings to strengthen their militia, they went by the name of *harmad* (derived from the Spanish armada) and were believed to have unleashed a reign of terror. They subsequently established their first church on the banks of river Hooghly in Bandel in 1599 and were assumed to have forcefully converted a number of people.<sup>29</sup> The converted came mostly from the Hindu community. One of the best known converts of the period was the young prince Bhushan of Dacca who was taken captive by the pirates and then re-christened as Dom Antonio de Rozario.<sup>30</sup> Credited for having written the first treatise on the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity, *Brāhman Kyāthalik Saṃbād* [Brahman Catholic Report] (1663), he is believed to have converted a substantial number of Hindus.<sup>31</sup> The Armenians and

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<sup>28</sup> Farquhar, J. N. *Modern Religious Movements in India*. New York: Macmillan, 1915.

<sup>29</sup> J. Jacob Thomas observes that 'When the Portuguese started forceful conversions, Emperor Shah Jahan drew them out of their Hooghly Fort and made at least 4000 Christians, including many Bengali Christians and priests. The Dutch started the Chinsura factory in 1653, Kassim Bazar and Baranagore in 1658. The French with the permission of the Nawab, Shaista Khan, entered Bengal in 1654 and started the famous factory of Chandranagar in 1690-92. The Danes had never an important role in Bengal, but their settlement at Serampore became famous for the refuge it gave to William Carey and others. Thomas, J. Jacob. 'Interaction of the Gospel and Culture in Bengal.' *Indian Journal of Theology*, 36. 1 (1987): pp. 38-53; p. 39.

<sup>30</sup> Prior to the advent of the Protestant missionaries in the wake of the British imperial rule, there seems to have been a considerable presence of the Portuguese in the eastern part of colonial Bengal (in what is now known as Bangladesh). 'The Portuguese also settled at Chittagong in the sixteenth century under the auspices of the king of Arakan. The Augustinians established themselves there in 1621 and baptized thousands who had been captured in piratical raids. Later in the seventeenth century, Nagari became an important centre, following the conversion of about 20, 000 mainly low-caste Hindus by Antonio de Rozario, son of the raja of Bhushna (Jessore), who had himself converted. R. C. Majumdar (1966) discusses a dispute between the two orders of priests, Jesuits and Augustinians, over the supervision of converts and reports that later the converts came back to their previous religion. The first church in Bangladesh was built in 1599 at Chandecon (also called Iswaripur or old Jessore) near Kaliganj of Satkhira District. Jesuit Father Francisco Fernandez built the Church with the permission of king Pratapaditya. The church was called "Holy Name of Jesus". The second church was also established by the same person in 1600 in Chittagong with the help of Arakan's king. When Dhaka was made the capital of Bengal in 1608, the missionaries started to come there. In 1612, the Portuguese Augustinian missionaries introduced Christian religion in Dhaka. In 1628, they established the church of the Assumption in Narinda. The second church in Dhaka was built in 1677 at Tejgaon. In 1764, Portuguese missionaries built a church at Padrishibpur in Barisal.' Farid, Md. Shaikh. 'Historical Sketch of the Christian traditions in Bengal.' *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*, 8. 1 (2011): pp. 72-103; p. 73.

<sup>31</sup> His book seems to have been very popular among enthusiasts even in the early twentieth century. It was republished by the Calcutta University. Dom Antonio Da Rozario. *Argument and Dispute Upon the Law Between a Roman Catholic and a Brahman*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1937. The reviewer for the Royal Asiatic society singles out the book as the most important Christian treatise written in India and credits Dom Antonio for having converted at least 20, 000-30, 000 Bengalis by 1680. Walsch, E. H.

the Augustans followed the Portuguese but failed to create a significant impact in the society.

It was only the arrival of the Danish missionaries at Serampore (Śrīrām'pur) and the setting up of the printing press that captured the imagination of the educated elite in Bengal. The popularity of the print coincided with the establishment of the Western education system in the form of the Hindu college in 1817. One of the most popular strategies of conversion was to educate the heathen and in the process expose the falsity of Hinduism by equipping them with Western science and philosophy. As William Wilberforce had remarked in 1830, the Indians would become Christians without 'knowing it'. In other words, Western education ensured that the Bengalis were well versed in the rhetoric of Christianity without having crossed the threshold of Hinduism. Education being largely an elite preserve in the nineteenth century, it would simultaneously allow the missionaries to target the upper-caste Hindus for conversion.<sup>32</sup>

The arrival of Christianity with the Portuguese in Bengal was followed by the missionary enterprises of several European colonizing powers like the Dutch, French and British, and marked the religion as a foreign import. Although the relationship between the missionaries and the colonizing powers were not very amicable in the first half of the nineteenth century,<sup>33</sup> they were allowed in the second half with the emphasis of the British government shifting by offering a civilizing face to the process of colonization.<sup>34</sup> Although the term 'the white man's burden' gained currency after the eponymous poem was written in 1899 by Rudyard Kipling, in spirit it had a widespread influence since the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> Frequently religion in the sense of Christianity was offered as a

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C. 'Review of *Argument and Dispute Upon the Law Between a Roman Catholic and a Brahman*.' Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1937.' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 71. 2 (1939): pp. 290-292.

<sup>32</sup> Copland, Ian. 'The Limits of Hegemony: Elite Responses to Nineteenth-century Imperial and Missionary Acculturation Strategies in India.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 49. 3 (2007): pp. 637-665.

<sup>33</sup> It was only with the Charter Act of 1813 or the East India Company Act of 1813 that the British crown allowed the missionaries to operate in India.

<sup>34</sup> A fairly common logic was to associate civilized Christianity as a counter-foil to the Muslim rule. To cite an example, in a lecture delivered in Calcutta in 1843, George Thompson had commented: 'Mogul has now passed into the hands of the representative of our beloved Queen, and where the mild mandates of Christianity, will, I trust, take the place of the stern edicts of Mahomet.' Thompson, George. *Addresses Delivered at the Meetings of the Native Community of Calcutta and on other Occasions*. Calcutta: Thacker and Co, 1843; p. 155.

<sup>35</sup> To cite an example, George Thompson in a lecture delivered to the natives of India had remarked: 'I have long been anxious that the people of England should feel their responsibility to God for the manner in which this empire is governed. No amount of wisdom, benevolence, or justice in the

panacea to aid the advent of colonial modernity. It has been convincingly argued that the missionary activities were never singular; the spiritual and the political, however, were intertwined.<sup>36</sup>

Ironically, while the missionaries continued to attract a good number of students very few actually became Christians. To quote Rev. James:

We thankfully acknowledge that, by the agency of missions, much has been done for India. We can point to one hundred thousand natives who have publicly renounced error and avow their faith in Christ. We can point to one hundred and twenty thousand pupils in Mission Schools, receiving a Scriptural education. We can assert, and prove, that the truth is leavening the masses and uprooting prejudices, but we admit that fruit in India has fallen far short of labour expended. We admit that the churches have a right to expect more abundant fruit, and we assert that missions to other parts of the world have been much more successful. Missions have been established in India for one hundred years. They have been gradually increasing in efficiency, till now we number from the various Protestant Societies in Europe and America, nearly 500 missionaries. These are effectually supplemented by a large native staff of evangelists, catechists, and colporteurs, and all supported at great expense. The agency is thus seen to be large, but the results have been far less glorious than we are entitled to expect.<sup>37</sup>

Even as mission schools received overwhelming response owing to the surge in the demand for Western education, the actual conversions in Bengal were few and far between. But what these large scale organized religious missions had achieved was to etch in the minds of the public that Christianity was an essentially Western import and part of the imperial apparatus of the British<sup>38</sup> on a civilizing mission.<sup>39</sup> While the missionaries indeed believed that the heathens were a culturally deprived

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delegated rulers of India, can, in my opinion, absolve the great body of the people from this responsibility. In consequence of their past ignorance, they have been quite incompetent to form a just opinion; still more, to suggest remedies for existing evils. If enlightened, informed, and interested in regard to Indian matters, they would be able to commend, encourage, and support that which is just and beneficial; and at the same time to check abuses, to make salutary changes, and to lay down broad and generous principles for the future administration of the Government.' Thompson, George. *Addresses Delivered at the Meetings of the Native Community of Calcutta and on other Occasions*. Calcutta: Thacker and Co. 1843: pp. 2-3.

<sup>36</sup> For a range of opinion that framed the missionary apparatus in India see Cox, Jeffrey. *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818–1940*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

<sup>37</sup> Mcke, Rev. James. *Obstacles to the Progress of Christianity in India*. Belfast: Printed at Newsletter Office, 1858; p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> The discussions of Christianity in India often overlooked the possibility of various fractionalizations in terms of the missionary enterprise in India. While the Irish question in India was often sympathized, the Scots, Danes, Americans and Germans were frequently clubbed together to represent one Christian block.

<sup>39</sup> One of the powerful instruments was the missionary strategy to undermine Hinduism. For an extended discussion of the same see Doctor, Adi H. 'Missionary Teachings and Social Reformers in 19th Century India.' Ed. Teotonio R. de Souza. *Discoveries Missionary Expansion And Asian Cultures*. Goa: Xavier Centre for Historical Research, 1994: pp. 105-114.

lot in need of the gospel, the Bengalis viewed Christianity as a cultural onslaught set to destabilize their societal matrix.<sup>40</sup>

Owing to its close proximity to the colonial powers, Christianity was always perceived as the natural ally of colonization.<sup>41</sup> On the contrary, recent studies have highlighted that the relationship between colonialism and empire was never an easy equation.<sup>42</sup> In a knee-jerk reaction to Orientalism as a discourse, this mood has continued well into the later part of the nineteenth century. Andrew Porter, for example, says that '[t]here have been plenty of polemics, historical analyses, and contemporary accounts of missionary activity; many authors suggesting that there was an intimate, inevitable connection between missions and "cultural

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<sup>40</sup> For a range of opinion on the relationship between the British Victorians at large and their missionary enterprise see: Stanley, Brian A. *The Bible and the Flag, Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Leicester: Apollos, 1990. Dunch, Ryan. 'Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity.' *History and Theory* 41. 3 (2002): pp. 301–325.

<sup>41</sup> Susan Vishwanathan observes that although the British were initially weary of the participation of the missionaries in the imperial agenda, by the 1840s things had changed considerably. The lines between the secular and the evangelical were often blurred owing to the overarching concern of 'one empire, one religion.' Vishwanathan, Susan. 'The Homogeneity of Fundamentalism: Christianity, British Colonialism and India in the Nineteenth Century.' *Studies in History*, 16. 2 (2000): pp. 221-240. Also see Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 100-103. The relationship between Christianity and colonialism cannot be read in monolithic terms as political ambitions of all the European missionaries (and even those from the United Kingdom) were never analogous. For example Philip Constable has highlighted the ambitions of the Scottish missionaries to establish a Scottish empire: 'Scottish Missionaries, "Protestant Hinduism" and the Scottish Sense of Empire in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-century India.' *The Scottish Historical Review*, 86. 2: No. 222 (October 2007): pp. 278-313. Even for Christian converts the European powers were not similar and they were particularly sympathetic about the Irish question for obvious reasons of political symbolism. K. M. Banerjea for example in a bilingual appeal urged the Bengali folk to generously contribute towards the relief fund for the Irish and the Scottish famine afflicted. Banerjea, K. M. *Be not Weary in Well Doing, An Appeal in Behalf of the Destitute Scotch and Irish*. Calcutta: Mr Lawrence and Co, 1851.

<sup>42</sup> Gauri Vishwanathan has elegantly demonstrated the British government's reluctance to let the missionaries intervene in India. Some others have argued that commerce and Christianity were inextricably linked in the heydays of the empire. British historians Brian Stanley and Andrew Porter have argued that in fact missions and commerce were not ideally interlinked. Ian Copland on the other hand has applied a cautious approach to state that: 'contrary to the dominant consensus, the relationship between church—in the form of the missionary societies—and state—in the shape of the English East India Company, initially cool, gradually warmed as the two parties came to realize that they had a common interest in providing "civilizing" Western education to the Indian elites. Indeed it provocatively suggests that the colonial state might well, in time, have given its endorsement and even its support to the spread of Christianity had not the Mutiny intervened in 1857. However the analysis of the benefits generated by this South Asian partnership finds, paradoxically, that it undermined the Company's authority, and may well have deterred many Indians from converting to Christianity—which had come to be widely seen as a privileged and imperialist religion.' Copland, Ian. 'Christianity as an Arm of Empire: The ambiguous case of India under the Company, c. 1813–1858.' *The Historical Journal* 49. 04, (2006): 1025-1054; p. 1026; Porter, Andrew. 'Religion and Empire: British Expansion in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1780–1914.' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 20. 3 (1992): pp. 370–390; Porter, Andrew. "'Commerce and Christianity': The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan.' *The Historical Journal* 28. 03, (1985): pp. 597-621; Porter, Andrew N. *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880-1914*. Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003. Stanley, Brian. *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Leicester: Apollos, 1990. Dunch, Ryan. 'Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity.' *History and Theory*, 41. 3 (2002): pp. 301-325.

imperialism”<sup>43</sup>. Merely connecting the two and posing it as the historical truth comes with its own challenges and counter-examples. Just to cite an example, this equivalence suggests a well orchestrated civilizing/imperialist agenda of the missionaries, and most obvious amongst them all, this overlooks the inherent tensions between the different church denominations.

In his monograph on the conversion of heathens, William Carey in fact rates the Muslims better than the fellow Greek and Armenian Christians: ‘In respect to those who bear the Christian name, a very great degree of ignorance and immorality abounds amongst them. There are Christians, so called of the Greek and Armenian churches, in all the mahometan countries: but they are, if possible, more ignorant and vicious than the mahometans themselves’.<sup>44</sup> The new native converts to Christianity also participated in these internecine religious skirmishes. One particular native convert in several issues of the *Bengal Catholic Herald* was belligerent against the Protestant onslaughts:

You proceed: ‘Will an intelligent being proceed into the bosom of his enemy’s country, leaving behind him her forts unconquered, and if he does, is it not sure that he will be killed?’ The Catholic Church all the world knows is built on *Rock*, and that the gates of *Hell* cannot prevail against it. It is therefore quite sure, as you yourself state, and which I have great pleasure in admitting, that if, with hostile intention, you penetrate her realms and approach her, an Invulnerable Fortress of Infallibility, you would certainly be killed. It is therefore natural that you should talk of refusing to fight, and prepare for a retreat.<sup>45</sup>

Even though Christian proselytization in nineteenth-century Bengal was largely a failure in terms of the number of conversions, it redefined religious dissent in the high noon of colonization. Fiery men, often graduates of the new institutes of Western learning and armed with Western philosophy, were looking for alternatives to voice religio-social dissent. While it infuriated the Hindu orthodoxy<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Porter, Andrew. ‘“Cultural Imperialism” and Protestant missionary enterprise, 1780-1914.’ *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 25. 3 (1997): pp. 367-91; p. 373.

<sup>44</sup> Carey, William. *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens: In which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings are Considered*; printed and sold by Ann Ireland, and the other booksellers in Leicester; J. Johnson, St. Paul’s Church yard; T. Knott, Lombard Street; R. Dilly, in the Poultry, London; and Smith, at Sheffield, 1792; p. 65

<sup>45</sup> ‘To Baboo Beni Madhob Kar.’ *Bengal Catholic Herald*. Vol. X. No. 23, 1846; 312. In a letter written to Beni Madhob Kar published in the Catholic Herald charge against being a Jesuit. Letter written on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 1846.

<sup>46</sup> In this regard one must remember that what was defined as a Hindu changed considerably during the course of the nineteenth century. Brain Hatcher for example says: ‘This modern project of defining Hinduism in terms of Vedānta is associated with the likes of Rammohan Roy in the early nineteenth century and with later colonial and postcolonial Hindu apologists like Swami Vivekananda and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. These and a host of lesser-known philosophers and swamis helped to

and intensified their social censure, it provided optimum opportunity for the Christian converts to fashion themselves as romantic 'rebels'. The norms that orchestrated every mode of societal exchange organized them around behavioural taboos and conversions invited immediate social ostracization.<sup>47</sup> Conversion to that end, armed with the logic of irreparable break, provided the prop for these rebellious demonstrations.

In representational terms, both in the nineteenth century itself and the criticism afterwards, conversion to Christianity as a foundational rupture or 'break' in the belief system has enjoyed centrality.<sup>48</sup> It was heightened by the information explosion in the nineteenth century with the advent of print capitalism. Representational excess attained magnanimous proportion due to what Partha Mitter calls the 'endless "repeatability" of information'.<sup>49</sup> Conversion as a threat was rendered potent by the belief that conversion was not just surrender to an 'alien' faith but, most importantly, surrender to an alien political order.<sup>50</sup> This 'representational excess', as Sipra Mukherjee observes, was extended to brand the Christian convert as a traitor of the nation at large.<sup>51</sup> Conversion to Christianity in Bengal therefore travels from a sociological understanding to a deeper problematics of political identities.

While sociological and political dimensions assume greater significance one cannot but overlook the metaphysical associations that Christianity generated. Beginning with Ram Mohan Roy and the Orientalist scholars and the entire bandwagon of the Hindu revivalist movement, Christianity was a relational touchstone against which habitually the indigenous reform movements oriented their

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enshrine Vedanta as the veritable essence of Hinduism.' Hatcher, Brian. 'Bourgeois Vedanta: The colonial roots of middle-class Hinduism.' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 75. 2 (June 2007): pp. 298–323.

<sup>47</sup> The Hindu societal relationships were governed by the ancient Aryan idea of *rita* (order) which mutated over the years. Central to this societal order were the concepts of 'purity' and 'pollution' and conversion unsettled such categories thereby prompting an excommunication. See for example; Pauline Kolenda. 'Purity and Pollution.' Ed. T. N. Madan. *Religion in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991: pp. 78-96.

<sup>48</sup> Arthur Darby Nock, for example, defines conversion as 'reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from earlier forms of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved that the old was wrong and the new is right.' Darby Nock, Arthur. *Conversion: Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988; p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Partha Mitter. 'Mechanical Reproduction and the World of the Colonial Artist.' *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 36. 1 and 2 (2002): pp. 1-32; p.2.

<sup>50</sup> Pannikar, K. M. *Asia and Western Dominance*. New York: Collier Books, 1969.

<sup>51</sup> Mukherjee, Sipra. 'Conversion without Commotion: Rev. Lal Behari Day's Chandramukhir Upakhyan.' *Conversion to Christianity in Modern Asia*, Ed. Richard Fox Young and Jonathan A. Seitz, Brill Books, Leiden, forthcoming.

metaphysics. From Ram Mohan Roy preaching monotheism to Swami Vivekananda lecturing on comparative religion (to indicate a span of time from the beginning of the nineteenth century to its closure), Christianity emerged as a key signifier in the metaphysical vocabulary. Even though in terms of religious conversions Christianity was but a minor presence in Bengal, it subsumed within itself a larger representational field. As Partha Chatterjee<sup>52</sup> would like to remind us, this also gives rise to the perceived acceptance of Western knowledge forms as versions of secularized Western Christianity. This representational field was complicated further by the blurring of the categories of Western secularized Christianity and Christianity as a religion.

Conflation of the categories was often one of the insignia of what came to be known as the Bengal Renaissance. In comparing the Bengal Renaissance with its Italian counterpart, Sukanta Chaudhuri observes, 'the new language and culture that triggered the Bengal Renaissance located itself vis-à-vis the native culture primarily in space, not in time'.<sup>53</sup> This spatially distant cultural relationship frequently challenged the limits of Christianity as a religion. This was concomitant with an increasing acceptance of Western mores of social exchange (most common being travel to foreign lands, acquiring Western forms of knowledge, dressing like European men, education of women and sharing food with people of other castes) often influenced by Western education.<sup>54</sup> Even as one was ready to assimilate/accept normative behavioural indicators of Western secularized Christianity, it was difficult to stomach the 'religion'. In the nationalist narrative canopy of literary histories of Bengal therefore Christianity has proven to be the dangerous outcaste.

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<sup>52</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. 'On Civil and Political Society in Post-colonial Democracies.' Eds. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani. *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001: pp. 165-178; p. 166.

<sup>53</sup> Chaudhuri, Sukanta. 'Renaissance and Renaissances: Europe and Bengal.' Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge. Occasional Paper No. 1, 2004; p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Mrinalini Sinha discusses the changes in social intercourse among men in Colonial Calcutta. Sinha, Mrinalini. 'Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India.' *The Journal of British Studies* 40. 4 (2001): pp. 489-521. For sartorial changes see Bannerji, Himani. 'Textile prison: Discourse on shame (lajja) in the attire of the gentlewoman (bhadramahila) in colonial Bengal.' *Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie*, 19. 2 (1994): pp. 169-193.

## *Religion and the literary imagination*

Sudipta Kaviraj in reviewing the pattern of literary histories of India (in particular Bengal), asks an imperative question: 'How do literary cultures, especially deeply entrenched literary cultures, change?'<sup>55</sup> The 'transformation' of a literary culture is most often a retrospective perception. Kaviraj further asks: why has literature been studied so much as compared to philosophy in terms of modernity in India? The answer perhaps lies in the fact that '[l]iterary reflections rather than social theory settle civilizational judgements about whether modernity offers a better way of existence than earlier forms, about what Hans Blumenberg called "the legitimacy of the modern age"'.<sup>56</sup> In attempting to do so, history and literature have collided all too often and created skewed modes of looking at the nineteenth century literary practices.

In understanding literary cultures, particularly the one in Bengal, significant attention has been devoted to the chronological parameters with a premium on colonial knowledge practices.<sup>57</sup> Although one cannot club all manners of literary histories together, one might be tempted to observe that these historiographies tend to highlight the Hindu-Muslim religious identities.<sup>58</sup> The Muslim consciousness often traced back to the Mughal rule in Bengal, takes a definitive shape post 1857,<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Kaviraj, Sudipta. 'The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal.' Ed. Sheldon Pollock. *The Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South-Asia*. Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003: pp. 503-566.

<sup>56</sup> Kaviraj, Sudipta. 'Literature and the Moral Imagination of Modernity.' Eds. Orla-Bukowska, Annamaria, and Krzysztof Kowalski. *The Moral Fabric in Contemporary Societies*. Vol. 9. Leiden: Brill Academic Pub, 2003: pp. 263-281.

<sup>57</sup> Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal point to the 'ahistorical privileging of religion in the periodization of Indian history adopted by the historians of the colonial era' where the history of India was typically understood to be Hindu (Ancient), Muslim (Medieval) and British (Modern). Bose, Sugata and Ayesha Jalal. *Modern South Asia: History, Culture and Political Economy*. New York: Routledge, 2004 (1997); p. 8.

<sup>58</sup> Kaviraj suggests that the nineteenth century colonial governance ensured that groupings based on caste and religion became markers of political community. Kaviraj, Sudipta. 'Religion and identity in India.' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20. 2 (1997): pp. 325-344. For some indicative examples of literary history, in particular the content and schematization of sources, see: Sen, Sukumar. *History of Bengali Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1971. Sen, Dinesh Chandra. *History of Bengali Language and Literature*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1954. De, Sushil Kumar. *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century, 1757-1857*. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar. *Languages and Literatures of Modern India*. Calcutta: Bengal Publishers, 1963. Ray, Annadasankar, and Lila Ray. *Bengali Literature*. New Delhi: Pen All-India Centre, 1942. Ghosh, J. C. *History of Bengali Literature*. London: Oxford University Press, 1948. Ashraf, Syed Ali. *Muslim Traditions in Bengali Literature*. No. 950. Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1983. In terms of literary histories written in Bengali, Sukumar Sen recognizes the possibility of a Christian literature, but predictably limits it to the missionary influence. Bandyopādhyāy, Asit Kumār. *Bāṅlā Sāhityer Itihāsa*. Kalikātā: Modern Book Agency, 1966. Caudhūrī, Bhūdeb. *Bāṅlā Sāhityer Itikathā*. Kalikātā: Dej Pābliśārs, 1984. Sen, Sukumār. *Bāṅlā Sāhityer Itihāsa*. Kalikātā: Ānanda Pābliśārs, 1980.

<sup>59</sup> Ahmed, Rafiuddin. *The Bengal Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

is made pronounced with the failed attempt at the partitioning of Bengal in 1905, and attains a final rupture with the partition of the country in 1947.<sup>60</sup> A conscious effort at developing a distinct Muslim literary heritage was particularly poignant in the nineteenth century and predominantly conspicuous by the turn of the twentieth century where a distinct Muslim identity was necessary to legitimize the birth of a new nation.<sup>61</sup> The Hindu upper-caste bhadralok apathy for including Muslim voices in the largely Hindu continuous literary tradition has also significantly contributed towards these compartmentalized literary identities. Both these indigenous sources of identity (ancient Hindu and medieval Muslim) were united in their nationalist agenda with the colonial power as their customary antinomy. As a 'natural suspect', by contrast, Christian religious discourses have been banished from common understandings of literary cultures in Bengal which has focussed on Hindus and Muslims. Hindu-Muslim literary histories have become even more popular in the studies after 1947, as the partition of the country on the basis of religion became an overarching historical vector. Since Christianity failed to figure in the nationalist organizing discourses it continued to serve as the common 'other' (for Hindus and Muslims alike), represented as the by product of colonization. The histories of Indian writing in English (where the converts owing to their Western education were luminaries) on the other hand attempt to parade English writing as representatives of a national idiom.<sup>62</sup> While vernacular<sup>63</sup> literatures could contend with fragmenting religious influences, if any, Indian English writing had to promote a national allegory thereby foreclosing the possibility of religious influences.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Jalal, Ayesha. *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam* New York: Routledge, 2000; p. xv.

<sup>61</sup> Dutt, R. C. *The Literature of Bengal: A Biographical and Critical History from the Earliest Times, Closing with a Review of Intellectual Progress under British rule in India*. Calcutta: Thacker Spink and Co, 1895. Roy, Asim. *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983. The politics of nationalist literary histories is further complicated by the nationalist conceptualizations of the state of Bangladesh on the basis of a linguistic identity (Bangladesh became an independent state in 1971).

<sup>62</sup> Meenakshi Mukherjee identifies this as a persistent trope in the Indian novels in English. Mukherjee, Meenakshi. 'The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2. 48 (1993): pp. 2607-2611.

<sup>63</sup> I am aware of the reservations against the use of the term vernacular. Some suggest it had definitive pejorative connotation as the Latin root verna means house-born of slave and recent critics use *bhasha* instead. In the course of the dissertation I have used vernacular precisely to highlight the hierarchy of languages in colonial Bengal. For a discussion on language terminologies in colonial India see: Merrill, Chriti. 'Afterlives of Pandity, Rethinking Fidelity in Sacred Texts with Multiple Origins.' Eds. Judy Wakabayashi and Rita Kothari. *Decentring Translation Studies: India and Beyond*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009: pp. 75-94.

<sup>64</sup> For recent academic engagements with writing the nation in English see, Prasad, G. J. V. *Writing India, Writing English*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2011.

This is precisely where my dissertation departs from the earlier literary studies of nineteenth century literature. I wish to bestow 'Christian Literature' its place in the nineteenth-century literary history. Examining a corpus of literature written by a marginal yet powerful (most converts came from the highly privileged upper caste bhadralok fraction) constituency allows a unique entry point into the complex literary terrain of nineteenth century colonial Bengal. I examine the English and the Bengali literary spheres together, highlighting the necessity to focus on the emerging dynamics of a colonial bilinguality.

In the nineteenth century owing to the influence of Western education emblemized in appropriation of the English language the co-mingling of linguistic practices also indicates overlapping of knowledge practices. While one cannot assign one single parameter to a rapidly changing code of aesthetic perception, a new axis of understanding might just be contributive. The nineteenth century India as Henry Schwarz points out is also the site of 'laissez-faire' linguistics where modern codified languages were born with the explosion of the print capital which in turn produced subservient legal subjects.<sup>65</sup> In other words, the standardization of languages went hand in hand with new colonial governmental policies which in turn defined legal subjectivities (for example codification of the Bengali language was coeval to the production of the Bengali as a legal subject under the British colonial law).<sup>66</sup> Subsequently it ordered the domains of linguistic spaces to produce hierarchically structured literary cultures with English functioning as the language of the rulers.<sup>67</sup> In these contending linguistic spheres religion becomes a common point of enquiry. Clearly, this bilingual literary culture (albeit with a premium on

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<sup>65</sup> Schwarz observes that the major project of the standardization of language involved efforts to codify grammar. 'Indeed, one suspects that the true project of the *Grammar* is explicitly *not* to create the "ideal speech situation," the utopia for which grammars usually strive, but rather to create a collective ear capable of hearing the unequivocal call of empire so as to produce the "right understanding" that would further lawful incorporation.' Schwarz, Henry. 'Laissez-Faire Linguistics: Grammar and the Codes of Empire.' *Critical Inquiry*, 23. 3 (1997): pp. 509-535; 513.

<sup>66</sup> Farina Mir in the context of the imperial language policy of Punjab argues that the bilingual culture was in fact a product of the British administrative system. The language policy was dictated often by local contingencies rather than a blind allegiance to imperial strategies. Read in this context the bilinguality takes regional dimensions rather than an overarching top down model. It is particularly useful in the context of this dissertation as it identifies localized modes of dealing with a new set of bilinguality occasioned by colonialism. Mir, Farina. 'Imperial Policy, Provincial Practices Colonial Language Policy in Nineteenth-Century India.' *Indian Economic & Social History, Review* 43. 4 (2006): pp. 395-427.

<sup>67</sup> For quite an early discussion on the same, see Mahendra V. Desai. 'Literatures of India.' *Books Abroad*. 28. 3 (1954): pp. 261-280.

the English language<sup>68</sup>) constituted a response that revived Indian Hindu-pasts where the frames of references were significantly altered.<sup>69</sup> Owing to the premium on certain knowledge practices and their dissemination the ensuing bilinguality created unequal spaces of comprehension both in semantic and semiotic terms (which will be discussed in detail in the course of the dissertation).

Among others the religious axis altered perceptions of the key terms of nineteenth century—civilization and progress. Christianity was conceived (both by the missionaries and the Indian intelligentsia) as not merely a religion but a way of life of the modern civilized West. Concepts of religion often attempted to renegotiate intuitive perceptions that yoked together the civilizing and the religious aspects of Christianity.

For example, a space of sovereignty was founded on the basis of re-discovering 'dharma'. Post the 1870s, there was a sudden rise in the number of periodicals that promised to discuss 'dharma'. The cross-section of the opinions on dharma ranged from the Brahmos to the Hindu conservatists and the missionaries also joined the fray.<sup>70</sup> Popularity of the term dharma was largely owing to its

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<sup>68</sup> Spivak suggests an inter-literary approach to 'the teaching of English literature can become critical only if it is intimately yoked to the teaching of the literary or cultural production in the mother tongue.' Spivak, Gayatri Chakravarty. 'The Burden of English.' Eds. Carol A. Breckenbridge and Peter Van der Veer. *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: pp. 134-157; p. 151. Niranjana, Tejaswini. 'Translation, Colonialism and Rise of English.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25. 15 (1990): pp. 773-779.

<sup>69</sup> However, as Ruth Vanita has pointed out, multilingualism was always a part of Indian intellectual training. English did not completely overhaul reading or writing practices in India. Instead, Indians appropriated the language and its culture from a position of 'self-confidence.' In her words, 'the phrase "was thus transformed" takes a jump from intention to execution. "Transformed" in the minds of government officials? Or in those of Indians? Is it possible to transform an entire literature into an instrument for "ensuring... compliance"? Can compliance ever be "ensured"? Did all English literature actually become educated Indians' "source of moral values for correct behaviour and action" or did the government mistakenly think it did? I suggest that regardless of British intentions, many "native subjects" received English literature from a position of intellectual self-confidence.' Vanita, Ruth. 'Gandhi's tiger: Multilingual Elites, the battle for minds, and English Romantic literature in colonial India.' *Postcolonial Studies*, 5: 1 (2002): pp. 95-110; p. 101.

<sup>70</sup> 'A Survey of the Bengali periodicals of the nineteenth century reveals that between 1840-90, there were at least thirteen periodicals with the term *dharmā* either prefixed or suffixed to their names. The earliest that I have found dates back to 1846 and was run by an individual, Nandakumar Kabiratna, who sided with the conservative party over the widow marriage controversy in Bengal. The *Nithyadharmaranjika* not only took dharma in the sense of religion, but actually sought to defend traditional Hinduism against the "advancing tide of Vedantism", by which it meant Brahmoism. The *Nirapekhadharmatattva*, the organ of a society by that name and the *Dharmabishayak Protibad*, a monthly founded by the Hindu Missionary society of Kalighat seem to have launched specifically to fight Christianity. Others like *Dharmamarmaprakashika* and *Dharmaraj* published from Konnagar (district Hooghly) and Kansaripara, Calcutta, were organs of propaganda for local religious organizations. For the same period, the number of books carrying the epithet dharma in their title would be more difficult to compute but a reasonable guess would be put the most productive years somewhere in the 1880s and the 1890s which saw major controversies breaking out between Brahmos and Hindus and within

delightful ambiguity. The semantics of dharma in the pre-modern and the modern age varied greatly. As Hans Harder with reference to Paul Hacker explicates, dharma in the pre-modern world 'is derived from √dhr. "to hold, support", and thus may be interpreted as "that which holds"'. [...] 'The substantial character of dharma counteracted a definite codification; dharma was not an abstract, "objective", independent set of prescriptions, but rather the empirical value of actions performed by persons immersed in the Vedas. Dharma is thus endowed with qualities of a substance and localised'.<sup>71</sup> The intense debates around religion and religious practices in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries engaged in the semantics of dharma. The Christian missionaries used it as a covalent of religion but others like Bankim Chatterjee used the ambiguity and complexity of the term to extend the concept of religious boundaries.<sup>72</sup> In his essay, *Dharmajijnāsā* he outlines the possibility of the different usages of the term dharma and the incapability of any manner of translation in capturing its essence.

Secondly we also call dharma that which the English call morality (Lat.), as for instance a certain deed (is said to be) 'against dharma', (and in expressions like) 'the teaching of human dharma', 'statement of dharma' etc. In modern Bengali, another term is current for this that is nīti. Regardless of whether Bengalis are able to do anything else, they easily pronounce the words 'against morality'. Thirdly the word dharma means virtue (Lat.). Virtue means the trained qualities of a man whose ātman (is immersed) in dharma, it is the fruit of practice governed by morality. In this sense we keep saying such and such person is dhārmika, such and such person is adhārmika. Here adharma is called Vice (lat.) in English. Fourthly, a deed sanctioned by religion or morality too is called dharma, and its contrary adharma. For instance, donation is highest dharma, non-violence is highest dharma, blame of one's teacher is highest adharma. [...] Fifthly, the word dharma means property, e.g., a magnet's dharma is the attraction of iron.<sup>73</sup>

The semantic layers of the word dharma opens the debates related to

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Hindu society.' Sen, Amiya P. *Explorations in Modern Bengal c. 1800-1900, Essays on Religion, History and Culture*. New Delhi: Primus Books, 2010; p. 130.

<sup>71</sup> Harder, Hans. *Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2001; p. 182.

<sup>72</sup> In *Dharmatattva* Bankim expounds most of theories on dharma via a dialogue between a master and his disciple. In this dialogue he explicitly deals with the love for the motherland which is not merely patriotism but his dharma. This duty is placed within the realm of the bhakti tradition. 'Between this universal love on the one hand, and love for the self, kin and country on the other, there is really no contradictions [...] I have also understood that the protection of kinsmen is a higher ideal than the protection of self; the protection of the country a higher ideal than the protection of kinsmen. When bhakti and universal love are one, it can be said that, barring bhakti the love for the country is the noblest ideal of all.' Trans. Apratim Ray. *Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's Dharmatattva*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003; p. 211.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Hans Harder, *Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2001: pp. 184-85.

religion<sup>74</sup> and for a new religious rhetoric to emerge at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>75</sup>

The dialectics of 'religion' and 'dharma' therefore is played out in this linguistic coupling, where the bilingual intellectual often finds his voice not necessarily in any one language but perhaps in the contradictions they pose. Especially, in a colonial context, this bilinguality where English is a crucial part, comes with its own sense of presumed hierarchies.<sup>76</sup> Colonial education policy ensured that English came to occupy a strategic position in terms of bhadralok hierarchies as the language of administration.<sup>77</sup> This played out in complex ways in the Indian context as 'English and vernacular audiences were not, as indeed they are not, symmetrically literate'.<sup>78</sup> As Veena Naregal has pointed out, "[i]f the political import of modern discourses was to mean anything at all, it was not enough in those worlds for native intellectuals to know English or the other imperial languages; they had to be able to write in vernacular as well."<sup>79</sup> I would like to further the argument by suggesting that the in-between space of literary narrativity that is fuelled by the overlap of the English and the Bengali has been lost in the critical analyses concerning the literature of nineteenth-century Bengal.

Perhaps it is in these linguistic overlaps and contradictions where the 'imagining' of the self often takes place. This is the specific area that literary histories

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<sup>74</sup> Sugirtharajah has argued that the hermeneutics regarding the concept of religion is fairly recent i. e. the nineteenth century and owes much to the protestant missionary enterprises that sought to measure other religious practices with reference to Christianity. Therefore in effect all religions were measured in terms of a lack. Sharada, Sugirtharajah. 'Colonialism and Religion.' Eds. Esther Bloch, Marianne Keppens and Rajaram Hegde. *Rethinking Religion in India, The Colonial Construction of Hinduism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010: pp. 69-78. In using religion as an imaginative category Jonathan Smith is able to show that the concept is peculiar to the Euro-American context and was an effective way of ordering cultural experiences. Smith, Jonathan. *Imagining Religion: from Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

<sup>75</sup> Bipin Chandra Pal points to the rise of the Hindu orthodoxy alongside the Brahmos in parading the Hindu dharma with the promotions such as the Hindu Mela by Nabagopal Mitra. The mela found favour not only among the Hindu orthodoxy but managed to influence the staunch and powerful Brahmos such as Devendra Nath Tagore and Raj Narain Bose. Pal, Bipin Chandra. 'Nabagopal Mitra and the Hindu Mela.' *Memories of My Life and Times*. Calcutta: Bipin Chandra Pal Institute, 1973, pp. 209-216.

<sup>76</sup> Cohn, Bernard S. 'The Command of Language and Language of Command.' Ed. Ranajit Guha. *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 276-329.

<sup>77</sup> Evans, Stephen. 'Macaulay's minute revisited: Colonial language policy in nineteenth-century India.' *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. 23. 4 (2002): pp. 260-281.

<sup>78</sup> Even within the same language like Bengali, the influence of English was easily visible as Himani Banerji has argued. Ed. Bannerji, Himani. 'Language and Liberation: A study of political Theatre in West Bengal.' *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*. 15. 4 (1984): pp. 131-144.

<sup>79</sup> Naregal, Veena. 'Colonial Bilingualism and Hierarchies of Language and Power: Making of a Vernacular Sphere in Western India.' *Economic and Political Weekly*. 34. 49 (1999): pp. 3446-3456.

have often ignored. They have considered and debated upon either the Bengali literary sphere or its English counter-part. This dissertation mandates that it is these linguistic couplings that offer the space for the Christian converts to fashion their own representations, where the colonial Christian convert, despite his/her perceived political 'disloyalty' is able to negotiate a space on the basis of his ability to spontaneously mutate. The narrative authority that the Christian convert claims for himself is therefore intimately related to these linguistic overlaps. In the course of the dissertation by examining the corpus of the literature by Hindu converts to Christianity in the nineteenth century I shall critically investigate the efficacy of the religious axis in the production of literature, as one caught in-between languages.

### *Key formulations*

Owing to the premium accorded to literary practices in the nineteenth century colonial India, a bulk of post colonial narratives have summoned literary productions as veritable testimonies.<sup>80</sup> Although this has meant that literary practices continue to remain in the limelight, it has significantly compromised the studies concerning literary corpora as it often actively bound them within the expectations of colonialist and post-colonialist narrativities. The grand narratives of linear progressive histories dismissed them as pale imitators of their European counterparts, product of the cultural hegemonic design of the colonizer, only to find them as the 'speaking link' between the present vibrant genre of Indian writing in English and the roots of its genesis. The religious affiliations of the Christian converts were read almost as footnote to their poetry of debris. They appeared as episodic breaks from the normative order, smoothening edges and ironing out the differences, and were absorbed in the linear history albeit as a part of a school of other writers. Representing their religious identity as a break allowed the normative course to persist.

There has been no significant study that has considered Christian converts of nineteenth-century Bengal as a formidable collective. Rosinka Chaudhuri has studied some poets of my concern as her work concentrated on the early Indian writers in English located in Bengal. While her in-depth historical analysis has made inroads into a largely neglected field of study, religion is not one of the primary actors in her undertaking. Subverting the traditional narratives about the

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<sup>80</sup> Chandra, Sudhir. 'Literature and the Colonial Connection.' *Social Scientist*, 11. 6 (June, 1983): pp. 3-47.

'gentleman poets' of Bengal as the collaborators of the British, she tries to read them as proto-nationalists. While this attempt relieves some of the charges levied against them it is unable to free itself from the overarching framework of what Federic Jameson would like to call 'national allegories'. Mary Ellis Gibson's recent study on the literature produced in British India toes similar lines as Chaudhuri's but she is careful to extend her corpus of study to include both the English and the Indians in India. Both of them however limit their studies to the poetry written in the nineteenth century as they believe 'disproportionate emphasis on fiction in the study of the colonial, postcolonial and transnational literatures' meant that poetry was indeed orphaned in the favour of the new form, 'the novel'.<sup>81</sup> However while insights into reading poetry have delivered startling results in the manner of understanding genres in their historicities, it failed to establish its intricate relationships with the prose of the day. While both these studies have charted new territories, they have concentrated only on the English writings, thereby ignoring the complexities of an emerging bilingual intelligentsia. The present study wishes to unlock interstitial spaces, organizing the study on the axes of a minority religion rather than the omnipresent frame of nationalism.

The convert literature of nineteenth-century Bengal perhaps carries the latent potential to challenge the accepted norms of this cultural exchange. The body of literature that I intend to study had used the prominent tropes of the literary current of its contemporary Western counterpart, decadent romanticism, yet playing in consonance with the revivalist trend that invested its creative energies in re-inventing primarily Hindu myths and legends. A major thrust of my enquiry would involve investigating the nodal value and the nature of their use of Hindu mythology without the religious baggage. It would be exciting to probe whether this usage involves the transformation of Hindu mythology (which was far from a mere sartorial embellishment in 'convert literature') from the 'religious subconscious' to the Indian 'cultural subconscious'. Is there a new 'creative' use of Hindu icons, texts, beliefs, and myths? Should this be easily dismissed as a legitimizing act? Unlike the uneasy particularities our historical secular present holds, can the religious be completely dismissed from the project of modernity? Can

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<sup>81</sup> Gibson, Mary Ellis. *Indian Angles: English Verse in Colonial India from Jones to Tagore*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011; p. 3. Chaudhuri, Rosinka. *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal: Emergent Nationalism and the Orientalist Project*. Kolkata: Seagull, 2002.

colonial modernity boast of an independent majoritarian secular cultural consciousness? What happens when the world of cultural practices is divorced from the religion that gives rise to them? Is there a complete rejection or is there an assimilation or do complex re-readings emerge from this? Does a sense of alienation characterize these texts? Can the texts be simply seen as a part of the overall changes occurring due to colonization or is there something unique to texts by converts?

The dissertation is divided into two parts; the first part introduces the context of the corpus of the literature to be discussed and the second part analyses six individual authors. In the first part, I try to analyse the politics of the literary sphere in nineteenth-century Bengal, thereby locating the literature by the Christian converts in this context. The first chapter discusses the central role that the Christian missionary presses played in ordering the discourse about religion in Bengal. In this context, I try to examine how a surplus print capital often in the form of cheap propagandist literature ensured a 'textual turn'. With the Bible essentially being a 'text' it was the locus of the transformations regarding the religious discourses and in particular the religious reform movements that were under way since the first quarter of the century. The following chapter discusses the overwhelming response that Christianity had generated and principal among them was the fear of conversion. Compared to the very few conversions that Bengal had witnessed their representations were towering. This 'representational excess' which often projected the Christian convert as an aberration warranted that conversion was understood as a rupture in the belief system. The educated upper-caste converts in their autobiographies responded by etching a hagiographic account of the life of the convert and the circumstances that led to the conversion. The narratives of conversions invariably speak of the atrocities of the Hindu religion and sketch a plot of conversion very similar to the ideal of an individualistic protestant spiritual ethic. Emerging out of an elitist context these narratives rely, as I will show, on their Hindu upper-caste identities for legitimation. The dynamics of these individuation processes rely on the dialectics of 'exception' and 'legitimation'. The last chapter in this part tries to address the core problem of this discussion; that of finding a literary voice in a contested religious terrain. It tries to establish that the nineteenth century was in fact looking to extend the limits of what was meant by literature. To that effect, mythology as a porous category serves as the entry point. The literary production of the Christian converts heavily relies on Hindu mythology for the

content. Even as they vociferously dismiss the tenets of Hinduism they zealously guard their cultural heritage in the manner of reliving Hindu mythological narratives in their creative endeavours. This apparent anomaly is resolved as the relationship between mythology, literature and history is revealed. In the nineteenth century, faced with the crisis of producing history, the Bengalis (to that extent Indians) were looking to plot themselves on the historical axis. Mythology as an effervescent yet ethereal presence solves this intricate question of the alleged historical paucity of the Indians. The definitions and redefinitions of the categories of history, literature and mythology allowed for significant overlaps. It is in these interstitial spaces that marginal yet powerful identities like the Christian converts sought to place themselves to carve a narrative tradition that could stake its claims to modernities.

Part two comprises six chapters dedicated to the authors that I study in detail and addresses the various genres that were popular in the nineteenth century; poetry, drama, novel, essays, mock-epics and folk tales. The different genres that are covered in the course of the dissertation give a glimpse of the extent of the corpus of literature in question. In terms of temporal parameters it covers mostly the second part of the nineteenth century. The discussions on the individual authors have not been arranged on the basis of chronology, instead, are thematically connected with reference to the complexities of subject positions of the authorial figure in relation to Hindu mythology and their Christian identities. The chapter on Toru Dutt relies on the central question that the usage of mythology warrants in the age of modernity which is obsessed with conquering time and exposes the possibility of various routes of entering the field of Hindu mythology. With Madhusudan Dutt, the father of modern poetry in Bengali, I look at one of his first plays which were written both in Bengali and English. This chapter deals with specific questions of audience reception and their relationship with the changing equations of caste and class influenced by the advent of Western education. Krishna Mohan Banerjea was one of the most public faces of Christian conversion in nineteenth-century Bengal. This chapter analyses the crucial interface between conversion and performance in the public sphere with the focus on Banerjea's play, *The Persecuted*. Lal Behari Day takes us to the realm of folktales in Bengal. Even as his collections constantly feed into the ethnological paradigms set by the colonial systems of knowledge he manages to

unveil the nuances of Hindu mythological narratives in the context of rural India. This fused sense of territoriality which pervades his sense of understanding and appropriating localized narratives is what I have called 'subsumed territorialities'. Shoshee Chunder Dutt who belongs to the first family of converts in nineteenth-century Bengal, the Dutts of Rambagan posits himself almost in the tradition of the Greek philosophers as a 'cynic'. This unique position allows him to exploit nuances of Hindu mythological narratives in conflict with their biblical counterparts in modern Bengal in a mock epic poem. Brahmabandhab Upadhyay is possibly the most enigmatic litterateurs of his day and times. His life spans half a century of the nineteenth century and well into the early twentieth century. His changing perceptions about religious practices in India ranging from Hindu religious reform to Brahmoism and finally Christianity subsumes within its narrative much of the raging debates of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Bengal. Discussed in this chapter is his attempt to reinvent everyday practices of Bengali life addressing questions of shared heritage.

In conclusion, I review this cognizable body of literary work that spans almost a century but interestingly enough loses its steam by the first half of the twentieth century. Tracing the steps of the Christian converts the conclusion tries to look at the unique nature of the narrative tradition that this corpus had successfully fashioned at three levels: contextual, co-textual and textual. In effect, the complicated status of this body of works as both marginal and yet distinctively bhadralok (in part it belongs to the English and Bengali canons proper) introduces interstitial spaces which can offer a better understanding of the complex literary sphere of the nineteenth century.

## **Part I**

# **Conversion and the Politics of a Literary Space**

## Chapter One

### *Christianity and the Culture of Representational Excess*

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The educated, that is to say, people who have received English education will certainly not accept such irrational excesses in the name of religion. But they too are now in a quandary, for, along with the English language, they have been exposed to Christian dogma. This, however, does not necessarily call for a mastery of the Bible; English literature itself is overflowing with Christian values and spirit. Thus, irrespective of whether or not we are Christians, we take Christianity to be the exemplary religion.

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay<sup>1</sup>

Conversion continues to be a thorny issue in the sociological and political fabric of post-independence India. Violence often becomes the indicator of protests against Christian proselytization in contemporary India and consequently conversion comes loaded with the understanding of community consciousness.<sup>2</sup> The word 'conversion' which comes veiled in a delightful vagueness in the socio-political parlance of post-colonial India has gained a negative connotation since its very inception.<sup>3</sup> During and subsequent to the colonial time-frame the word 'conversion' has often been singularly associated with Christianity. If the current scholarship is any indicator, most works by eminent scholars that promise to theorize conversion inadvertently turn to the proselytizing character of Christianity.<sup>4</sup> A monograph by the Centre for Indian Political Research and Analysis that promises to engage with the conversion debate as late as 2006, notes that '[i]t is high time for Hindus to dismiss the dogma of Christianity with the contempt it deserves, and pay attention to the Christian missionary apparatus planted in their midst. The sole aim of this apparatus is to ruin Hindu society and culture, and take

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<sup>1</sup> Chattopadhyay, Bankim Chandra. 'Religion and the Modern Man.' Ed. Amiya P. Sen. *Bankim's Hinduism, An Anthology of Writings by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011: pp. 223-226, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on the relationship between violence, community consciousness and conversion to Christianity in recent times see Sarkar, Sumit. 'Conversion and Politics of Hindu Right.' *Economic and Political Weekly*. 34. 26 (1999): pp. 1691-1700.

<sup>3</sup> Judith M. Brown discusses the prospect of Christianity in post-independence 'secular' India as plagued by the concerns of accommodating an alien proselytizing religion. Brown, Judith. 'Indian Christians and Nehru's Nation-State.' Ed. Robert Fox Young. *Indians and Indianness of Christianity*. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009: pp. 217-234.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Robert Eric Frykenberg's discussion on the current state of postcolonial scholarship on conversion in Frykenberg, Robert Eric. 'Introduction: Dealing with Contested Definitions and Controversial Perspectives.' Ed. Robert Eric Frykenberg. *Christians and Missionaries in India*. Cambridge: Routledge Curzon, 2003: pp. 1-32.

over the Hindu homeland'.<sup>5</sup> Readings like these often 'straddle conversion as symptom and substance of bad faith in the body of the nation—a pestilent view that has wide currency in India today'.<sup>6</sup> If this has been the reaction of the scholars in defence of the 'anti-nationalist' charges against the native converts, there have been quite a few scholars who have tried to portray 'conversion' as a mode of resistance and social rebellion.<sup>7</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, often called the architect of the constitution of the Republic of India, presented 'conversion' (albeit in the context of Buddhism) as a prerequisite to emancipation.<sup>8</sup> Gauri Vishwanathan, Rowena Robinson, Saurabh Dube, have argued that conversion as a register of dissent is empowering.<sup>9</sup>

But the representation of the Christian conversion machinery as completely overhauling existing religious practices and subsequently taking over the Hindu homeland is interestingly a rhetoric that carries with it historical continuity. Some improbable suspects like Mahatma Gandhi are part of this rather curious genealogy. *Young India* in 1936 carried Gandhi's remark which claimed that '[e]very nation considers its own faith to be as good as that of any other. Certainly the great faiths held by the people of India are adequate for her people. India stands in no need of conversion from one faith to another'.<sup>10</sup> As with Gandhi's reading, Christianity is an

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This rather jingoistic monograph continues to confirm that Christianity 'goes on devising strategies for every situation, favourable and unfavourable. It trains and employs a large number of intellectual criminals ready to prostitute their talents in the service of their paymasters, and adept at dressing up dark designs in high-sounding language. The fact that every design is advertised as a theology in the Indian context and every criminal euphemized as an Indian theologian, should not hoodwink Hindus about the real intentions of this gangster game.' Centre for Indian Political Research and Analysis, *The Conversion Debate*. New Delhi: CIPRA books, 2006; p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Dube, Saurabh. 'Colonial Registers of Vernacular Christianity: Conversion to Translation.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39. 2 (2004): pp. 161-171. Conversion read in this context in the political backdrop of post-independence India is particularly intriguing as it brings forth instances not only of conversion to Christianity, Islam and Buddhism among others but reminds us of the attempts to convert Christians back to the Hindu fold.

<sup>7</sup> Gauri Vishwanathan argues that '[c]onversion is primarily an interpretive act, an index of material and social conflicts.' Vishwanathan, Gauri. *Outside the Fold, Conversion, Modernity and Belief*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998; 252. D. Forrester particularly argues that the downtrodden castes, peasants and tribal people find their voice of resistance in 'conversion.' Forrester, D. *Caste and Christianity in India, Attitudes and Policies of Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India*. London: Curzon Press, 1980.

<sup>8</sup> Ambedkar addresses the dalit constituency in this book and defends his conversion to Buddhism as a form of emancipation from the vagaries of caste in Hinduism. B. R. Ambedkar. *Conversion as Emancipation*. New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2004 (1959).

<sup>9</sup> Vishwanathan, Gauri. 'Conversion as Dissent.' Ed. Peter Van der Veer. *Conversion to Modernities, The Globalization of Christianity*. New York: Routledge, 1996: pp. 89-114. Robinson, Rowena. *Christians of India*. New Delhi: Sage, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Sarah Claerhout and Jakob De Roover. 'The Question of Conversion in India.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40. 28 (2005): pp. 3048-3055; 3049. Sudhir Chandra however points out that Gandhi has been misunderstood and the ambivalence of his position vis-à-vis the proselytizing dimension of Christianity has been read unilaterally. Chandra, Sudhir. 'An Unresolved Dilemma, Gandhi on Religious Conversion.' *Continuing Dilemmas*. New Delhi: Tulika, 2002: pp. 271-307.

intrusive 'alien' faith that carries with it the potential to alter the carefully sequestered religious dynamics of India.

Not only has Christian religion been understood as foreign but there seems to have been an equivalence drawn between the proselytizing character of Christianity and colonization at large. Reading conversion on these lines is premised on a set of presumptive equivalences: one that the missionary religious activism is a direct result of colonial hegemony and therefore adopting the new faith is surrendering to an alien 'political order'.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, acts of conversion have an insinuating unwritten logic which invariably links the advent of Christianity with commerce.<sup>12</sup> As Brian Stanley and Andrew Porter have convincingly argued, this simplistic equivalence was contested both in Europe and outside in the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> However, these overarching generalizations fail to account for the wide range of histories of the advent of Christianity in India and their repercussions.

Unlike other parts of India, Christianity arrived at the shores of Bengal with the colonial powers.<sup>14</sup> As a consequence, Christianity in Bengal has been read as the 'natural' suspect and 'conversion' was not merely a spiritual act but a larger socio-cultural and political enterprise.<sup>15</sup> Nineteenth-century Bengal in particular and parts of northern India in general saw the advent of Christianity as a cultural onslaught that carried the potential of changing the socio-cultural matrix.<sup>16</sup> Although the project of converting heathens to Christianity was largely a failure, owing to its rather charged political history, it enjoyed an overwhelming attention in the

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<sup>11</sup> Panikkar, K. M. *Asia under Western Dominance*, London: Collier Books, 1969.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Frykenberg, Robert Eric. 'Caste, morality and Western religion under the Raj.' *Modern Asian Studies*, 19. 2 (1995): pp. 321-343.

<sup>13</sup> Stanley, Brian. 'Commerce and Christianity: Providence Theory, The Missionary Movement, and the Imperialism of Free-Trade, 1842-1860.' *The Historical Journal*, 26. 1 (1983): pp. 71-94; Porter, Andrew. 'Commerce and Christianity: The Rise and Fall of the Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan.' *The Historical Journal*. 28. 3 (1985): pp. 597-621.

<sup>14</sup> Christianity is believed to have reached India with Thomas the Apostle in the Malabar Coast as early as the first century AD. Neil, Stephen. *A History of Christianity in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

<sup>15</sup> Long before the advent of the European colonial powers, Bengal had witnessed mass conversions to Buddhism (with the Pala kings), Vaishnavism and Islam (with the Mughals), which were often attributed to the ruling powers. For a discussion on the history of religious conversions in Bengal see: Eaton, Richard M. *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993. What significantly separated Christianity from the other proselytizing religions was its far reaching impact in terms of print.

<sup>16</sup> Nineteenth-century Bengal is discussed here in the context of regional consciousness. Sudhir Mishra has pointed out: 'regional consciousness emerged contemporaneously with national consciousness and barring occasional contradictions regional consciousness and national consciousness were not seen as incompatible.' Mishra, Sudhir. 'Regional Consciousness in 19<sup>th</sup> Century India: A Preliminary Note.' *Economic and Political Weekly*. 17. 32 (1982): pp. 1278-1285; p. 1282.

representational realm of cultural production. In the nineteenth century with print adding new dimensions to the public sphere, 'conversion' came to be a symbolic act. Christianity in the largely Hindu majoritarian response was seen as an imminent threat. From trying to understand Christianity to vilifying its believers, reactions came in various hues. Interestingly enough, the overwhelming response that Christianity and Christian conversion enjoyed in the nineteenth-century Bengal was largely disproportionate to the actual number of Christian conversions. The sheer scale of the presence of Christianity/Christian conversion in the field of representation and its allied inter-textual linkages points to a phenomenon which I shall refer as 'representational excess'. As print came to influence public opinion, representational excess came to be a function of prevalent psyche and hysteria that emanated from the perception of dominant political ideology and social order. Crucially, excess in this context, has to be understood not merely in terms of numbers but in the amplified negativities involved in the portraiture of the convert. There were a number of other literary productions on the negative influence of Christianity in the Bengali society by the Hindu conservative intelligentsia but most visible were their representations in the satires that inundated the print market in the nineteenth century. I have consciously chosen satire for closer analysis in this chapter over other literary productions because it highlights the self-censuring and stabilizing mechanisms of a society faced with tumultuous changes.

Although, traditions of humour in India can be traced to antiquity, nineteenth-century Bengal developed its own idioms of humour in the satirical mode. With its oblique critical eye,<sup>17</sup> satire ensured that it came to occupy a significant position in the intellectual universe of the day. As a mode of creative expression it was effective in promoting a semblance of order by negation in a chaotic colonial society. The colonial intelligentsia had taken to the satire to advance an indirect way of looking at dysfunctionalities of the modern society thereby sponsoring a normative moral nucleus.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, this excess manifested itself in terms of the production of the convert as an archetypal stock character of socio-

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<sup>17</sup> The oblique criticism was particularly useful in colonial India where the press was monitored for sedition. For example, see Roy, Tapti. 'Disciplining the Printed Text: Colonial and Nationalist Surveillance of Bengali Literature.' Ed. Partha Chatterjee. *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995: pp. 30-62.

<sup>18</sup> Freudenberg contends that satirists promote themselves as 'moral agents.' Satirists operate by advancing a negation of other possibilities thereby insisting on a normative nucleus. Freudenburg, Kirk. 'Horace's Satiric Program and the Language of Contemporary Theory in Satires.' *The American Journal of Philology* 111. 2 (1990): pp. 187-203.

religious deviance. While the Western-educated bilingual intelligentsia enthusiastically produced and consumed satire, most of these literary productions were grounded in a vernacular idiom. Producing satire in the vernacular served two purposes. First, it could exclusively determine its audience. Concomitantly it could focus on localized topicality to generate humour. Using satire to evaluate the 'representational excess' serves the purpose of fixing the locale (colonial Bengal) of analysis while reading into the normative practices of a deeply divided society. This chapter deals with the specificities of this representational excess and in particular delves into the dynamics of construction of the Christian converts as an aberration. While the first section explores the contingencies of the excess in numbers, the ensuing sections concentrate on the representations of conversion and converts.

### *Print and the Christian religious imaginary in nineteenth-century Bengal*

In Bengal, the coming of Christianity and print were coterminous and consequently print played a determining role in the imagination of Christianity. I shall argue in the course of this chapter that Christianity and print in all their productive complications engaged with each other at three levels: indexical, receptive and representational. These levels and categories are not exclusive and frequently overlap but this categorization might aid in understanding the variegated relationship between print and Christianity in colonial Bengal.

It took some three hundred years since its inception for print capitalism to establish itself firmly in the nineteenth century. The text or written word was always important in South Asia (except that access to the privileged knowledge was limited to the upper castes, mainly Brahmins), but it was the advent of the missionaries and the missionary printing presses that provided the launch pad for the popularity of the printed word. At the indexical level, Christianity was historically related to both the production and dissemination of print. It was in fact the Christian missionaries who first brought printing presses to India and successively Christianity manifested as a material or physical presence in the nineteenth-century.

It is evident from the opening quote of Bankim Chattopadhyay that the close interactions between print and Christianity ensured the emergence of a new discursive idiom. The definitive attention that Christian conversions received were to a large extent related to the print culture that evolved in nineteenth-century Bengal. To understand the impact of the Christian printing presses in the new

emerging print culture of colonial Bengal, it is necessary to take a detour into the networks of printing that were gradually coming to life. On 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1556 the first printing press landed in Goa at the behest of Jesuits and the first printed book in recorded South Asian history is *Compendio Spritual da Vida Christa* in 1562. Several books on Christianity were soon published. The history of print in Bengal closely toes the Portuguese precedent in Goa. Even though the first book to be published was Halhed's Bengali grammar, the volumes that followed had a clear Christian agenda. In the year 1743 was published the *Brāhmaṇ kyāthalik saṁbād* by a Bengali convert to Christianity called Dom Antonio. It was soon followed by Bento D'Souza's *Praśna-Uttar-Mālā* and *Prārthanāmālā*.<sup>19</sup> Although the Portuguese introduced printing in India, it was the Danish missionaries at Sreerampore in the first quarter of the nineteenth century who were instrumental in its dissemination and popularity.<sup>20</sup> Darnton goes further to suggest that printing remained a missionary preserve until 1858 when the British administrative machinery came to represent a bureaucratic regime.<sup>21</sup>

Christianity 'arrived' in the minds of the public along with print in Bengal<sup>22</sup> with cheap Bibles finding their way to the new reading public.<sup>23</sup> This inter-

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<sup>19</sup> Śrīpāntha. *Yakhan Chāpākhānā Ela*. Kalikātā: Paścim Bāṁlā Ekāḍemi, 1996: pp. 3-7.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed discussion on the impact of the printing press in Sreerampore see Ed. Colin Clair. *The Spread of Printing Eastern Hemisphere India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1969 and Kesavan, B. S. *History Of Printing And Publishing In India*. New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1997.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Darnton says: 'Not for the centuries before 1556, when the Portuguese set up the first printing press on the subcontinent, nor for the following three hundred years, when printing remained confined for the most part to missionary enclaves, imperialist administrations, and occasional newspapers. But by 1858, when the British Raj began to reconstitute itself as a modern, bureaucratic state, book publishing had become an important industry, and the Indian Civil Service (ICS) began to keep track of it.' Darnton, Robert. 'Book Production in British India, 1850-1900.' *Book History*, 5. 1 (2002): pp. 239-262, 240.

<sup>22</sup> 'The Portuguese started taking a keen interest in Bengal 1581 onwards, and established many missionary centres and trading outposts. The Portuguese missionaries undertook translations of catechisms and religious tracts into Bangla, and we are aware of a couple of religious booklets compiled in 1683 by Father Marcos Antonio Santucci, the Superior of the Portuguese mission in Bengal, and a catechism book in Bangla compiled by Father Barbier in 1723. However, it is not clearly known if these books were printed or handwritten as none of them have survived. The first Bangla book to be transliterated and printed in Roman type is perhaps *Catechisms de doutrina christaa* (1743) by Father Manoel de Assumpcao, which was printed by Francisco da Silva in Lisbon. This was a bilingual book with the Bangla and Portuguese text appearing in adjacent columns on the same page. This was followed by a few more Bangla-Portuguese bilingual books by Father Manoel, printed in Roman type by da Silva in Lisbon; parts of the Book of Common Prayer and a catechism were published in Bangla by Bento de Selvestre using Roman type as *Prarthanamala* and *Prashmottarmala* in London.' <http://computersight.com/software/visiting-early-printing-in-bengal/#ixzz1z02Z2Ddb>. Accessed on 12. 01. 2013.

<sup>23</sup> While outlining the activities of the Sreerampore missionary trio of Marshman, Carey and Ward, Henry Herbert Dodwell singles out the printing of Bibles and its dissemination as their singular most important contribution. 'So persistent was the energy and so ardent the spirit of these three men that in spite of many difficulties and setbacks, they not only gained converts and attracted pupils but their

relationship ensured that Christianity became inseparable from the print culture of the times<sup>24</sup> and consequently religion (not necessarily Christianity) came to occupy a significant part of the day-to-day print life of colonial Bengal.<sup>25</sup>

The explosion of print that encouraged a new-found interest in textuality in Bengal owes its heritage to the missionary printing presses that came into existence in the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Although it has to be taken into account that all religious cultures in question accorded a premium to sacred textuality, the relationship between Christianity and the Bible was perhaps etched in material terms by the sheer volume of books printed. The Sreerampore Baptist Mission Press established in 1800 by William Carey and William Ward north of Calcutta on the banks of river Hooghly in Sreerampore is believed to have produced 212, 000 books between 1800 and 1832.<sup>27</sup> By 1818 the Baptist Mission Press was functional in Calcutta. The

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translations of the books of the Bible, which were widely diffused, assisted in laying the foundations of Bengali prose literature.' Dodwell, Herbert. *The Cambridge History of the British Empire, Volume 4*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940; p. 99. Reports on the translations and printing of the Bible suggests that Calcutta was one of the hubs of Bible printing at least in the first half of nineteenth century in India. *Contributions Towards a History of Biblical Translations in India, Reprinted from the Christian Observer*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1854.

<sup>24</sup> The Catalogue draws a direct equivalence between the rising influence of the Baptist Missionary Press and the development of the vernacular reading public. 'The Christian Vernacular Literature of India, Bengal Presidency.' *Catalogue of Christian Vernacular Literature in India*. Madras: Caled Foster, 1870: pp. 2-4.

<sup>25</sup> Assessment of any kind of actual extent of penetration of print was however intimately linked to the question of literacy. Debjani Sengupta contends that, even by the end of the nineteenth century the extent of literacy was very low. Other modes of dissemination such as oral were common which makes it difficult to estimate the extent of the dissemination of print. 'The rate of growth of literacy among Hindu and Muslim males was slow during the years 1881-1891 and the Census of 1901 reported that "the slow rate of increase in the total number of literate persons in the city is partly to be accounted for by the fact that there is annually an increasing admixture of illiterate immigrants, who are attracted to Calcutta by a higher rate of wages and find employment as artisans, menial servants and labourers". The spread of the written word through the early printing presses in the city introduced a new hierarchy amongst common people. The literate and the semi-literate were held in awe by the unlettered members of the city, the "artisans, menial servants and labourers". Although the habit "of listening to the reading out (by literate neighbours) of books, scriptures or mythological stories [was] fairly widespread in Bengal", the low literacy level created a new pecking order as far as the new media were concerned.' Sengupta, Debjani. 'Mechanicalcutta, Industrialisation, New Media in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.' *Sarai Reader 2002: The Cities of Everyday Life*. [www.sarai.net/journal/02PDF/06for\\_those/13calcutta.pdf](http://www.sarai.net/journal/02PDF/06for_those/13calcutta.pdf), 149-158; p. 150. Accessed on 14. 12. 2012. For the relationship between literacy and the Bible in India also see: Shackle, Christopher. 'Christianity in South Asia.' Ed. John Sawyer. *Concise Encyclopaedia of Language and Religion*. Amsterdam: Elsevier. 2001: pp. 39-41.

<sup>26</sup> Frances W. Prichett observes that print was tightly monitored by the British government which was reflected in their desire to catalogue books printed in India. Although the missionaries and Indian elite controlled bulk of the print production, by the end of the nineteenth century a lot of small publishing houses were threatening their stronghold; Prichett, Frances W. 'The History of Indian Publishing: A Note on Sources.' *India International Centre Quarterly*, 10. 4 (1983): pp. 467-471.

<sup>27</sup> Grierson, G. A. 'The Early Publications of the Serampore Missionaries.' *The Indian Antiquary* (June, 1903), pp. 241-254.

London Missionary Society soon began publishing pamphlets and other propagandist literature at very affordable prices.<sup>28</sup>

Apart from these big players who had their own printing presses, other missionary organizations, both Catholic and Protestant, began publishing books, newspapers and journals. As 'The Returns Relating to Native Printing Presses and Publications in Bengal Extracted from the Selections of the Records of the Bengal Government' published in 1855 suggests, there was indeed an explosion of the material in print and a large bulk of it was concerned with religion.<sup>29</sup> The 'Catalogue of Sanskrit and Bengali Books, Procured under the Despatch of the Secretary of State. No. 55', published in July 1863 has a similar story to tell.<sup>30</sup> The records are arranged under different labels like drama, fiction, law, medicine etc. Apart from various translations of Sanskrit texts, which seem to have been a major trend, there were a large number of books being printed by the Christian Missionary associations with the Baptist Mission Press at the helm.<sup>31</sup> Although the influence of

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<sup>28</sup> The Baptist mission's progress in printing was part of a global affair: 'The year 1804 was something of a watershed in British church history. In that year the British and Foreign Bible Society was founded, the first large-scale experiment in ecumenicism, uniting evangelicals of various stripes and colours in a gigantic publishing venture that would cover the globe with Bibles printed in every language known to humanity. A key ingredient that would enable various Churches to work together in this massive ecumenical enterprise was a strict rule, to which all subscribed, stating that only the Authorised Version of the Bible would be published and that these Bibles would be circulated "without note or comment". This rule, known as "The Fundamental Principle", was designed to protect the Bible Society from accusations that it was promoting a seditious or heterodox document. Moreover, governance of the new society would be equally divided between Churchmen and Dissenters. In this way it was hoped that Baptists and non-Baptists, Calvinists and Armenians, Dissenters and Anglicans, could forget that which divided them, and join together in publishing and distributing a book to which they all subscribed. And to a large degree the Bible Society was successful in this enterprise, circulating 4, 252, 000 Bibles by 1825 and uniting many denominations and Churches in the process.' Martin, Roger H. 'Anglicans and Baptists in Conflict: The Bible Society, Bengal and the Baptizo Controversy.' *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 49 (1998): pp. 293-316; 293.

<sup>29</sup> The reach and the spread of the religious was such that 'by 1807, the missionaries were able to report that the printing of the Bible in as many as 11 south Asian languages were in hand' and Abhijit Gupta also shows how Sreerampore had in fact begun printing Chinese Bibles. Gupta, Abhijit. 'A Note on Chinese Printing in Serampore.' Eds. Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakraborty, *New Word Order, Transnational Themes in Book History*. New Delhi: Worldview, 2011: pp. 160-172; p. 160.

<sup>30</sup> Ulrike Stark points to an explosion in the printing of religious and devotional texts 'by the 1840s in northern India that helped contested religious identities.' Stark, Ulrike. 'Publishers as Patrons and the Commodification of Hindu Religious Texts in Nineteenth-Century North India.' Ed. Heidi Rika Maria Pauwels. *Patronage and Popularisation, Pilgrimage and Procession: Channels of Transcultural Translation and Transmission in Early Modern South Asia; Papers in Honour of Monika Horstmann*. Wiesbaden: Harrowitz, 2009: pp. 189-204; p. 189.

<sup>31</sup> One report on the native printing presses in 1826 remarked that print had revolutionized social relations in Bengal by granting access to all sections of the people. It also sampled the kind of books that the native press published in the first half of the nineteenth century: 'Leaving the periodical publications, a list is given of thirty-one other works which have been issued during the last four or five years. About 1000 copies of each is computed to be sold, and it is remarked that none of the works printed long on hand. 'Most of these are of a fabulous, religious, or superstitious character; but we shall give a few specimens of their titles: 'Punchang Soondoree', a work on astrology; 'Pudanku Dootu', a work respecting the imprints of Krishna's feet; 'The Thousand Names of Vishnoo'; 'Kak

the missionary literature was most visible in the first half of the nineteenth century their presence was not compromised even at the close of the century.<sup>32</sup> Other than the well known missionary writers such as Willam Carey, Joshua Marshman, William Ward, Alexander Duff, etc., there were several other important missionary writers like William Yates, William Hopkins Pearce, John Wenger, John Lawson, Robert May, to name a few, who were simultaneously publishing both in Bengali and English.<sup>33</sup>

As the printed word became increasingly the norm, the religious texts opened themselves to a fertile inter-textual world. The various translations of key ancient Hindu religious texts co-existed with the Bible.<sup>34</sup> William Jones, Halhed, Willam Ward, Max Müller and the long list of Orientalist scholars contributed to extending the limits of this exchange.<sup>35</sup> It gave Christianity an edge in the print economy (where the primary consumers were not Christians) of the day and at the same time encouraged an interaction with other prominent discourses of the day.

Therefore, at the level of reception, literature on Christianity had opened itself to a wide range of audience who often received it as part of the Western knowledge network. Hence, proselytizing literature on Christianity and the Bible in particular became a highly resonant mode of cultural and political praxis. Apart

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Churita', a work with various circles to enable anyone to discover his fortune. 'Native Press of Bengal.' *The Oriental Herald and Journal of General Literature*; April 1826: pp. 151-156; p. 152.

<sup>32</sup> For instance in the annual address of the Asiatic Society of India the President, Mr A. Pedlar had remarked: 'The number of publications issued from the various printing presses all over India was 7179 in 1894, and 5529 during the first three quarters of 1895. Of these 12, 700 publications the majority are either school books, catechisms, sketches, compendiums, annotations, notes or keys to school books, or short pamphlets of leaflets by the preachers of various religions which are prevalent in India.' Pedlar, A. 'Vernacular Literature in India.' *The Academy*. September 5, 1896; p. 164.

<sup>33</sup> De, Sushil Kumar. *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century*. Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1962; p. 238.

<sup>34</sup> Religious texts in general seems to have profited greatly from the boom in print in the later half of the nineteenth century. Chromo lithography also contributed in the publication and dissemination of cheap prints of the images of gods and goddesses. For example, see, Mitter, Partha. 'Mechanical reproduction and the world of the colonial artist.' *Contributions to Indian sociology* 36. 1-2 (2002): pp. 1-32. Ghosh, Pika. 'Kalighat Paintings from Nineteenth Century Calcutta in Maxwell Sommerville's Ethnological East Indian Collection.' *Expedition-Philadelphia* 42. 3, 2000: pp. 11-20.

<sup>35</sup> We shall discuss the Orientalists and their relationship with Christianity in detail in Part I, Chapter Three. However, it must be remarked that although the Orientalists and the missionaries studied similar aspects of the Indian civilization like religion and social customs, their perspectives were diametrically opposite. As Bernard Cohn observes: '[b]oth the Orientalists and the missionaries agreed that Hinduism as practised within the realm of their observation in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries was filled with "superstition" and "abuses" and that by and large the Hindus were debased and licentious. Their major differences lay in that the Orientalists admired in theory the civilization and religion embodied in the texts and saw the difficulties of Indian society as being a fall from a golden age. The missionaries saw the society and culture as always having been corrupt, pernicious and filled with absurdities.' Cohn, Bernard S. 'Notes on the History of Study of Indian Society and Culture.' Eds. Milton S. Singer and Bernard S. Cohn. *Structure and Change in Indian Society*. New Jersey: Aldine De Gruyter, 2007 (1968): pp. 3-28; p. 10.

from the obvious relationship between the colonizing powers and Christianity, due to the turn to a written culture there had been a continuous interest in ‘reading’ the text of the ‘mleccha’.<sup>36</sup> The Bible acted as the relational touchstone against which a significant bulk of religious opinion was weighed.<sup>37</sup> As Lefebvre points out, ‘[i]t may be just possible that the West has paid so much attention to translation because its central text, the Bible, was written in a language it could not readily understand, so that it was forced to rely on translators to legitimize power’.<sup>38</sup> The Bible not only has been the corner stone for cultural bartering, but has been instrumental in organizing an interpretive textual culture around it.<sup>39</sup> The most vocal among them were the Brahmos who effectively engaged with Christian theology.

Ram Mohan Roy, very early in the nineteenth century, began this study of comparative religions with the Bible as one of the central texts. Searching for ‘surer foundations of revelation and reason’, Roy ends up finding several similarities between Hinduism and ‘another system of Christianity called Unitarianism’.<sup>40</sup> In the preface to his seminal text, *The Precepts of Jesus* (1823), Thomas Rees (the Secretary to the Unitarian Society) has described him as a ‘philanthropic Brahmin’ who appears in the text as a ‘Christian professor’.<sup>41</sup> While the Unitarians were quick

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<sup>36</sup> ‘mlechchha, also spelled mleccha, people of foreign extraction in ancient India. A Sanskrit term, *mlechchha* was used by the Vedic peoples much as the ancient Greeks used *barbaros*, originally to indicate the uncouth and incomprehensible speech of foreigners and then extended to their unfamiliar behaviour. *Mlechchhas* were found in north-western India, and there is reason to believe that the people known in Akkadian as *Mlakkha* were the original *mlechchhas*. As a *mlechchha*, any foreigner stood completely outside the caste system and the ritual ambience. Thus, historically, contact with them was viewed by the caste Hindu as polluting. “mlechchha”.’ *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2013. Web. 04 Jan. 2013. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/386595/mlechchha>>. The concept of the mlecchha, like other Indian concepts that we discuss in the dissertation, combines the religious and the racial. Hence, perhaps it is equally important to locate the discourse of the mlecchha in the changing conceptualizations of the ‘religious other’(especially Christianity) in Hinduism. For a discussion see, Clooney, Francis X. ‘Hindu Views of Religious Others: Implications for Christian Theology.’ *Theological Studies*, 64 (2003): pp. 306-333.

<sup>37</sup> A letter by William Carey written on October 4 1818, relates with extreme enthusiasm that Bibles are now being printed at the Baptist missionary press in most Indian languages including Assamese, Kurinata, Telinga, Wuteh, etc. *Missionary Herald*. October 1818: pp. 269-70.

<sup>38</sup> Lefebvre, Andre Ed. *Translation, History, Culture, A Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge, 1992; p. 3. In this regard also see Sugirtharajah, Rasiah S. *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

<sup>39</sup> Sugirtharajah, R. S. ‘The Magi from Bengal and their Jesus: Indian Construals of Christ during Colonial Times.’ Ed; Porter, Stanley E., Michael A. Hayes, and David Tombs. *Images of Christ*. London: T&T Clark, 2004 (1997): pp. 144-158.

<sup>40</sup> Biswas, Dilip Kumar Ed. *The Correspondence of Raja Rammohun Roy, 2 vols*. Calcutta: Saraswat, 1992-1997: pp. 349-350.

<sup>41</sup> Roy, Ram Mohan. *The Precepts of Jesus, The Guide to Peace and Happiness, extracted from the New Testament ascribed to the four Evangelists to which are added the first and the second appeal to the Christian Public, in reply to the observations of Dr. Marshman of Sreerampore*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1820, reprinted London: Unitarian Society, 1823.

to identify Roy as a proponent of their faith, Ram Mohan was in fact unravelling the Bible as a text in comparison. As with his first essay 'Against the Idolatry of All Religions', Roy was trying to situate the 'written word' in context. He turned to Aristotle, Euclid, Upanishads and the Koran alike and squarely blamed any departures from the 'written and coded text' as polluting diversions. In this textual-scape he found the Upanishadic ideals in communion with the Unitarian principles of Christianity.

Disgusted by the puerile and unsociable system of Hindoo idolatry, and dissatisfied by the cruelty of the mussalmans against the non-mussalmans, I, on searching after the truth of Christianity, felt for a very long time perplexed with the difference of sentiments felt by the followers of Christ (I mean the Trinitarians and the Unitarians, and the grand divisions of them), until I met with the explanations of unity given by the divine Teacher himself as a guide to peace and Happiness.<sup>42</sup>

As he searched for answers to the unity of that one God, evident in the wealth of his writings and the precepts in particular, he accords centrality to the texts. In accordance with his methodology, he promoted the translation of the Bible into 'Sungskrit' as it is the 'language of the Bengali people'. The later day Brahmos like Keshav Chunder Sen, etc., followed in his footsteps and Christian theological texts and treatises continued to be part of the religious debates of the day. Several associations were formed that debated religion and ethics; the Academic Association of the Derozians or Young Bengal and Tattvabodhini Sabha being the most prominent. Peary Chand Mitra for example remarked that '[t]he social fomentation caused by its tremendous ups and downs, its mighty waves of dynamic ideologies rising in crescendo and occasionally bursting forth in frightful excesses, sending cold tremors to the hollow spines of the seasoned conservatives, ultimately cooled down to a synthetic assimilation of Western and Oriental cultures in the latter half of the nineteenth century'.<sup>43</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century the Hindu reformists had been successful in promoting Hinduism as an effervescent world religion that was capable of subsuming within itself various religious practices thereby harnessing the symbolic capital of Christianity.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>43</sup> Mitra, Peary Chand. *David Hare*. Calcutta: Basumati Sahitya Mandir, 1949; p. xvi.

<sup>44</sup> Religion in the garb of an effusive Hindu past posed itself as the 'cultural continuous' which held the possibility of constantly mutating itself to work with the warps of time. It is best demonstrated in the kind of universalism that came to define the re-invention of the Hindu identity in the late nineteenth century. Swami Vivekananda's address at the Parliament of World Religions in 1893 in Chicago might be a case in point. Ashis Nandy is of the opinion that Nationalism was in fact contested by its own

Textuality as a marker of progress (modernity) was promoted fiercely by the other most important organ of the missionary enterprise in India, education.<sup>45</sup> Initially, the missionary educational machinery prospered in the Dutch colony of Chinsura and the Danish settlement of Sreerampore.<sup>46</sup> Eventually with David Hare and Alexander Duff, the missionary education machinery travelled to Calcutta. Most of them wrote on various subjects ranging from medicine to theology. Detailed accounts of the records show that the missionaries were very successful in normativizing a system of education that came to teach English, Bengali and a classical language.<sup>47</sup> This model was then replicated by other educational institutions.<sup>48</sup> The missionaries and the Orientalists were also credited for having finally codified the tenets of Bengali as a written language. Henry Schwarz has tried to show how attempts by the Orientalists to codify Bengali language to create an 'ideal speech situation' to be able to homogenize the 'unformed, dispersed, and heterogeneous mass of Indian habitants', in effect created 'juridical subjects of English law'.<sup>49</sup> To claim that the 'reading public' was for once homogenized would be preposterous, but that the Western education system had largely bound them to a bilingual sphere would be quite accurate.<sup>50</sup> Even the colonizers never fostered a utopian assumption that English would be the functional language in the Indian

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heroes and his examples are Tagore and Gandhi. Both Gandhi and Tagore refuted the territoriality that is one of the defining characteristics of an 'imagined community' rather they opted for universality. Nandy, Ashis. 'Nationalism, Genuine and Spurious: Mourning Two Early Post-Nationalist Strains.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41. 32 (2006): pp. 3500-3504. Also see Fitzgerald, Timothy. 'Hinduism and the "world religion" Fallacy.' *Religion* 20. 2 (1990): pp. 101-118.

<sup>45</sup> Although the missionaries and the colonial state have been accorded a lot of importance in terms of the spread of Western education in India, the Indians were also enthusiastic participants. For example, see Acharya, Poromesh. 'Bengali "Bhadralok" and Educational Development in 19th Century Bengal.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30. 13 (1995): pp. 670-673.

<sup>46</sup> The ambivalence in the British policy for education in India and its reluctance to grant missionaries a free hand might have been one of the primary reasons. For a detailed analysis of the Orientalist and Anglicist debate, see Vishwanathan, Gauri. *Masks of Conquest, Literary Study and British Rule in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>47</sup> Laird, M. A. *Missionaries and Education in Bengal 1793-1837*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.

<sup>48</sup> Research in the missionary education policy also suggests that the missionaries encouraged an inter-religious dialogue. 'Proselytising Christianity, as a distinguishing characteristic of mission schools, was therefore marginalised within the educational enterprise. This ensured that discussions of comparative religion would come to characterise these schools. Many of these teachers spent time during term breaks conversing with *pundits*, *sannyasis* and students, in the form of treatises, debate and discourse. These educationists were consequently well-read in the higher schools of Hinduism, particularly Vaishnavite theology; this was recognised by government officials and administrators such as Lethbridge, Roper and Denzel Ibbetson. 'The Darwinian ideal of Fulfilment informed their approaches.' Bellenoit, Hayden J. A. 'Missionary Education: Religion and Knowledge in India, 1880-1915.' *Modern Asian Studies*, 41. 2 (2007): pp. 369-394; p. 373.

<sup>49</sup> Schwarz, Henry. 'Laissez-Faire Linguistics: Grammar and the Codes of Empire.' *Critical Enquiry*, 23. 3 (1997): pp. 509-535.

<sup>50</sup> For particular difficulties in studying British literary cultures see Bassnett, Susan. 'Introduction: Studying British Cultures.' Ed. Susan Bassnett. *Studying British Cultures: An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997: pp. xiii-xxix.

sub-continent.<sup>51</sup> This 'multi-tier literate culture' also ensured that 'English and vernacular audiences were not, as indeed they are not, symmetrically literate'. Therefore, '[i]f the political import of modern discourses was to mean anything at all, it was not enough in those worlds for native intellectuals to know English or the other imperial languages; they had to be able to write in vernacular as well'.<sup>52</sup> This bilingual literary sphere encouraged overflow of discourses even as it sought to separate its audience. The Bible and especially the Gospels were one of the first texts to be translated and printed in Bengali.<sup>53</sup> This marked what Swapan Chakrabarty likes to call the fear of contamination:

The altered protocol of reading, the fashioning of new concepts such as those of the individual author and the reading public, the danger of religious and social infringement posed by a hybrid idiom and liberalised access, the organization of the production and marketing of books, the regulation of discourse through such activities as commissioning of translations and selection of textbooks, the imperfect fit between colonial, missionary and native projects of regularising the vernacular for printed public discourse—all of these need to be considered as integral to the story of nineteenth-century Bengali prose [...] Excesses were in the first place the products of a deep disquiet about purity and danger that the arrival of public discourse in print generated. The threat posed by print in India may be characterised as one of contamination.<sup>54</sup>

Contagion of discourses highlights the influence of print creating a common receptacle (dictated by the readership) that refused isolated spaces of existence. In this case it should be noted that Christianity in print cannot be simplistically equated with propaganda literature as Christianity was consumed as part of textuality.<sup>55</sup> Even as the advent of Christianity diversified the religious discourse in Bengal it simultaneously succeeded in locating the meaning of the religious somewhere in between the languages of the day (cf. the discussion on dharma). Representations were not uniformly distributed in terms of languages, as criticism in Bengali created its own vernacular idioms of deviance which shall be explored in the ensuing section. The unique character of a bilingual intelligentsia and its related

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<sup>51</sup> Mukherjee, Meenakshi. 'English in an Uneven Land.' *Elusive Terrain, Culture and Literary Memory*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008: pp. 3-16.

<sup>52</sup> Naregal, Veena. 'Colonial Bilingualism and Hierarchies of Language and Power: Making of a Vernacular Sphere in Western India.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35. 49 (1999): pp. 3446-58.

<sup>53</sup> Hooper, J. S. M. *Bible Translations in India, Pakistan and Ceylon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.

<sup>54</sup> Chakravorty, Swapan. 'Purity and Print, A Note on Nineteenth-Century Bengali Prose.' Eds. Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorty. *Print Areas, Book History in India*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004: pp. 197-226; p. 203.

<sup>55</sup> Julia Charlotte Maitland for instance observes that 'a native school of *Caste* boys— not Christians' were learning to 'read the Bible for the sake of education'. Indira Ghose Ed. *Memsahibs Abroad, Writings by Women Travellers in Nineteenth Century India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998; p. 87.

literary cultures is a running theme in the dissertation and I shall take it up in connection with the authors that I discuss in detail in the next part.

These missionaries apart from being part of the Christianity print nexus evolved as the crucial link between the Bible as a book and the larger audience. From village marketplaces to the little churches in the rural hinterland they were a presence that people could not ignore. Often delivering lectures and sermons in the marketplaces they took the knowledge of the 'book' to the places hitherto untravelled. In his biography of Lal Behari Day, one of the most prominent Hindu converts, Macpherson reveals that '[w]hile carrying on his theological studies, Mr Day in company with other catechists, made what he called preaching tours during the winter season through the villages and hamlets of Western Bengal, distributing tracts and copies of the New Testament to each as could read and were willing to receive them'.<sup>56</sup> The Bible was literally the travelling book and the missionary its agent. Rev. T.K. Chatterji, in his biography recounts how the Christian booksellers and missionaries travelled to remote villages to distribute books: '[t]he Christian bookseller from whom I bought the Bible paid frequent visits to our village, accompanied by another colporteur, and by preaching and selling Christian books and distributing books succeeded in getting several young men of our village interested to some extent in Christianity'.<sup>57</sup> As William A. Hart's account of Bengal suggests, Bibles were even part of the fairs that accompanied popular Hindu festivals.

These great occasions give special opportunity for evangelistic work, and our preachers and teachers are always ready to make a wise use of them. A Christian book shop is sure to be one of the most prominent features of the fair.<sup>58</sup>

With the missionaries, the Bible acquired for the first time mobility and entered spaces which were largely untapped creating new modes of knowledge comprehension. Although, other religious orders (most notably the Vaishnavas) practised preaching, Bible preaching with its premium on print was pitched at a different level. It developed a hybrid knowledge dissemination and comprehension where the missionary in his performance at the marketplace combined 'economic

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<sup>56</sup> G. Macpherson. *Life of Lal Behari Day, Convert, Pastor, Professor and Author*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1900; p. 33.

<sup>57</sup> Rev. T. K. Chatterji. *Into the Light or how a Brahmin found the Christ. Being the Life story of Rev. T. K. Chatterji, Minister of the Bhowanipore Native Church*. Calcutta: London Missionary Society, 1895.

<sup>58</sup> William H. Hart. *Everyday Life in Bengal*. London: Charles H. Kelly, 1901; p. 151.

metaphors' and 'religious meanings'.<sup>59</sup> As a pariah figure often unwanted by the dominant Hindu populace of the villages and the urban centres alike, he was expressly bringing the print capital beyond the realms of textual knowledge. It is doubly interesting in this case, as we have noticed in the earlier section, that there was a huge emphasis on the Bible as the key text through which true knowledge could be obtained. The addressees of the missionary were a heterogeneous group from peasants to school boys to vagrants who were often detached from the textual medium. It is through the bodily gestures and the subjective interpretations that the missionary offered in 'public' spaces that this hallowed text (which was discussed in the rarefied philosophical circles of the day, as we have seen with the Brahmos) comes alive beyond the dictates of the textual world. The Bible was a foreign knowledge that was being intelligible through the figure of the missionary in the seemingly 'secular' space of the marketplace. Allowing this knowledge to be freely interpreted and disseminated in spaces which were often bound by economics, like the marketplace, brings into sharp focus the geographical spaces that this spilling over of textual knowledge occupied. This heuristic division of spaces (textual and non-textual, vernacular and English and Sanskrit [the vernacular however cuts across these spaces as it engages a multilingual intelligentsia], secular and religious) was then re-organized in the religious narrative medium. The stage for this religious 'performance' created a religious imaginary that could seemingly co-exist with the every-day practices.

This becomes obvious in the arguments provided by the missionary newspapers advocating female education.<sup>60</sup> For the *bhadramahila* encounters with the outer world was limited to the lower class women and to the zenana Christian missionaries who were allowed to teach in some 'progressive' households.<sup>61</sup> As Sumanta Banerjee observes the lower caste women '[b]ecause of the nature of their

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<sup>59</sup> Hugh Urban in his study of folk songs of Colonial Bengal talks about the convergence of the 'marketplace' and the 'temple' in the rural settings of colonial Bengal. Here I extend the concept to look at the missionary in the marketplace. Urban, Hugh. 'The Marketplace and the Temple: Economic Metaphors and Religious Meanings in the Folk Songs of Colonial Bengal.' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 60. 4 (2001): pp. 1085-1114.

<sup>60</sup> David W. Savage suggests that the missionaries propagating female education in India were in fact trying to appropriate contemporary British evangelical ideas of gendered domestic spaces which were linked to their own cultural transformation. Savage, David W. 'Missionaries and Development of a Colonial Ideology of Female Education in India.' *Gender and History*, 1. 2 (1997): pp. 201-221.

<sup>61</sup> The Zenana mission was first formed in 1852 by a woman missionary, Mrs Mary Jane Kinnaird (part of the Church Missionary Society) and soon gained popularity after which many more Church denominations took it up. For details see Burton, Antoinette. 'Contesting the Zenana: The Mission to Make "Lady Doctors for India".' *Journal of British Studies*. 35. 1 (1996): pp. 368-397.

work, [...] had to move in that “dangerous society” which was considered to be a threat to their sheltered sisters who lived in the andarmahals of upper class Bengali gentlefolk. For the members of the zenana, it was often this vast multitude of working women (like naptenis, sweepers, or singers) who had access to the andarmahal and so provided the only link to the outside world’.<sup>62</sup> On the part of the missionaries it was the unique chance to penetrate the zenana,<sup>63</sup> spaces where the ‘pure heathen’ could be located, ‘untouched’ by textual cultures and other worldly influences.<sup>64</sup> The project of converting the women locked in the zenanas was influenced by the Victorian protestant ethics of the importance of reforming the women to ensure the well-being of the family.<sup>65</sup> As was common with other missionary enterprises (via the zenana teachers), the primary target audience was however, the upper-caste women.<sup>66</sup> Many newspapers around this time were promoting English education for women.<sup>67</sup> The *Kṛiṣṭīya-Bāndhab* (The Christian

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<sup>62</sup> Banerjee, Sumanta. ‘Women’s Popular Culture in Nineteenth-century Bengal.’ Eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. *Recasting Women, Essays in Indian Colonial History*, Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1989: pp. 127-179; p. 129.

<sup>63</sup> Judith Rowbotham argues that the zenana missions became a formidable force owing to the propagandist literature in Britain in the nineteenth century which engendered considerable attention and authority in the minds of the British public of the nineteenth century. Rowbotham, Judith. “‘Hear an Indian Sister’s Plea’”: Reporting the work of the 19th century British Female Missionaries.’ *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 21. 3 (1998): pp. 247-261.

<sup>64</sup> Geraldine Forbes observes that British women were particularly fond of zenana missions as they realized the possibility of encountering the women who were always spoken about but never allowed to represent themselves. This allowed for fantastic and often gruesome tales of oppression to be singularly associated with the zenana and elicited curiosity among the women in Europe and evangelists in particular. Forbes, Geraldine. ‘In Search of the “Pure Heathen”’: Missionary Women in Nineteenth Century India.’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21. 17 (1986): pp. WS2-WS8.

<sup>65</sup> The best examples of the same were the abundance of the conduct books that constructed a hallowed perception of women as goddesses of their homes. It was insisted that the education and reformation of the women were necessary to nurture a family. For details see, Perkin, Mrs Joan. *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England*. London: Routledge, 1988. Similar principles were applied to rationalize the zenana mission: ‘The man goes out and sees the world and learns and sees the folly of his own idolatry, but back in the home the woman, the grandmother, calls him to worship the old way, and he dare not refuse, and this of course in the class that leads—the upper class. We can only talk to the women through a thick curtain, but the work of converting in the zenana must go on, for everyone knows the influence of the mother and the wife.’ Sir Andrew Frazer. ‘Greatest Obstacle in the way of the Christian teacher is in reaching the women.’ *New York Times*, March 29, 1899; p. 7. Also see, Lankina, Tomila, and Lullit Getachew. ‘Competitive Religious Entrepreneurs: Christian Missionaries and Female Education in Colonial and Post-Colonial India.’ *British Journal of Political Science*, 1. 1 (2012): pp. 1-29.

<sup>66</sup> Parna Sengupta makes a startling observation that the caste markers which prohibited the upper caste women to directly partake of the textual revolution enabled the lower caste women to join the missionaries as teachers thereby prompting a social revolution. Sengupta, Parna. ‘Teaching Gender in the Colony: The Education of “Outsider” Teachers in Late-Nineteenth-Century Bengal.’ *Journal of Women’s History*, 17. 4 (2005): pp. 32-55.

<sup>67</sup> Zenana missions seem to be very popular by the mid second half of the nineteenth century. ‘This is an association of ladies in this country for the promotion of Christian effort in zenanas, and employment of Bible women in connection with the Baptist Missionary Society. The word “zenana” is explained in Porter edition of Webster’s Dictionary to mean “the part of dwelling appropriated to women in East Indies”. Owing to the jealous seclusion of female sex in that as in all Oriental countries, this portion of an Indian household is, of course, inaccessible to the Christian Missionaries, upon

Friend) was a Bengali newspaper published by the Baptist Mission Press of Calcutta. It carried several articles on the nature and necessity of native female education. Apart from the usual nation building arguments, the newspaper provides an interesting perspective on the re-examination of the textual aspect of the Bible. It talks about the necessity of women to read the Bible in order to orally relate to their children biblical narratives.<sup>68</sup> This is a recurrent theme which features in another missionary newspaper in Bengali, *Arunoday* (The Sunrise) edited by Lal Behari Day. The print that was to travel to the almost impermeable inner quarters of the zenana was to create a tradition of oral narratives born out of a central textual narrative.<sup>69</sup> This suggestive spilling over (from the textual to the oral) allows the narratives to be both subjective and yet ensconced in the newly forged tradition. At this level the native convert in the zenana partakes of the same performative space as that of the missionary in the marketplace; where the tales constantly reproduce themselves.

Inherent in the propaganda strategy of the male and the female missionaries is the centrality of the written word mediated through the Bible and disseminated with the help of surplus print capital in the growing metropolis of nineteenth century Calcutta. The Christian religious imagery in the nineteenth century print culture therefore is tied to this textual surfeit where the performative allows for the subjective index which in turn creates its own narrative traditions. By creating textual communities both within and without print, Christianity came to occupy a significant position in the religious spectrum of nineteenth-century Bengal. This 'textual turn', if we may call it thus, prompted the fields of 'representations' to be interconnected. They were related, as discussed thus far, not only in terms of relational discourses but in material terms of shared print spaces (reflected in the overlapping consumption indexes). These interlinkages prompted novel textual productions and chief among them were the literary constructions.

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whose wives, therefore, devolves this department of missionary work. In connection with the Baptist zenana mission it seems there are agents in Calcutta, Baraset, Kidderpore, and Dum-dum etc., in Delhi, Benaras, Allahabad, Soories, Sreerampore, Dacca and Barisaul. The staff consists of about 11 European lady visitors, and about '33 native teachers and Bible women. More than 103 women receive religious instruction, and nine girls' schools containing about 280 children are taught. These numbers, however, give a very inadequate idea of the work done.' 'Baptist Zenana Mission.' *The Mercury* (Hobert, Tas: 1860-1954), 2 Jul 1875; p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Kṛīṣṭīya Bāndhab* (The Christian Friend). Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1900; p. 281.

<sup>69</sup> See for example, Haggis, Jane and Margaret Allen. 'Imperial Emotions: Affective Communities of Mission in British, Protestant Women's Missionary Publications c. 1880-1920.' *Journal of Social History*, 41. 3 (2008): pp. 691-716.

That the literary texts are inherently reflexive and they are not merely related to the texts that precede them but also part of the chain of the texts in anticipation, is no new proposition. Rather curious in this context is the relationship between 'representation' and print.<sup>70</sup> For intertextuality, as Bourdieu puts it, is positioned at the very crossroads of the 'political' and the 'aesthetic', the 'internal' and the 'external':

Keeping what is inscribed in the notion of intertextuality, meaning the fact that space of works always appears as a field of position-takings which can only be understood in terms of relationships, as a system of differential variations, one may offer the hypothesis (confirmed by empirical analysis) of a homology between space of works defined by their essentially symbolic content, and in particular by their *form*, and the space of positions in the field of production. For example, free verse defines itself against the alexandrine and everything it implies aesthetically, but also socially and even politically. In effect, the interplay of homologies between the literary field and the field of power or the social field in its entirety means that most literary strategies are overdetermined and a number of 'choices' hit two targets at once, aesthetic and political, internal and external.<sup>71</sup>

Christianity as an external marker amplified social and political markers of religious discourses. Hence, the discourses around religion as intertextual exchange came to reorganize the fields of productions thereby foregrounding ideological dilemmas. This overtly textualized field was also an active participant in the external Anglophone literary culture of the day. With steam ships and new additions to technology, print was mobile like never before.<sup>72</sup> Books printed in the Anglophone world via the new age ships would arrive in Calcutta in a comparatively short span of time.<sup>73</sup> With it travelled the numerous literatures on Christianity as a 'universal religion' which was a product of the evangelical awakening of Europe in the late eighteenth century.<sup>74</sup> The symbolic fields of the texts in question were at once both topical (located in the everyday of the Calcutta of

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<sup>70</sup> Chakraborti, Samarjit. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: A Study in the Growth of Public Opinion*. Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1976. Cf. Bauman, Richard. *A World of Other's Words, Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality*. Malden, Oxford, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2004; p. 16.

<sup>71</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Rules of Art, Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Trans. Susan Emmanuel. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995 (1992); p. 198.

<sup>72</sup> Bayly, Christopher A. 'Knowing the Country: Empire and Information in India.' *Modern Asian Studies* 27. 1 (1993): pp. 3-43.

<sup>73</sup> Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian writing in English*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000; p. 112.

<sup>74</sup> For example, Van der Veer, Peter. 'The Moral State: Religion, Nation, and Empire in Victorian Britain and British India.' Eds. Peter Van der Veer and Harmurt Lehmann. *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999; pp. 15-43.

the nineteenth century) and also an integral part of an ever expanding Anglophone market.

Boundaries of this bilingual literary space in Calcutta were both porous and rigid: the peripheries were determined both by limitations in terms of linguistic skills (primarily English and often indicative of class/caste privilege) and accessibility of sources. For example, students of the Hindu College were reading and debating Keshav Chandra Sen's *Young Bengal this is for You*, Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, Watson Theodore Parker's *Discourses in the matters of Religion*, Campbell's *Evidences of Christianity* and Hume's *Natural History of Religion* along with the Bible (in particular the Gospels) as well as ancient and contemporary Indian texts. This checklist is indicative of the kind of complex intertextual web that the discourse of Christianity found itself in colonial Calcutta of the nineteenth century.<sup>75</sup>

Christianity found a significant purchase in the intellectual realm as a religion of colonial modernity which was supported by a deeper print cultural arrangement. As a popular discourse affecting the socio-political rubric of society, Christianity soon moved out of its theological preserve and participated in the literary productions of the day. Interestingly enough, even while the colonized easily adapted to the new print medium and its associated practices (most prominent among them being the Western education system) they readily rejected its agents. It was most evident in the tropes of representation as I shall elaborate in the following section.

### *Representing Christianity*

Despite the availability of cheap literature on Christianity, by the turn of the century even by the confession of the native converts, Christianity as an enterprise in India was largely a failure. J.N. Farquhar laments that '[...] there has been a Christian community in South India since the third century at latest, since the sixteenth century there has been a vigorous Roman Catholic propaganda; and for the last two centuries there have been Protestant Missions. Yet, even today all the Christians of India taken together are only one percent of the population, surely a most pitiable result of seventeen centuries of Syrian Christianity, four centuries of

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<sup>75</sup> Chatterjea, B. C. *Papers for Thoughtful Men, A Brahmin Convert's Testimony for Christ*. London: Calcutta Tract and Book Society, 1900.

Roman Catholicism, and two centuries of Protestantism'.<sup>76</sup> Marshman in his journal talks about the hardships the missionaries had to face to convert a single person. He recounts how it took the missionaries at Sreerampore no less than seven years to find a person to convert. They tasted their first success on December 22, 1800, when 'two native Bengalis sat down with the little crowd of English Baptist missionaries at the Danish station at Serampore, not far from Calcutta'. After seven years of hard work the missionaries had managed to find just two Indians for conversion. 'While sitting down and eating with the Christian men, the two Bengalis openly renounced their caste, to the surprise of the Indian servants and the community in general. It was a happy day—almost too happy, in fact'.<sup>77</sup> The next attempt was a public one at the banks of the river Ganges, where Carey was to convert two Hindus in the presence of a large crowd. He managed to convert Krishna Pal even as the other man fled.

As Tanika Sarkar has demonstrated, the missionary enterprise in Bengal was largely a failure<sup>78</sup> (to the extent that the most famous missionary in Bengal, William Carey, is believed to have converted just three heathens). Following the census of Calcutta in 1840,<sup>79</sup> *The Calcutta Christian Advocate*, published an article on the number of native Christians in Calcutta. The author notes that ' Captain Birch, expressed 'his surprise at the statement made in reference to the number of native Christians in the city, which the census gives at 30!'.<sup>80</sup> This magnitude of failure is disproportionate to the extent of fear of conversion that was generated in the popular representations.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Farquhar, J. N. *Christianity in India*. London, Madras and Colombo: Christian Literature Society, 1908; p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> Marshman, John Clark. *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman, and Ward, Embracing the History of the Serampore Mission*, Volume 1. London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts, 1859; p. 138.

<sup>78</sup> Sarkar, Tanika. 'Missionaries, Converts and the State in Colonial India.' *Studies in History*, 18. 1 (2002): pp. 121-133.

<sup>79</sup> Historians have argued that the colonial census in India helped concretize notions of religion and community. See for example, Peabody, Norbert. 'Cents, Sense, Census: Human Inventories in Late Precolonial and Earlycolonial India.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43. 04 (2001): pp. 819-850. For a specific discussion on the nature of religious boundaries created as a result of the colonial census see: Gottschalk, Peter. 'A Science of Defining Boundaries: Classification, Categorization, and the Census of India.' Eds. Mathew N. Schmalk and Peter Gottschalk. *Engaging South Asian religions, Boundaries, Appropriations and Resistances*. New York: SUNY Press, 2011: pp. 21-38.

<sup>80</sup> 'Census of Calcutta.' *The Calcutta Christian Advocate*. Vol. II. No. 5, June 6, 1840; p. 35.

<sup>81</sup> Interestingly enough the statistics of the area that sites of worship occupied shows that churches in terms of space, were a recognizable presence. *Report on the Survey of Calcutta by F. W. SIMMS, C. E., Consulting Engineer to the Government of India and director of the Railway department dated 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1850*. Calcutta J. C. Sheriff Military Orphan press, 1851; p. 77.

An important agent in the entire context of conversion in colonial Bengal was the presence of the figure of the missionary often supposed as an aggressive, alien and proselytizing force. Even as the various Christian denominations fought over their differences, the common Hindu perceptions remained unchanged: ‘a *pādri* or (increasingly as memory of the Portuguese faded in the British era) a *mishanrī*, there being no terms of indigenous origin for such alien concept’.<sup>82</sup> Missionaries were obvious targets and were viewed as agents of disruption both in India<sup>83</sup> and in their countries of origin. At the macro-level back in Europe the Protestant missionaries had envisioned the phenomenon of conversion as a ‘spread’ of an essentialized tradition from point A to point B—typically from metropolis to periphery—as though it were a substance, like molasses or lava, flowing outward from a central point, engulfing and incorporating all that it passes over while itself remaining unchanged’<sup>84</sup>.

This understanding of conversion is in conjunction with a number of post-colonial readings of religious conversion which typically looks at the missionary as the active agent and the convert as the passive recipient.<sup>85</sup> Read in these terms, the

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Details on the places of worship:

Church of England—8 total area: 924, 226 feet

Church of Scotland—1 29, 782 feet

Free church of Scotland—1 28, 916 feet

Roman catholic places of worship—5 295, 902 feet

Independent chapels—2 52, 986 feet

Baptist chapels—3 94, 705 feet

Chinese—1 4, 578 feet

Greek—1 13, 779 feet

Armenian—1 33, 898 feet

Jewish synagogue—1 6, 373 feet

Hindoo temples—167 149, 587 feet

Mahomedan—74 139, 797 feet

<sup>82</sup> Young, Robert Fox. ‘Some Hindu Perspectives on Christian Missionaries in the Indic World of the Mid Nineteenth Century.’ Eds. Judith M. Brown and Robert Eric Frykenberg. *Christians, Cultural Interactions and India’s Religious Traditions*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2002: pp. 37-60; p. 39.

<sup>83</sup> The negative attributes associated with the missionaries was received by an ambivalent stance by the ruling elite and the administrative machinery in colonial India. For example, see Menon, Kalyani Devaki. ‘Converted Innocents and their Trickster Heroes: The Politics of Proselytizing in India.’ Eds. Andrew Buckster and Stephen D. Glazier. *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*. Oxford: Lowman and Littlefield, 2003: pp. 43-54.

<sup>83</sup> Eaton, Richard M. ‘Comparative History as World History: Religious Conversion in Modern India.’ *Journal of World History*, 8. 2 (1997): pp. 243-271; p. 245.

<sup>84</sup> Sipra Mukherjee in her conference paper, ‘The Scare of Conversion’says, ‘This view reads conversion in accordance with the missionary-narratives that placed the Western missionary at the centre of the process of conversion as the active agent, portraying the convert as passive, acted upon. The conversion narratives documented during the colonial times echo this equation with very little space being given to the narrative of the convert. The Indian nationalist view, shaped along the same lines of argument, has been that the native converts were puppets in the hands of the missionaries who manipulated and persuaded them into accepting an alien religion, the conversion itself being interpreted as a conversion to the religion of the imperialists. Any role of control is denied to the native convert who is looked upon either as opportunist or at best, weak and impressionable.’ Mukherjee,

obvious villains of this 'gangster game', the missionaries, were accused of 'manipulation and coercion and the convert is said to have betrayed his 'culture and tradition'.<sup>86</sup> While this reading might have served its purpose of creating the perfect pitiable character of the convert who is always at the receiving end of devious 'games' of the missionaries, it has also obliterated the possibility of the convert to participate in the discourse.<sup>87</sup> 'Sheep stealing' was one of the many derogatory terms used to describe 'conversion', which ensures that the agency remains with the 'thief', in this case the missionary.<sup>88</sup> One particular letter written to the editor of *The Hindu Intelligencer* charged the missionaries with kidnapping and destroying the peace and the calm of the Hindu society. To quote:

Sir,

It is a matter of deep regret and great alarm to us to find that the missionaries have now-a-days turned downright kidnappers. The peace of domestic society, and the happiness of families, are often rudely violated by them, by enticing away tender and unsophisticated youths from the bosom of the loving mother or affectionate father.<sup>89</sup>

Vilifying the missionary was not just the prerogative of the Indians but the British also seem to enjoy teasing with this idea. J.G. Farrell's Booker prize winning novel, for example, on the 1857 mutiny of India constantly refers to the terrorizing effect of conversion that was prevalent in the nineteenth century northern and eastern India.

The collector had been astonished, on hearing of the mutiny of the 19th at Behrampur, at the lack of alarm in official circles over this development. Later he heard that General Harsey had been obliged to address the sepoys at Barackpur to reassure them that there was no intention of forcibly converting them to Christianity, as they suspected. The English, Hearsay had explained to them, were 'Christians of the Book', which meant that

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Sipra. 'The Scare of Conversion in 19th Century Bengal: Myth and Reality.' Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, 13th Triennial Conference, Hyderabad, India, 4 –9 August, 2004.

<sup>85</sup> Sipra Mukherjee. 'Lessons From the Past.' *The Telegraph*. Calcutta, May 31, 2005; p. 19.

<sup>87</sup> S. K. Bhattacharya in the context of Christian conversions in Bengal has a very controversial theory. He suggests 'When two societies or two cultures come in contact, it is expected that the weaker culture will borrow elements from the dominant one.' Conversion in this reading is a 'natural' progression where missionaries are mere facilitators. Bhattacharya, S. K. *Christian Missions, Missionaries and Indian Society*. New Delhi: Mohit Publications, 1999; p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> Michael Bergunder in the context of 'forced conversions' quotes K. Baago's essay "'Sheepstealing" in the nineteenth century.' *Bulletin of the Church History Association of India*, November 1966; 17. Bergunder, Michael. 'Proselytism in the History of Christianity in India.' Ed. Richard Fox Young. *India and the Indianness of Christianity, Essays on Understanding—Historical, Theological and Bibliographical—in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg*. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009: pp. 181-195.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Long, Rev. James. *Handbook of Bengal Missions, in Connection with the Church of Bengal. Together with an Account of General Educational Efforts in North India*. London: John Farquhar Shaw, 1848; p. 501.

nobody could become a Christian without first reading and understanding the Book and voluntarily choosing to become a Christian.<sup>90</sup>

The threat of forceful conversion was possibly best manifest during the 1857 sepoy uprising. The Hindu and the Muslim soldiers had refused to bite into the cartridges which were allegedly greased with beef and pork fat thereby suggesting that polluting them with forbidden food would ensure their eventual conversion. In Farrell's understanding the redeeming feature of Christianity lay in the fact that the Bible was part of a 'reading public'. While the 'Book' or the Bible came to participate in the discourses of religious dissent in the age of social reform, the missionary, its agent, was perceived as a threat.<sup>91</sup> The disruptive potential of the missionary came from his performative action where the text he was preaching became the vehicle for extreme religious dissent.

Other than the missionary, the Christian convert was another very popular character particularly in the satirical representations of the day. In an age of imperial repression and extreme social changes, satires became one of the most favoured literary forms. Hans Harder argues that the popularity of the satire in colonialism<sup>92</sup> 'was a kind of answer to the social displacement of colonialism'.<sup>93</sup> As

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<sup>90</sup> J. G. Farrell. *The Siege of Krishnapur*. London: Orion Books, 2008 (1973); p. 33.

<sup>91</sup> Ram Mohun Roy in fact outlines the three pronged approach of the missionaries in converting the people of India with print as their prime agent: 'During the last twenty years, a body of English gentlemen, who are called missionaries, have been publicly endeavouring in several ways to convert Hindoos and Mussalmans of this country to Christianity. The first way is that of publishing and distributing among the natives various books, large and small, reviling both religions, and abusing the gods and saints of the former. The second way is that of standing in front of the doors of the natives, or in the public roads, to preach the excellence of their religion, and debasedness of that of others. The third way is that if any natives of low origin become Christians from the desire of gain, or from any other motives, these gentlemen employ and maintain them as a necessary encouragement to others to follow their example.' Roy, Rammohun. 'Religious Controversy in India between the Bramuns and Missionaries.' *The Philadelphia Universalist Magazine and Christian Messenger*. Vol. 2, 1823: pp. 121-140; p. 122.

<sup>92</sup> A significant number of humorous pieces targeted the Western civilization (as the relational extreme) so as to define the normative. As Jashodhara Bagchi suggests, 'The West offers the rich ground of parody in which elite literature of Bengal stakes its simultaneous claim of questioning the superiority of the west that has put in place a cultural domination to complete the process of extracting the surplus from our economy and the imitative "mimicry" of power that has emasculated the indigenous elite and hypothecated them to the west. In both these terrains humour has attempted to re-turn the gaze quite unbeknown to the "west", blinded by the naturalization that the dominant culture accepts as its due.' Bagchi, Jashodhara. "'May the Sindoor on the Lips never Perish": The West in Colonial Humour.' Ed. C. Vijayshree. *Writing the West, Representations from Indian Languages*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 2004: pp. 39-58; p. 42.

<sup>93</sup> Hans Harder notes that 'a basic effect of British colonialism in South Asia was a proliferation of double value systems, frames of reference and cultural codes. These doubled frames obeyed a thorough-going asymmetry in so far as the British/European set of frames was invested with power and agency and usually considered superior, whereas the "native" ones were relegated to a recessive and inferior position. Admissions to the dominant codes for South Asians were always conditional, and this brought about identity issues particularly among the South Asian inhabitants of the colonial interface between those frames. This situation, I want to argue, granted satire the bonus of bestowing

an oblique and often self-reflexive mode of articulation (which frequently relied on exaggerations) it soon became one of the most powerful tools of social censure in the nineteenth century. The laughter ensued from a silent covenant between the reader and the author where both agreed on an understanding of normative behaviour. Apart from demarcating social dysfunctionalities, satires generated a consensual community where the success of the literary piece relied as much on the author as on the audience. As much as the satire was about positioning the colonized at the centre by negation it was also about creating stabilizing tropes. To extend Hans Harder's argument, the centrifugal force occasioned by satire required a stabilizing centre, albeit prevaricated, to provide a conduit for levels of negation. Satires and humorous pieces highlighted this aspect by fashioning the image of the convert (the Christian missionary's target audience) as the religious other.

Framing the Christian neophyte as the religious other ensured that the threat posed by the convert remained as an aberration in the religious universe of the day. Apart from the participation of Christianity in the print medium which secured its position in the contemporary religious parlance, as an alien import Christianity was simultaneously viewed as (to use Stephen Greenblatt's term) the marvellous. As a system of religious organization Christianity was so fresh for the Hindu traditional intelligentsia that representational excess in this regard can be read as a purging mechanism used to frame the Christian convert as the relational other.<sup>94</sup>

Incidentally, most of the satirical pieces by the Bengali intelligentsia appear in Bengali. It can be argued that humour relies on the semantics (context dependent and often locally produced) of a language. As I have just outlined, humour relies on a *sensus communis* which is possible only when the author and his audience inhabit

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an awkward symmetry between two asymmetries: colonial asymmetries were written into so many "modern" authors' lives; and these make the satirical mode, asymmetrical and oblique as it was, a promising strategy of representation. Since positive identification was hard for the colonial subject, the destructive mode that satire is, appeared at times as the easier option. Satire seems to have the capacity to re-establish a kind of symmetry in answering to the social displacements of colonialism. It contains a mechanism of self-assurance and self-resorting which seems to lack in some theories of satire: Satire can function as a centrifuge in which distorted colonial world is made to revolve, and the essential part of the exercise is to regain a position in the centre.' Harder, Hans. 'Colonial Satire in South Asian Literatures.' Eds. Monika Horstmann and Heidi Rika Maria Pauwels. *Indian Satire in the Period of First Modernity*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012: pp. 165-183; p. 180.

<sup>94</sup> Stephen Greenblatt in his influential study on the British discovery of the marvellous in the new world states: 'From medieval wonder as a sign of dispossession to Renaissance wonder as an agent of appropriation: the early discourse of the New World is, among other things, a record of colonizing the marvellous. Marvellous as a sign of eyewitness's surprising recognition of the other in himself, himself in the other.' Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvelous Possessions, The Wonder of the New World*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991; p. 25.

the same pool of signification. Although the vernacular constituency shares a significant overlap with the English audience (the bilingual intelligentsia) it has its own autonomous tenets of exchange. The most obvious example is the context specificity of Bengali genres like *naksā* which were effectively appropriated by the satirists. In the case of print in general, it allows for subversive space to emerge. For example it has been argued that the spread of the native printing presses was a global phenomenon where the natives set out to defeat the colonizers at their own game.<sup>95</sup> The sovereignty is most evident in the idioms of humour. Therefore the proclivity for humour is as much instilled in the linguistic ordering as in its opportunist politicking.

### *Fashioning aberration*

Exaggerated representations of the Christian convert literary or otherwise met with a resounding excess. As a result, the Christian convert much like his Brahmo counterpart evolved as a prototypical stock character that pronounced social aberration. Caught in a dialectic web the convert constantly oscillates between extremes of a visionary revolutionary and a passive recipient of proselytizing discourses. Categorizing the convert as a socio-religious aberration with identifiable fallacies, offers the perfect stabilizing trope of producing an internal other.

23<sup>rd</sup> August 1831 was a day on which conservative Calcutta shook and tremors were felt all around. On this day, some men of the young Bengal group had gathered at the residence of Krishna Mohan Banerjea and in his absence ate bread made by Muslim bakers and had beef. In celebration of their great feat they threw the bones over to the neighbour's house, who happened to be a devout Brahmin. Krishna Mohan was as a result unceremoniously asked to leave his house by his grandfather. This 'act' helped crystallize conservative Hindu public opinion against the 'Young Bengal'. *The Inquirer*, a newspaper edited by Krishna Mohan Banerjea on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1832 announced that Mahesh Chandra Ghosh, one of the Derozians had converted to Christianity. With Krishna Mohan Banerjea's conversion on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October in the same year there was public outrage that students of Hindu College were being misled into adopting Christianity. Such extremities had precedence in the conversion of Krishna Paul on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December. According to Marshman, '[t]he report that Krishna had thrown up his

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<sup>95</sup> Parins, James W. 'The English-Language Native Press in the Nineteenth Century.' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 18. 1 (1985): pp. 17-33.

caste, and become a “Feringee”—then the nickname of the Christian—spread rapidly through the town and created an extraordinary sensation. The next morning a mob of two thousand persons collected in front of his house, uttering violent imprecations on him’.<sup>96</sup>

It is interesting to note that the term ‘Feringee’<sup>97</sup> was used as an expression of loathing to implicate both the foreigner and the Christian, indicating the fallibility of both. Christianity here is often confused with the vague understanding of Western modernity.<sup>98</sup> Ashok Mitra for example has remarked:

Suffice it to say, exposure to the west did things to the Dutts of Hatkhola Rambagan, as it did to the Boses, Ghoses and the Mitters in the neighbourhood—with whom they heavily intermarried. There was a certain straining of the genes. Toru Dutt, the Poetaster, who also composed metrical structures in French, and died in her twenties, while still in Europe, in consumptive splendor, belonged to one branch of the family. [...] The Dutts of Hatkhola-Rambagan were forced by the heady times to be innovative: some of them, despite their flowering into *haute couture*, stuck to the Hindu faith; bolder ones went the whole hog, for them it was the Church of England.<sup>99</sup>

This is apparent in most depictions of Christians and their ways in nineteenth century. Often imagined as having gone too far with adopting Western customs, the figure of the ‘convert’ in the literary representations of the ‘time’ is archetypal. He is either the ‘opportunist’ or the ‘gullible fool’ who has taken to the ways of the West. Often this was achieved by associating two disparate elements. William Radice taking cue from Arthur Koestler insists that the yoking of ‘two unconnected frames of reference’ or ‘bisociation’ defined the humour of colonial Calcutta.<sup>100</sup> Read in these terms, the figure of the convert was perceived as the

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<sup>96</sup> Marshman, Joshua. *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward, Volume I*. London: Longman, Brown, Green & Roberts, 1859; p. 138.

<sup>97</sup> Brahmabandhab Upadhyay playfully deconstructs the term to highlight the shortcomings of the white settlers. For example, he says that the ‘phi’ stands for people who demands fees for everything. ‘Phiringi śabder buyt-patti’. Ed. Bārī'dbaraṅ Ghoṣ. *Racanā Saṃgraha*. Kalikātā: De Buk stor, 1987; p. 97.

<sup>98</sup> The Hindu converts to Christianity were also convinced by the correlation between modern Western intellect and Christianity. One of the converts to Christianity addressing ‘the educated native young men of Calcutta’ had written: ‘Is Christianity, the religion of Newton and Locke, of Boyle and Milton, to be condemned and its authority questioned by the narrow-minded unbelievers of our day?’ A Hindu. *Remarks Concerning the Evidences of Christianity*. Calcutta: Kashipore Press, 1853; p. 1. Sanjay Seth argues that it is difficult to separate education from Christianity. The moral codes that the Western education promoted were intricately related to the Christian ethical universe. See chapter ‘Diagnosing Moral Crisis.’ Seth, Sanjay. *Subject Lessons*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007; p. 57.

<sup>99</sup> Mitra, Ashok. ‘The Calcutta Diary.’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10. 3 (1975): pp. 50-51.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Whether or not Koestler’s theory is strong enough to account for all varieties of humour in Calcutta or anywhere else, it certainly fits a type of humour that one recognizes as distinctively Calcuttan. Just as the culture that developed in nineteenth-century Calcutta was itself a rich blend of indigenous and Western traditions and influences, so the humour of the city’s literature, drama and art exploited to the

misadventure of the clash of the frames of the East and the West. The humour often ensued from the lack of coherence of these frames of references. Hence the overwhelming prerogative of this kind of satire is catechesis where Christianity is habitually used to designate Western modernity.

Even when the aberrant figures are accorded designated spaces in these representations, they are bound within certain expectations. While the humorous excites the possibility of normative behaviour it concurrently sets the language of religious dissent. Therefore religious dissent even in its stern defiance continues to play to the tune of the normative.

In Dwijendralal Roy's poem '*Bad'le Gela Man'tā'* (The Change of Mind), part of his book, *Hasir Gān* (The Songs of Laughter), the central character is presumably a young man who has been exposed to Western education. The protagonist has been reading Herbert Spencer, Hume and Mill and is thereby unable to locate his religious inclination. He begins by falling in love with a Christian woman and converts to Christianity, and then turns to the Brahmos. When he reads Hume, Mill and Herbert Spencer he decides on becoming a rationalist and as luck would have it, he is exposed to Basu and Ghosh who insist that he takes to theosophy.

In the beginning no religion attracted me,  
A Christian lady caught my fancy,  
I began believing in Christianity and worshipped Christ,  
At the precise moment my father kicked my arse!  
I abandoned the way, changed my mind.  
(chorus) left to these conditions, everybody changes his mind.

I saw clearly the faith of the new Brahmos,  
Apart from closing the eyes there was no pain,  
The moment I was supposed to be indoctrinated with my sister into  
the afore mentioned faith,  
I was married according to the Hindu 'form',  
I abandoned the way, changed my mind.  
(chorus) left to these conditions, everybody changes his mind.

I befriended a gay group of agnostics,  
Read Hume, Mill and Herbert Spencer  
Was swept by the flood of beef and fowl,  
At this precise moment God gave me a few daughters,  
I abandoned the way, changed my mind.  
(chorus) left to these conditions, everybody changes his mind.

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full the often ludicrous "bisociation" of East and West, Bengali and English.' Radice, William. 'The Humour of Calcutta.' Eds Christina Oesterheld and Claus Peter Zoller. *Of Clowns and Gods, Brahmans and Babus, Humour in South Asian Literatures*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1999: pp. 102-117; p. 102.

I discarded Herbert Spencer, Bain and Mill,  
I deserted beef and fowl, atleast at my expense,  
Basu and Ghosh directed me towards Hinduism,  
At that precise moment I fell into the hole of Theosophy  
I abandoned the way, changed my mind.  
(chorus) left to these conditions, everybody changes his mind.<sup>101</sup>

In this 'song' the convert is the habitual troublemaker who is liable to be kicked in his arse for his deviant ways. He has an affected Western sensibility, again thanks to the 'texts' that a liberal Western education has given him. The Christian convert meets almost the same predicament as the Brahmos of the day. The figure of the convert was part of an entire discourse of 'aberration' where departures from the norm (the traditional Hindu male, albeit with an acceptable dose of Western education) were severely criticized. Even as the readers draw humour from this poem, one is ruefully aware of the thin line that divides Western modernity from socially acceptable behaviour. The ever changing language of social acceptability can be understood by applying Skinner's arguments regarding 'unchanged meanings' and 'new meanings'. While criticizing Raymond Williams's heavy reliance on the sense of a term that dictates 'accepted' meanings, Skinner states:

When an argument of this nature is successful, the outcome will hardly be the emergence of new meanings, save the application of a term with a new range of reference may eventually put pressure on the criteria for applying it. The outcome will rather be the acceptance of new social perceptions, as a result of which the relevant appraisive terms will then be applied with unchanged meanings to new circumstances. It is only when such arguments fail that new meanings tend to arise.<sup>102</sup>

The 'new meanings', in this case, the new codes of social behaviour, vacillates between the new religious ideologies that were floating around. Noticeable in this semantic exchange is a significant reliance on textual sources as engendering new meanings. Participants of all these discourses are part of the same textual rubric as the gullible and confused 'convert'.

If the Christian convert in nineteenth-century Bengal is the sure sign of 'aberration', then the Brahmos come a close second. They are accused of virtually all the vices that are associated with the Christians. Indranath Bandyopadhyay, the

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<sup>101</sup> Rāy, Dvijendralāl. *Hāsir Gān*. Ed. Pabitra Adhikārī. *Tin'šo Bacharer Bāñilā Byaṅga Kabitā*. Kalikātā: Karuṇā Prakāśani, 2003; p. 71.

<sup>102</sup> Skinner, Quentin. 'Language and Political Change.' *Visions of Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; p. 15.

creator of the narratorial figure Pāncu ṭhākur, wrote '*Brāhmakors*'<sup>103</sup> ('Exposition on Brahma Ideals'). This text offers an array of good reasons for joining the Brahmo fold. Chief among them were the disregard for castes, free mixing of men and women, remarriage and widow remarriage, women's education (including the learning of singing, dancing, love-affairs, novel-reading, etc.), social upward mobility, drinking, smoking, etc. Satirical pieces targeting the anglophilic tendency of the inhabitants of Calcutta were fairly common.<sup>104</sup>

One of the most famous satirical pieces of the day, Kaliprasanna Singha's *Hutom Pyāñcār Nakṣā* (The Observant Owl [1868]), widely believed to be a masterpiece in social commentary, also highlights similar practices as social ills. Two interesting aspects in this text which was first published in 1861, form the core of the bad influence of the 'firingis'; the imposition of a sense of new 'time' and the importance of the printed word. There are umpteen references to mechanical clocks and watches that men carry on their person to enhance their appearance. But most important of all are the references that he makes about the church clock dictating the lives of the people. While documenting the lives of the morally degraded 'Babus', Hutom or the narrator, reminds the reader that it is in fact the Church gongs with their particular rhythmic 'tung tang tung tang' that signals the homeward journey of the Babus.<sup>105</sup> Amidst all the ethical downturn of the culture in Calcutta stands the influence of the English printed word. While the English newspapers like the *Englishman*, *Hurakaru*, *Phoenix*, *Exchange Gazette* early in the morning make their way to the breakfast tables, the Bengali ones prefer to be savoured like stale deer meat.<sup>106</sup> Hutom goes on to classify the English affected babus into two groups: the first is an appalling mirror image of the 'firingi', the second are the opportunists. The first group is easily identified by their manners which include an English gait, sitting by

<sup>103</sup> Bandyopādhyāy, Rañjan Ed. *Indranāth Racanābalī Vol. 2*. Kalikātā: Dīp Prakāśan, 2007; p. 279.

<sup>104</sup> The charges were fairly repetitive. A piece by Manmohan Basu highlights the change in social perceptions of what it means to adopt Western ways.

Puja rituals and vegetarianism have been stalled, /All we hear night and day is 'bring me liquor'. Cakrabartī, Ramākānta. *Nidhubābu o Tār Ṭappā*. Kalikātā: Punaśca, 2001; p. 33. Rupchand Pakshi has to say similar things in his poem 'Bāburām Locā':

Having read a few pages of English,  
Lost sense of proportion,  
We take pride in our liquor,  
And life is but nothing.

Ibid., 49. Relating liquor to the decadence of morality seems to be fairly common: Thākur, Ṭekcād. 'Mad khāoyā baṛa dāy, jāṭ thākār ki upāy.' Ed. Kāñcan Basu. *Duṣprāpya sāhitya samgraha*. Kālikātā: Rephlekṭ Pāblikeśan, 2004. 7<sup>th</sup> ed.: pp. 169-208.

<sup>105</sup> For a detailed discussion on the influence of colonial time refer to, Guha, Ranajit. 'A Colonial City and its Time (s).' *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45. 3 (2008): pp. 329-51.

<sup>106</sup> Siṃha, Kāliprasanna. *Hutom Pyāñcār Nakṣā*. Trans. Swarup Roy. *The Observant Owl, Hootum's Vignettes of Nineteenth-Century Calcutta*. New Delhi: Black Kite, 2008: pp. 4-5.

the table and chair, using the cup and the saucer for tea, jug for water, decanter for brandy, etc. His rebellions are confined to the *Hurakaru*, *Englishman*, *Phoenix and Politics* and *News of the Day*. Eating at the table, defecating at the commode and using paper to clean up are some of their practices. When this category of quasi-firingi Bengali men crosses the threshold of Hinduism, with the Brahmoism as the final marker, they become Christians.

Taking to the Western ways is the first step towards Christianity. Hutom paints a very sorry picture of the 'padri' who ultimately lures these already Westernized gentlemen into surrendering to an alien faith. James W. Lane points out how conversion is 'first expressed externally, through the body, disciplined and shaped by culture and political power'.<sup>107</sup> The figure of the convert (the native missionary) here externalizes all the negative attributes that are heaped on him. Far from being a charismatic figure, the padre for Hutom is a cultural hotchpotch gone dreadfully wrong. While describing a street sequence he observes:

A padre was distributing Bibles among the people. A catechist was standing close by, dressed like a suburban chowkidar: he was wearing a pantaloon, a short chapkan and a black top hat. He was speaking and gesticulating like a pleader and explaining the glory of the Christian faith to the crowd. At first glance one would mistake him for a puppeteer! A few porters, pedlars and schoolboys were listening to the catechist with rapt attention, but they couldn't make head or tail of what he said! Earlier, wayward boys used to quarrel with their parents and run away to the north of the country, or become Christians. But now, with the coming of the Railways, running away from home has become a hazardous job! What's more, having seen the wretched condition of the converts, people are now terrified of becoming Christians!<sup>108</sup>

This significant passage helps us to put the divergent strands into perspective. At the very obvious level, he paints a rather wretched picture of the padre or the itinerant preacher who looks like a chowkidar or a guard. Even as the missionary or the padre is a sad figure, he continues to play a mock-authoritative role in a society that has obvious affinity towards the Western culture, mainly represented by the British in Calcutta. With his puppet dance like histrionics he wishes to control lives but in effect has either juveniles or people from the marginal classes as his audience. Conversion seems to have been the result of infantile

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<sup>107</sup> Lane, James W. 'The Body as the Locus of Religious Identity.' Eds. Dennis Washburn and A. Kevin Reinhardt. *Converting Cultures, Religion, Identity and Transformations of Modernity*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007: pp. 325-343; p. 326.

<sup>108</sup> Simha, Kāliprasanna. *Hutom Pyāncār Nakṣā* Trans. Swarup Roy. *The Observant Owl, Hootum's Vignettes of Nineteenth-Century Calcutta*. New Delhi: Black Kite, 2008; p. 18.

rebellions against parental authorities gone awfully wrong. On the one hand, Hutom establishes Christianity essentially as a religion of the printed literate word with the Bible as its centre and on the other hand trivializes the rebellious potential of 'conversion'. Even as the narrator recognizes that Christianity is a formidable departure it blunts the possibility of equating 'conversion' with revolution. Conversion remains a whimsical act that smells of immaturity.

In a courtroom sequence published in *Basantak*, one of the very popular satirical magazines of the day, the Christian convert is a similar stock character of an impressionable fool.

2<sup>nd</sup> witness: Sir that our third testifier can say better. In the current issue of Jail Return it is said that the native converts account for the most criminals and hence he can speak the best on this issue.

3<sup>rd</sup> witness: What? You dare to insult me. Do you know that we follow the pure religion?

Jury. What is the point in skirmishing? Let us hear what you know.

3<sup>rd</sup> witness: Sir, I can speak well on a lot of issues. I was initially a Brahmin, then a Brahmo and now a Christian hence I know about all the three religions.

Jury. Now tell me about the famine that the government anticipates.

3<sup>rd</sup> witness: Sir, I have enumerated whatever the Old Testament has to say about it in the Weekly Magazine.

Jury. What is this Weekly Magazine?

3<sup>rd</sup> Witness: That is a Christian newspaper. If you kindly permit I would like to read out from it.

Jury: I do not like to hear of the Bible, let me know the condition of the country.<sup>109</sup>

The humour of this piece rides on the shoulder of the figure of the confused convert. He has been indoctrinated to the textual world where the Bible reigns supreme and he subsequently values the world around him with respect to the religious text. Ironically, his blinkered world view is detached from the 'real material world' around him. Importantly the convert is so steeped in his religious practices that he is blissfully unaware of the anti-native activities of the British government. This directly implicates the convert in the process of colonization. Interestingly enough, his conversion to Christianity has not made him compatible with the Western modern system. His knowledge of the Bible thus does not correlate to the colonial legal universe. Crucially, the convert also fails as a Western modern. Even as the Christian convert occupies the extremity of 'aberration' from

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<sup>109</sup> Caṇḍī Lāhiṛī. Ed. *Basantak, A Collection of Bengali Cartoon Journals 1-2- yrs.* Kalikātā: Niu Ej Pāblišārs, 2009; p. 12. For a complete German translation see: Harder, Hans. „Basantak.’ *Verkehrte Welten. Bengalische Satiren aus dem kolonialen Kalkutta. Zweisprachige Ausgabe: bengalisch – deutsch.* Heidelberg: Draupadi, 2011.

the norm, where the Brahmo seems to be a mid-point,<sup>110</sup> he is unable to present himself as a rebel worthy of recognition.

A scale of aberration is sanctioned in the religious universe where departure from the norm is carefully calibrated.<sup>111</sup> Babu Shyama Charan Ghosh's book, *To Christianity through Brahmoism* (1869) in its very title clarifies the range of religious dissidence.<sup>112</sup> The ideological proximity (and their social standing) of the Brahmos and the Christians is also evident in the satirical pieces written by the converts themselves. In a mock dialogue between a missionary of the Brahmo Samaj of India suitably named Bhakta-bitel (bhakta implies a devout follower but the bitel suffix completely negates any serious religious intent) Manmohan Bose, MA, DL and educated gentlemen (who evidently sides with Christianity), the divine dispensation of the Samaj is brought to disrepute. For example, Manmohan Ghose tries hard to prove that Brahmo Samaj is struggling to mimick the likes of other proclaimed religions.

M — [...] He is evidently playing the role of a Bengali Muhammad. It is not inspiration but conceit which has originated the New Dispensation. Your minister has some good qualities. He has a handsome appearance; he is intelligent; he is amiable; he has a sort of eloquence: but—but — excuse me for adding, he is eaten up with conceit. He thinks no end of himself. Moses proclaimed a Dispensation; Jesus Christ proclaimed a second; Muhammad proclaimed a third; and your Minister though in his mind—'If others have proclaimed Dispensations, why should not I?'<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> This is evident in the formulations of the religious identities of the converts themselves. In defining their religious stance the Christians position themselves against the Brahmos. For example Lal Behari Day comments: 'The best definition of Brahmaism is—"I think, thou thinkest, he she or it thinks; we think, ye or you think, they think." That is Brahmaism as to its basis. Hence, it is no marvel, which its principles, its tenets, its doctrines, are constantly changing. The principles of Christianity are, on the other hand, fixed and certain. They may be misunderstood by sectaries, but Christianity is not responsible for their misunderstandings. There may be a thousand sects, all having their misconceptions of the principles of Christianity; but Christianity is not chargeable for those misconceptions... They lie embedded in this Holy Volume, which I have now in my hands. They are treasured up in this casket of precious gems. Of this book, God is the Author, and salvation is its subject.' Day, Lal Behari. *Antidote to Brahmaism in Four Lectures*. Calcutta: Messrs. G. C. Hay and Co., 1869: pp. 60-61.

<sup>111</sup> The perception that the Brahmos were most likely to become Christians was evident also in the missionary responses. For example a report in the Imperial Magazine stated that a native of high birth (a Brahmin) had professed his faith of the Vedanta on his death-bed. To this the magazine responds: 'This anecdote shows that the light of immortal truth begins to shed its rays on the long-beighted children of India. Missionaries have assiduously laboured for more than twenty years in Bengal; and though the number of their actual converts have not been great, we have every reason to believe, that a rich harvest is near; and that the benefits of their infatigable and perservering labours, have already extended to many who have never openly sided with the Gospel; and given them more just ideas about the Creator.' 'The Confession of a Learned Native of Bengal at his Death Bed.' *The Imperial Magazine*. November 1820; p. 934. The most famous example being the misconception that Rammohun Roy persistently fostered that he had converted to Christianity.

<sup>112</sup> Ghosh, Babu Shyama Charan. *To Christianity Through Brahmoism*. Bansberia Hooghly, 1869.

<sup>113</sup> 'The Dialogue of the Times.' *The Bengal Magazine Volume IX*. June 1881: pp. 412-423; p. 413.

It is interesting that Ghose finally decides to align the minister of the Brahma Samaj with the likes of Muhammad, the religious other of the Hindus. Defiance is etched in terms of markers that challenge Hindu opinion only to find themselves as cultural others (representatives of Western modernity). Another satirical piece published in 1863 from Battala, famous for its cheap taste in literature, was suitably titled *Young Bengal, Kṣudra Nabāb*.<sup>114</sup> Like the earlier texts cited above it does not disappoint the readers' expectations. The Brahmoms and the Christians are spoken of in the same breath as 'departure' except for the fact that in this text they are not gullible fools but cunning fraudsters.

There is no love any longer, he bites my neck,  
I am the puppet that he gifts.  
He visits the temple without removing his footwear,  
He disregards anything to do with Hinduism.  
His deception has been exposed,  
He is but a Kartabhaja<sup>115</sup> Christian and a fraud Brahma!  
I have spoken much and do not have anything to say  
He is dressed like a babu,  
And he takes to the leftovers for culture.

The convert here is both morally and socially decrepit and has an affected Western taste akin to that of the well known degenerate figure of the Babu. Even as he revels in appropriating a derivative culture, the convert is unaware of the fact that he is drunk on the dregs of Western civilization. This equivalence settles the position of the convert in the moral and social universe of the day, the margins. But the converts' social demeanour is tantalizingly close to that of the Westernized intellectual which makes complete rejection both easy and difficult. While it may have been easy to paint all Western mannerisms in dark hues, it is difficult to salvage only the Hindu out of the same. To avoid such a faux pas, there is a moral narrative to the otherwise spiritual endeavour.

In another of the Battala pieces, the Bible is offered as textual shorthand for the narrator:

I abandoned my association with the Gosain and for a few days fiercely engaged myself with the Bible. God if you are the supreme maker, how come you introduced yourself as the father of a son? I am very upset by this action of yours. Mentally I had schemed that I would tail along with

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<sup>114</sup> 'Young Bengal [sic], Kṣudra Nabāb.' Kalikātā: Hindu Pres, 1863. Ed. Adrīs Biśvās. *Baṭṭalār bai, unīś sataker duṣprāpya kuṛiṭi bai*. Kalikātā: Gāñ-cil, 2011; p. 307.

<sup>115</sup> Kartabhajas were a deviant sect, founded in the eighteenth century, with Aulchand as the guru. For more information see, Urban, Hugh. *Economics of Ecstasy: Tantra Secrecy and Power in Colonial Bengal*. Oxford University Press: New York, 2001.

Jesus to finally embrace<sup>116</sup> you. [...] Let me know if you are really the father of Jesus else you are free to go wherever you have come from. (The supreme God is indicating with his hand that you are much more and beyond this) So who are you god? Not this, not that, who are you? Are you male or female? Are you part male and part female?<sup>117</sup>

Unaware of the frame of this new religious order the prospective convert is keen to learn the gender of God. Humour ensues from the fact that the unassuming prospective convert is in the dark as to the new moral universe of Christianity. Hence, the convert is not only devoid of moral fortitude but is blissfully unaware of the new religious order. He is portrayed as an ignorant soul and hence incapable of taking an informed decision, in opposition to the Protestant view of Christianity where the convert is spiritually awakened. Hence, the disruptive potential of his conversion is brought to question as the very foundational parameters of the understanding of the new religion are deemed as at best unstable.

The Christian convert as the symbol of the coming of *kaliyuga* or the end of the world is another recurrent theme. Narayan Chattaraj in 1853 decides on shifting the kingdom of *Kali* to Calcutta in his '*Kalikutūhal*'. The text is obsessed with idea of the degrading morals and religious conversions that take place due to monetary concerns. The author cleverly plays on the twin implications of the word *Kali*, as the end of time and as the mythic goddess Kali. Hindu dharma in this land of *Kali* is threatened by the European missionary.

Maya and Moha the aides of Kali have occupied Bharata,  
They now wonder what can destroy all men,  
For this reason the missionaries arrive.  
Now everybody is afloat on the boat,  
As they have the right.  
Sreerampore is the site of their preaching,  
And that's their abode.  
Marshman and Carey have begun their Dharma farming.  
In the fields and in the markets alike they sow the seeds of Jesus.<sup>118</sup>

Discernible by his new external markers, the 'Christian convert' is also the harbinger of doom. He belongs to the extreme other end of the religious spectrum. Most importantly his political position is doubtful as he sides with the outsider. In the popular *Kabi gān* or *Tarjā gān* of the day, 'conversion to Christianity' was a

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<sup>116</sup> Here the Bengali word is *kolākuli*, which is customary formal greeting of hugging and exchanging pleasantries.

<sup>117</sup> Datta, Śrī Parameśvar. *Hābā Cheler Bābār Kathā, Pratham Bhāg*. Ed. Adrīs Biśvās. *Baṭṭalār bai, unīś sataker duṣprāpya kuṛiṭi bai*. Kalikātā: Gān-cil, 2011; p. 401.

<sup>118</sup> Cattarāj, Nārāyaṇ. *Kalikutūhal*. Kalikātā, 1853 in Ed. Arṇab Sāhā. *Duṣprāpya Bāṅlā Sāhitya*. Saptarṣi: Kalikātā, 2010; p. 153.

popular theme. Recorded in the history of these competitive composition displays is the encounter between Bhola Maira and Antony Firingi. Antony is a poet par excellence and owing to his Portuguese lineage is not quite welcome in the community of the Kabiwalas. In the much publicized competition, Bhola Maira asks the clumsy ‘*tyās phiringi*’ (upstart foreigner) to abandon the fight and instead resume his prayers for Jesus Christ at the Sreerampore Church.<sup>119</sup> On another occasion Ram Basu suggests that ‘for nothing has the Saheb tonsured his head at the feet of Krishna, he would be humiliated now by the padris’.<sup>120</sup> Antony is believed to have married a Hindu widow and taken to worshipping the Hindu pantheon. In the common place understanding Europeans who were commonly called phiringis or foreigners appear as a homogenized proselytizing community with the missionaries as their representative.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, in popular literature the converts and conversions as ‘aberrants’ were relational others.

Although, many writers of the age established an inter-relationship between Western modernity and Christianity, it does not cover the entirety of popular opinion. Some people familiar with the Western system of education perceived Christianity as an attack on ‘freethinking’. Freethinking in colonial Calcutta was associated with the teachings of Thomas Paine (in extension the atheists) and the coming of the age of high rationalism. For example, *Anti-Christian*, a monthly Journal, published from the Oriental Press Calcutta beginning in the year 1882, proposed to ‘expose the absurdities of the Christian faith’. It was edited by Kaliprasanna Kabyabisharad who was a member of the National Secular Society, London. The Journal sought to propound ‘secular faith’ and identified Christianity with the ‘insatiable greed for temporal dominion’. In ‘The Address to the Nation’, published in its May 31<sup>st</sup> 1882 issue, the author equated British dominion over India with examples from Europe: ‘[t]hat in disregard to its ethical philosophy, Christianity, in its active development, has proved itself an engine of oppression and tyranny, is too well testified by history. Who holds Ireland and India in

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<sup>119</sup> Mitrā, Minati. *Bāṅlā Sāhitye Kṛṣṭiṅga Racanā*. Kalikātā: Pustak Bīpaṅī, 2004.

<sup>120</sup> Sen, Gopinath. ‘An English Kabiwala of Bengal.’ *Midwest Folklore*, 12. 1 (1962): pp. 27-30.

<sup>121</sup> Tapan Raychaudhuri points out, ‘The tradition of Hindu xenology has been described as one “of silence and evasion”. The mlechchha, the impure foreigner, was the object of “utter disregard and radical exclusion”, a “faint and distant phenomenon”, a negative and abstract “otherness” posing no concrete cultural or religious challenges.’ When the ‘distant’ phenomenon comes home there is an inevitable cultural relativism where the mlechchha although accepted in some quarters, still remains the civilizational ‘other.’ Raychaudhuri, Tapan. ‘Europe in India’s Xenology: The Nineteenth-Century Record.’ *Past & Present*, 137. 1, The Cultural and Political Construction of Europe (1992): pp. 156-182; 161.

thralldom vile, by the sheer force of might over right? Christianity inflamed with territorial cupidity. Who holds Gibraltar from its lawful possessors? Who has swallowed up Poland?<sup>122</sup> Christianity is equated with 'governance' not merely in the peripheral colonies in Africa or Asia but with countries in continental Europe. It is interesting to note that the author identifies himself as a 'secular' voice, clearly a concept that he has borrowed from the current politics of post-enlightenment rational Europe, but still wishes to equate the 'imperial' character of Britain with Christianity.<sup>123</sup> This dichotomy is symptomatic of the very character of the intertextual context of the nineteenth century. As Tejaswini Niranjana notes, 'even when the anglicised Indian spoke a language other than English, to gain access to his own past through the translations and histories circulating through colonial discourse'.<sup>124</sup> Therefore, the relation with the world at large is filtered through texts and trapped in histories that are always already translations. Other than the perceived Protestant vocabulary of the West that the Bengali intelligentsia had by and large internalized, the free thinkers had sought to identify with a new lexis. They add secular credentials to the largely polarized and complex religious frame of the nineteenth century.

We Must Think for Ourselves

(1.)

'What is the world? A wildering maze'  
Where foolishness in thousand ways,  
Her victims doth ensnare  
But truth is ready and at hand  
To succour the unhappy band  
And no one need despair.

(2.)

Millions of credulous simple men  
Misled by blind faith now and then  
Run their lives useless race,  
Fettered with foolish priestly chains  
What do they gain for all their pains?  
—Their human name's disgrace.

(3.)

Is there no guide to lead them on  
And save them from SUPERSTITION  
breaking chains link by link?  
Their guide is their own thoughtful mind,

<sup>122</sup> 'Address to the Nation.' *Anti-Christian*. May 31- 1882. Calcutta: Oriental Press, 1882; p. 107.

<sup>123</sup> Van der Veer, Peter. *Imperial Encounters, Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

<sup>124</sup> Niranjana, Tejaswini. 'Translation, Colonialism and the Rise of English.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25. 14 (1990): pp. 773-779; p. 778.

And pure TRUTH, they are sure to find  
For themselves if they think.<sup>125</sup>

So what does the 'Anti-Christian' do when he begs us to think for ourselves? Even when the reader is supposed to break chains and rally away from superstition he is not granted refuge in any religion. The poem provides for the focus to be shifted again to the individual and his ability to 'think'. This 'thinking' is interestingly enough mediated by a discourse that comes from the Europe:

The publication of the London *Freethinker* would surely be stopped, and Christian Bigots would write epitaphs, a specimen of which is published below. For I say unto you, a day cometh when the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light. In the same day Christianity would be believed by all people, the cause of freethought will be ruined for-ever, and beasts with innumerable heads and as many horns would reign over them.<sup>126</sup>

Whether one agrees or not with the views expressed above, it brings back the focus on contemporary discourses. The Christian convert in the assessment of the freethinker or the secularist is not a harbinger of progressive social change; he is still subject to blind faith. As quoted in the poem below, it is neither the conservative Hindu nor the Brahmos that kill the Freethinker.<sup>127</sup> It is in fact Christianity and its allies that murder the 'freethinker'.

A CALCUTTA PROPHET  
EPITAPH

who killed the *Freethinker*?<sup>128</sup>  
'I said Henry Tyler,  
'With the tongue of a reviler  
I killed the *Freethinker*'.

Who saw him die?

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<sup>125</sup> 'Secular Imitation of Christian Poets.' *Anti-Christian*. July 31, 1882; p. 154.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>127</sup> Rosinka Chaudhuri observes that the Freethinking movement or the push towards rationalism was first successfully introduced by Drummond and popularized by Derozio (although he never quite accepted the charges): 'Disavowing the charge that he advocated atheism, he had emphatically declared, a few sentences ahead of this, "To produce convictions was not within my power; and if I am to be condemned for the Atheism of some, let me receive credit for the *Theism* of others.'" Derozio is supposed to have inherited his scepticism from Drummond, described in most accounts as a 'free thinker' and 'rationalist', whose deductive powers are evident from his book, *Objections to Phrenology*. Derozio's own *Objections to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Kant* was praised by the then Principal of Bishop's College, Dr Mill, as displaying 'powers of reasoning and observation which would not disgrace even gifted philosophers.' Chaudhuri, Rosinka. 'The Politics of Naming: Derozio in Two Formative Moments of Literary and Political Discourse', Calcutta, 1825–31. " *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 44. 4 (2010): pp. 857-885; 865.

<sup>128</sup> J. Quack suggests that the term freethinker was used as a synonym for an atheist until the end of the nineteenth century. Quack, Johannes. 'Organised Atheism in India: An Overview.' *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 27: 1, (2012): pp. 67-85.

'T'said the Lord Mayor  
'Doubt not, be sure  
I saw him die'.

Who caught his blood?  
'T'said Talmage,  
'To do him homage  
I caught his blood'.

Who'll dig his grave?  
'T'said Christ Jesus,  
'may the father, bless us  
I'll dig his grave'.  
Who'll be the chief mourner?  
'T'said the *Christian Herald*  
'with James MacDonald  
I'll be the chief mourner'.  
Who'll make the shroud?  
'T'said Virgin Mary,  
'At his death I am sorry  
I'll make the shroud'.  
Who'll be the clerk?  
'T'said the London Bishop  
'As heresy is going to stop,  
I'll be the clerk'.

Who'll carry him to the grave?  
'T'said the Holy Ghost,  
'While he lived I hated him most  
I'll carry him to the grave'.

Who'll be the parson?  
'T'said the Devil,  
'I should be more civil  
I'll be the parson'.

Who'll carry the coffin  
'T'said Belzebub,  
'I hate the Christian mob  
I'll carry the coffin'.  
Who'll toll the bell  
Jahveh said 'I'  
'In peace let him die  
I'll toll the bell'.

The *Freethinker's* dead — a happy tale,  
Christian bigots toll his knell  
Hark how I hear them dindong bell!<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> 'A Calcutta Prophet, Epitaph.' *Anti-Christian*. Vol. I, No. 11; p. 262.

The freethinkers offer a new narrative frame where the Christian convert is no longer the only person to have been completely colonized. In fact they challenge the concept of the West as Christian.<sup>130</sup> In absence of the 'right' rational mind, the Christian 'bigots' usurp their place. Everything related to the Christian faith conspires against 'freethought'. Interestingly, it doesn't call for a jingoistic cultural self-assertion but looks to the West to find answers. Although it is not bound by the familiar compulsions of the colonial context, it still highlights the presence of a tightly bound inter-textual context where every departure is in relation with texts. Written at the last quarter of the nineteenth century it possibly signals a change in rather polarized religious rhetoric. It also simultaneously highlights the limits of the religious exchange where Christianity absorbs all the negative currents of a deeply divided colonial society. In this context identifying an internal other (in this case the freethinker) would involve syncopating other cognizable forms of religio-social deviance which in turn could deeply upset the stabilizing practices of the colonial intellectual elite.

Locating the Christian convert on a scale of aberration seems to have been a recurrent concern in nineteenth-century Bengal. There appears to be a neat ascendancy model in these formulations. The affected Hindu intellectual is superseded by the Brahmo and the supreme symbol of 'aberration' is the Christian convert. Hindu intelligentsia's promotion of representational excess as a purging mechanism works effectively by generating social exceptions. It is successful in relegating Christianity as the religious other by visualizing departure. On the one hand these surplus representations ensured the semblance of normativity and on the other hand indicated the importance of Christianity as a political discourse in India. Most importantly, systemic failures were used as instant ciphers for Christian conversions. Hence, unlike the romanticized versions of the spiritually or intellectually enlightened individual, the convert of the satires is stripped of his individuality. He is paraded as a prototype whose potentially endless repeatability ensures that the religio-social rhetoric of dissent even in its supreme rebellion is bound within certain stabilizing tropes.

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<sup>130</sup> Marsh, Joss Lutz. "Bibliolatry" and "Bible-Smashing": GW Foote, George Meredith, and the Heretic Trope of the Book. " *Victorian Studies*, 34. 3 (1991): pp. 315-336.

## Chapter Two

### *Writing for (An)other: Contexts of Life-writing of the Christian converts of Nineteenth-century Bengal*

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In the previous chapter we had suggested that the reaction against the Christian missionary onslaught in colonial Bengal produced a state of 'representational excess'. Surplus in the field of representations was often marked by the Christian convert being depicted as a deviant figure who tipped the scales in the favour of Western modernity. These representations were able to generate a prototype of the convert (heaped with negative attributes) which was then endlessly reproduced. Identifying aberrations, often self-referential, acted as stabilizing tropes that bound dissent within certain expectations of religiosity. This effacement of individuality corresponded with an overwhelming presence of biographies and autobiographies that the native Christian community in Bengal produced. This chapter explores the reactions that these constructions solicited in the form of biographies and autobiographies both by the Christian missionaries and the native Christian converts. Autobiography or biography as a genre relies on the role of the exceptional and its subsequent desire to endlessly reproduce itself. The Christian missionaries and the native converts to Christianity have both used the genre to their advantage to create their individual models of 'exceptions' as opposed to the 'aberration'. Biographies of converts by missionaries often doubled as hagiographies and formed part of the Christian missionary propaganda. Autobiographies of the converts in a departure from images produced by the Hindu conservative intelligentsia (as discussed in the preceding chapter) and the Christian missionaries generated their own norm of the 'exceptional'.

#### *Representing lives*

It is fragments of memory that form complex constructions and these are most evident in fiercely individualized genres such as the biography/autobiography. Always a retrospective construct, autobiographies or biographies could be best described as 'a moving target, a set of shifting self-referential practices that, in engaging the past, reflect on identity in the present'.<sup>1</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Sidone and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography, A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010 (2001). 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; p. 15.

this complex narrative of representations 'historical time' proves to be the constant against which the narrative is drawn. Life-writing carries embedded understanding of a historical time axis which might have contributed to it becoming the preferred mode of delineation of the individual in 'modernity'.

In terms of both theory and practice, autobiography or biography for that matter defies any definition; it seems to produce more exceptions than the norm. If we are to adhere to the normative model, autobiography is by and large a product of the Romantic Movement. But Europe has had a long history of what we broadly term as auto-biography or life-writing. Beginning with antiquity it had gained prominence with St Augustine's famous tract *Confessions* and has since found steady favour with a wide spectrum of people, from the church to the parliament. John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* written in the seventeenth century, which has been one of the most important texts of this genre, promised to bestow knowledge from experience 'to those whom God has counted' 'worthy to beget by faith, by his ministry in the world'.<sup>2</sup> But in terms of immediate historical covalence it is the popularity among the romantics that sealed its fate. Rousseau's *Confessions* which obviously plays on the earlier fourth century work by St Augustine is a forerunner in this regard. Its content and approach is, however, entirely different from the earlier autobiographies that we have thus far spoken about. It was one of the first distinguished autobiographies that did not seek believers, it rather outlined the philosophical tenets that governed his life. In the introduction to the first book, he makes his intention amply clear:

I have entered upon a performance which is without example, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I mean to present my fellow-mortals with a man in all the integrity of nature; and this man shall be myself.

I know my heart, and have studied mankind; I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence; if not better, I at least claim originality, and whether Nature did wisely in breaking the mould with which she formed me, can only be determined after having read this work.<sup>3</sup>

All thanks to the promises of the French revolution, the individual as the centre of the discourse and as prophetic figure looking into the future came into

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<sup>2</sup> Bunyan, John. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, New York: Penguin 2006 (1666); p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Rousseau, Jean Jacques. *The Confessions of Jean Jaques Rousseau*. Vol. I. London: Aldus Society, 1903 (1782); p. 7.

prominence. Enlightenment facilitated the construction of an inner-reflexive self which gave credibility to the idea of a 'private self'.

Although Romantics in more ways than one, reinforced the importance of the individual, traces of individuality were always part of the Western intellectual history. Modernity married the need for individuation and creation of the 'exceptional'. Read in this context, the genres that pertained to the individual came to be particularly significant because as Karl Joachim Weintraub points out it introduced the possibility of sketching a model that could be emulated:

An ideal form of being beckons men and women to model their lives upon it. There existed, and continue to exist, many such model conceptions of the personality in our tradition: the ideal of the Homeric Hero, the Germanic hero, the truly 'polis-minded' man, the Roman *pater familias*, of the unshakable Stoic, the ideal monk, the ideal knight, the ideal gentleman, the ideal teacher, and so on [...] The more the mind's eye is fascinated by the ideal model before it, the more a man will strive to attain it, and less he will ask about the fit between the model and his own specific reality. He is unlikely to suffer from a sense of 'falsifying himself' by fitting into the norms demanded by his model, to feel 'hemmed in' if the ideal expresses the values of the society, or to lament the lost opportunities of his precious individuality.<sup>4</sup>

As printing technologies and the increase in literacy made print inescapable in the public realm, autobiographies and biographies as individual replicable models came to be particularly popular. Life-writing, as individual examples of the extraordinary, generated the desire to be endlessly reproduced. The cognitive relationship that autobiography or biographies set to establish with the mass ignited the possibility of generating new normativities. This aspect seems to have been particularly important for the Indians in the nineteenth century as the autobiographies and biographies not only explored the links between the public and the private but were consciously contributing to the 'experience of historical change'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Weintraub, Karl Joachim. *The Value of the Individual, Self and Circumstance in Autobiography*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978: pp. xv- xvi.

<sup>5</sup> Udaya Kumar is of the opinion that the disavowal of the private in most autobiographies in India is linked to the desire of the Indians to belong both in the realm of the historical and the personal. 'Using the life of the author at times as a mere pretext, they sought to provide their readers with a "slice of history". Truth claims made in these narratives were simultaneously historical and personal: the veracity of the account of the past was grounded in a testamentary claim made by the narrating voice. Even as they made statements of an intimate nature about the personal life of the author or of other individuals, they were also intervening in ongoing processes that shaped a collective memory. The autobiographer in these texts is simultaneously, the author of an individuated act of truth-telling and the subject of a shared historical memory.' Kumar, Udaya. 'Autobiography as a Way of Writing

In the Indian context, as David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn pithily remark, autobiography has been a fairly new concept.<sup>6</sup> At the risk of making a sweeping generalization, one might still suggest that the premium given on individuality is a fairly fresh concept and a product of the Western intellectual impact in India (in particular Romanticism).<sup>7</sup> Life-writing came to be particularly popular in the nineteenth century as the British colonial power established their stronghold in India. The overwhelming presence of colonial authority imposed novel notions of the individuality, best represented by new legal and education systems. The colonial subject was willy-nilly party to the larger project of modernity where he had to negotiate new cognitive traditions. Among other things, modernity in the colonized world created the need for an autonomous subject and autobiography/biography seemed to be the most natural choice.<sup>8</sup> Treating a monolithic West versus East debate, problematic as it may sound, may be useful in pointing towards an overarching trend rather than particular exceptions. Preceding these claims to the 'sense of selfhood', 'personal identity and agency' were muted<sup>9</sup> whereas castes, religious communities and kinship networks played a larger social role.<sup>10</sup>

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History, Personal Narratives from Kerala and the Inhabitation of Modernity.' Eds. Raziuddin Aquil and Partha Chatterjee. *History in the Vernacular*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2008: pp. 418-448, 421.

<sup>6</sup> Arnold, David and Stuart Blackburn. 'Introduction.' Eds. David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn. *Telling Lives in India, Biography, Autobiography and Life-History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004: pp. 1-28.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, the particularities of the influence of Romantic literature in India. Aravamudan, Srinivas. 'The Colonial Logic of Late Romanticism.' *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102. 1 (2003): pp. 179-214.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Holden observes that '[w]hile it would be easy to read these texts as reveling in the hybridity or the performative subjectivity of a colonial world already globalized, they frequently attempt to construct "pure", stable, autonomous, modern subjects who have agency to claim autochthonous modernity.' Holden, Philip. *Autobiography and Decolonization: Modernity, Masculinity and the Nation State*. Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison Press, 2008; p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Waghorne points to the fact that individual identities were traditionally compromised in India: 'This is the core of the embarrassment over autobiography within India, which scholars in the study of religion and personality have ignored: the classical Hindu tradition teaches the slow elimination of the ego—the very base of personality for modern theory of individual development. Hence, the very purpose of autobiography is seemingly denied: the presentation of one's self as an individual entity, as a reality, to society at large.' Waghorne, Joanne Punzo. 'The Case of the Missing Autobiography.' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 49. 4 (1981): pp. 589-603; p. 590.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, Philip Holden has argued that emancipation of the community (in this case the nation) was part of the individual's prerogative in what he calls 'nationalist autobiographies' of the twentieth century. He further states that Jawaharlal Nehru's autobiography builds on the genre of autobiography in the nineteenth century to generate a replicable model of nationalist autobiography. 'These national autobiographies constitute a dense intertextual network: many of their subjects corresponded with each other, or read and reworked the writings of a preceding generation. They map the disciplinary action of the nationalist movement on the chaos of the nation onto the protagonist's disciplining of a male body. And these parallel disciplinary actions are further mirrored at the level of narrative strategy. A retrospective narrator shapes the events of the protagonist's life into a narrative of growth towards emancipation, just as nationalism itself is a narrative which remakes the past, populating it with national epics, national consciousness, national heroes before the nation is even thought of.'

Several forms of articulations of life-writing were fairly common in India since antiquity, and hagiographies the most recurrent among them. There existed *caritas* which were biographies and part of the mythological narratives which were constantly improvised. But life-writing as a conscious and fairly common practice by Western educated Indians is a reasonably modern phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> As to the absence of life-writing or autobiographies, it has been stated that several communal identities were thought to be more important than individual ones, of which caste was a primary indicator.<sup>12</sup> While one understands the limits of these binary divisions between the 'individual' West versus the 'communal' East, it comes handy while analysing the scope of the genre of autobiography in India and especially Bengal. The guru of English literary education in nineteenth century Calcutta, Professor Richardson of the Hindu College had expounded the problem as early as 1830. 'Literature in British India is to Europeans an exotic.' Consequently, it 'wants nearly all the conditions which make it thrive in the West. It is not surprising, therefore, that it should rear its head but languidly, and that it should but partially and imperfectly flourish'.<sup>13</sup>

Sudipta Kaviraj is of the opinion that the nineteenth century brought with itself three distinct and new genres: the novel, the modern lyric and the autobiography. The latter one is a result of the construction of a 'private' life which is one of the primary objectives of Western modernity. It also suited the literary marketplace of the day, fiction also comprised of realistic novels. It meant that 'the central characters in these must be socially credible and act like ordinary individuals in society, which means that interior reflections and commentaries can apply to actual social life'.<sup>14</sup> The argument can be extended to the genre of autobiography. This literary context, capitalizes on the desirability of the 'real' and promotes it to another level where the desired is also the 'possible'. While it can be debated whether India had in the Western sense of the term, a legacy of life-writing, it is

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Holden, Philip. 'Other Modernities: National Autobiographies and Globalization.' *Biography*, 28. 1 (2005): pp. 89-103; 89.

<sup>11</sup> Tanika Sarkar, for example, highlights that in the absence of a clear precedence, the first female autobiography in India borrowed heavily from other individuated spiritual traditions. Sarkar, Tanika. 'A Book of Her Own. A Life of Her Own: Autobiography of a Nineteenth-Century Woman.' *History Workshop*, 36. 1, Colonial and Post-Colonial History (1993): pp. 35-65; 41.

<sup>12</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*; Princeton University Press, 2001. Dumont, Louis. *Homo Hierarchicus: the Caste System and its Implications*. University of Chicago Press, 1981.

<sup>13</sup> 'The Literati of British India.' *The Bengal Annual, A literary Keepsake*. Ed. David Lester Richardson. Calcutta, Samuel Smith and Co. Hare Street, 1830; p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Kaviraj, *Telling Lives*; p. 84.

beyond doubt that the nineteenth century life-writings (which include both biography, memoirs and autobiography) were influenced by Western narrative genres. Most of them insisted on the historical authenticity of the narrative with a premium on evidences such as dates and signatures, etc., playing to the tune of life-writing as authentic and realistic testimony. This is where it also made a significant difference, 'that biography began to insist on a difference with history, for although history might have allegorical force it could never record and describe the modern age directly. The huge popularity of lives of the recently dead, or even of the still living, suggests that they were read in part as a mirror to the modern'.<sup>15</sup> It differed from history, in that it was not the lives of chronologically distant and important figures, but it spoke in the language of the day.

But as it travelled to Bengal from the European shores, it eventually became a trans-cultural narrative. After Franz Fanon and Homi Bhabha, this phenomenon of appropriating genres can easily be read in terms of post-structuralist understandings of mimicry, but for the sake of the current argument we shall restrict ourselves to the understanding of individual markers of representation.<sup>16</sup>

### *Why write a life-story in nineteenth-century Bengal?*

The socio-political representations of the period, as discussed in the earlier sections, suggest that nineteenth-century Bengal has been seen as a period of luminaries. It has been variously named as the golden period of Bengal or most famously as the 'Bengal Renaissance'. One might admit that this retrospective imagination was a result of the focus that was given to certain towering individuals who stood out in a period of utmost socio-political upheaval. This age produced its own heroes, who were both worshipped and despised. Most of this took place in the public glare, all thanks to a number of ever mushrooming journals and newspapers and public meetings. Societies were formed which discussed and debated the politics of the day and therefore the public sphere itself fashioned its own iconic figures. The nineteenth century interestingly also produced a lot of literature about itself. There were commentators on society, politics and state of affairs of the day like never before. Much like the Romantic movement in Europe, which influenced

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<sup>15</sup> Tillyard, Stella. 'Biography and Modernity: Some Thoughts on Origins.' Eds. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker. *Writing Lives: Biography, Textuality, Identity and Representation in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008: pp. 29-34, 32.

<sup>16</sup> Autobiographies in Bengal, like most other genres, can be read in terms of mimicry as resistance to the colonial forms. See for example, Bhabha, Homi. *Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

most prominent writers of the day, they theorized upon their age. Essays, treatises and public lectures were commonplace.

It was indeed a very self-conscious age, and beginning with Ram Mohan Roy in the early nineteenth century, the Bengali intelligentsia was aware of their role in the changing history.<sup>17</sup> This consciousness perhaps necessitated documentation and an intense engagement in self-analysis. Life-writing whether in the form of biographies and auto-biographies set the tone for this self-consciousness. Brian Hatcher has adumbrated that the curriculum in nineteenth-century Bengal encouraged such exemplary formulations. Vidysagar's *Jiban'carit* (1849) and *Caritābali* (1856) being cases in point.<sup>18</sup>

Autobiographies are always already retrospective. It is constantly looking to shape and reshape the past according to what lies in the present. This fluidity in conceptualization of both the past and the present, which were two important categories of the age, gave life-writing the edge over the others. As Kaviraj pointed out, it seemed to have emerged as a veritable literary form in the market.<sup>19</sup> Swapna M. Banerjee adds that the explosion of autobiographical writing in the nineteenth century was a bhadralok/bhadramahila preserve.<sup>20</sup> It is debatable however whether all forms of self conscious life writing emerged only in the nineteenth century influenced by European traditions as Sudipta Kaviraj would like us to believe. In uncovering methodological parameters regarding the framing of genres in the Indian literary tradition, Ipsita Chanda quite convincingly argues that life-writing in

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<sup>17</sup> A. R. Venkatachalapathy claims, autobiography could be read as the newly formed middle class's articulation of history. Venkatachalapathy, A. R. 'Excising the Self.' in A. R. Venkatachalapathy. *In those Days there was No Coffee, Writings in Cultural History*. New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006, pp. 163-184; 172.

<sup>18</sup> 'How lessons were taken to heart by the students of colonial Calcutta can be judged by a review of their recorded essays as well as by consideration of the new genre of Bengali school books which appeared after 1840. Consider, for instance, the influential primers of Isvarcandra Vidyasagar, such as *Jivancarit* (1849) and *Caritavali* (1856), which served up "exemplary and instructive biography". With such models firmly in place, it is hardly surprising that from the second quarter of the nineteenth century anyone chronicling the course of cultural change in Bengal did so by concentrating on the work of exemplary individuals like Rammohun.' Hatcher, Brian A. 'Great Men Waking: Paradigms in the Historiography of the Bengal Renaissance.' Ed. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay. *Bengal: Rethinking History, Essays in Historiography*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2001: pp. 135-166; p. 138-39.

<sup>19</sup> David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn in the anthology on life-writing in India of which Sudipta Kaviraj's essay figures, is of the opinion that although traces of life-writing in the form of *caritas*, etc. existed in India it was only in the nineteenth century that we find the autobiography/biography as we understand it today. Kaviraj, Sudipta. 'The Invention of a Private Life: A Reading of Sibnath Shastri's *Autobiography*.' Eds. David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn. *Telling lives in India: Biography, Autobiography and Life History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009, pp. 83-115.

<sup>19</sup> Weintraub, Karl Joachim. *The Value of the Individual, Self and Circumstance in Autobiography*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978: pp. xv- xvi.

<sup>20</sup> Banerjee, Swapna M. 'Down Memory Lane: Representations of Domestic Workers in Middle Class Personal Narratives of Colonial Bengal.' *Journal of Social History* 37. 3 (2004): pp. 681-708.

various forms (most prominently in the *carita*) as a genre was a continuous tradition.<sup>21</sup> However, it can be argued that the particular self-conscious constructionist narrative as autobiography might have taken concrete shape in the height of the Bengal Renaissance.

Highlighting individuality came with its own ideas of the how and why to emulate. Purnima Bose reads the middle-class insistence on individuality as an attempt to make heroes in the age of extreme oppression which denied a voice to the collectivist/subaltern models of systemic resistance.<sup>22</sup> Most biographies that were written in nineteenth-century Bengal not only came with its tag of the 'real' but also created aspirational models. They were of the great men of the age or men who were perceived as distinct from the ordinary. The most common among them were perhaps the autobiographies written by 'liberated women'.<sup>23</sup> The life-writing genre allowed one of the most marginal of voices, of an erstwhile prostitute turned into a theatre actress, Binodini Dasi, to recount her life a little later in 1912. Therefore, this form with its wide spectrum allowed the most marginal to share space with the most normative. This covalence perhaps encouraged many liminal voices to partake in this form which transformed the 'marginal' into the 'exceptional'. Promptly writing about oneself had come into fashion.

If autobiography or biography were to have three distinct forms of the historical, philosophical and poetical, of which the latter is the marker of modernity, the conceptualization of the self would then depend largely on verbal action.<sup>24</sup> The 'poetic' agency creates its own problems and also provides unique solutions. With life-writing, there was suddenly an absence of authorial mediation. The author in a speech act creates himself as a subject in the text. While the absence of 'mediation' offers the scope of misreading where the author is equated continuously with the 'subject' in the text, in a Lacanian sense, it was as if the author was in conversation

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<sup>21</sup> Chanda, Ipshita. *Tracing the Charit as a Genre*. Kolkata: Department of Comparative Literature Jadavpur University, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Bose, Purnima. *Organizing Empire: Individualism, Collective Agency, and India*. NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Raychaudhuri, Tapan and Geraldine Forbes. *The Memoirs of Haimavati Sen: From Child Widow to Lady Doctor*. Roli Books, 2000. As noted by Sarbashi Ghosh; 'women as marginal members of the society make examples of their psychological tensions and uncertainties in the face of social resistance in their autobiographies beginning with the first autobiography by a Bengali woman Rassundari Devi's *Amar Jibon*, published in 1876.' Ghosh, Sarbashi. "'Birds in a Cage": Changes in Bengali Social Life as Recorded in Autobiographies by Women.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21. 43 (1986): pp. WS88-WS96.

<sup>24</sup> Spengemann, William C. *The Forms of Autobiography, Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980.

with his 'mirror self'.<sup>25</sup> Hence, there emerges a possibility of a 'cognitive' self which stands the test of 'credibility'. This allows a unique inter-subjective interface between the authorial agency, his *different* represented 'self' and the 'reading subject'.<sup>26</sup> The identification and the misidentification therefore make the author as much an exclusive authority as a participatory prototype. Even as the author maintains his agency, the symbolic ramifications of the text transcend the real personage.

The autobiography as a form had clear advantages in an environment which was changing everyday. Unlike other literary forms, autobiography offered the unique illusion of independently producing 'oneself'. As Nietzsche had remarked, '[t]he "subject" is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what is there'.<sup>27</sup> The 'subject' or the author here had the unique opportunity of fashioning oneself within the acceptable domain of the 'real'. This understanding does not assume that the represented 'self' and I as the author are one or that they are in a consistent relationship with one another. Rather as Gasché would like to put it, the author enters through the 'doors' into the 'text' which are 'revolving' so that the tropes are constantly in motion.<sup>28</sup> The literary self-analysis is therefore placed between 'cognition' of the self and 'representation'.<sup>29</sup> Hence it is the 'I' which is 'both the addressee and the subject-object of a performative telling'. Paul De Man insists that '[a]utobiography then, is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution. The structure implies differentiation as well as similarity, since both depend on a substitutive exchange that constitutes the subject'.<sup>30</sup> Inherently the theories point towards an understanding of life-writing as a mode that has stakes in the constitution of the 'modern subject'. All forms of opinion

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<sup>25</sup> Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977.

<sup>26</sup> Chambers, Ross. 'Text as Trading Place: Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother*.' Eds. Leigh Dale and Helen Gilbert. *Economies of Representation 1700-2000*. Ashgate e-book, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Colingdale, Ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1968; p. 267.

<sup>28</sup> Gasché, Rodolphe. 'Self Engendering as a Verbal Body.' *Modern Language Notes*, 93. 4 (May 1978): pp. 677-694; p. 684.

<sup>29</sup> Jay, Paul L. 'Being in the Text: Autobiography and the Problem of the Subject.' *Modern Language Notes. Comparative Literature*. Vol. 5 (1982): pp. 1045-1063; p. 1047.

<sup>30</sup> De Man, Paul. 'Autobiography as De-facement.' *Modern Language Notes. Comparative Literature*. 94. 5 (1979): pp. 919-930; p. 921.

about what concerned 'modernity' were played out in the mode of the life-writing. One of the most prominent of this group was the native Christian community, who wrote about their lives, which were published as pamphlets or in the form of books throughout the nineteenth century. They were often part of the propaganda machinery of various Church denominations and served as examples of ideal behaviour which were to be emulated.

We have observed in the earlier chapter how conversion to Christianity in nineteenth-century Bengal was seen as a departure and often indulgently viewed as the project of becoming the Western modern gone awfully wrong. This narrative rested on a covenant between the reader and the authors of conceptualizing conversion as a rupture in a belief system. Becoming Christian on a scale of aberration was not only the highest point but also a moment of great significance, where one travelled from the religion of one's birth into an alien faith, never to look back.<sup>31</sup> In a traditional Hindu society 'conversion' was tantamount to pollution and on becoming a Christian one was immediately ostracized. As a response to a 'representational excess' and the umpteen number of satires that flooded the market about the excesses of 'conversion', it is likely that such a diabolic reaction would invite a response that highlighted the moment of 'crossing over' as the high point of this spiritual journey. Interestingly enough, almost none of the narratives that boast of writing the life that was changed due to the advent of Christianity speaks of that moment of conversion at all.

If we look for responses to the 'representational excess' that defined the native Christian community in the literary marketplace of the day, we find a resounding silence. The life-writing about them by the missionaries, who flout them as trophies, often stress on the moment of crossing over, but this instance is curiously absent in the writings by the converts themselves. Both in discourses on conversion in the twentieth to twenty-first century and those of the nineteenth century the act of conversion or the 'crossing over' is of supreme importance. It is fuelled by the understanding that it is not merely an emotional and personal issue but a larger politically charged act. The effect in nineteenth-century Bengal was

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<sup>31</sup> This is the moment that Robert Fox Young identifies a metanoia and separates the Christian from the Hindu. To quote him: 'Christian *jijnasa* must be accompanied by a change of heart and not only of mind, which is to say, in a more congenial idiom of our own, that the proper predisposition of a Christian for the task at hand is that of metanoia, a turning from the false and the unreal toward the true and the real.' Fox Young, Robert. 'Seeking India's Christ-bearing Word.' *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 19. 3 (2002): pp. 19-29, 20.

heightened by the fact that it was a time of political hyper-activity. Views and counter-views with a number of journals suddenly partaking in the public sphere ensured that there was re-ordering of community boundaries. New imaginings of community meant new political spaces.<sup>32</sup> And new found political spaces debated and assessed their boundaries in the public sphere.<sup>33</sup>

In keeping with these perceptions, 'conversion' in general placed a premium on the very act of crossing over.<sup>34</sup> This 'crossing over' was so important that several Christian denominations fought over the translation of the word 'baptism'. Carey first translated it as 'ḍobā' or immersion bearing reference to the Hindu ritualistic practices. This did not go too well with the other missionaries, who until the second half of the century continued squabbling over the 'right' translation of the Bible.<sup>35</sup> Agreed that the converts portrayed themselves as examples, it is difficult to contend with this gnawing silence. Possibly it functioned at two levels; one that conversion entailed a spiritual ascendancy or maturity and not a break, and the second being that the convert was often weary about the looming presence of a European/American authoritarian Church. Given that the converts insisted on marking their journey to a higher realm via an informed understanding of the new dispensation, conversion as enlightenment is a recurrent theme.

Most of the Western educated Christian converts that are discussed in the course of this dissertation were influenced by the Brahmo faith and later took to Christianity. This shift was explained as the logical conclusion to a spiritual search. An apt example is the lecture delivered to 'Educated Native Young Men' by Krishna Mohan Banerjea, where he alleges that the concept of the Vedanta by Raja Ram Mohan Roy is in essence 'borrowed from English or rather Christian works—and

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<sup>32</sup> Dilip Menon argues that it was in fact religious spaces which were fashioning new collectivities as 'Individuality was located in a traditional "private" sphere within which colonialism feared to tread.' Menon, Dilip. 'Religion and Colonial Modernity: Rethinking Belief and Identity.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37. 17 (2002): pp. 1662-1667.

<sup>33</sup> Here I would not like to discuss the public sphere in terms of the ideal public sphere model of Habermas but rather stick to twin tenets proposed by Francesca Orsini (in the context of nineteenth century Hindi as: a) normative attitude that interprets public in terms of jati or community. By normative I mean an understanding of the public and of public institutions, as spaces where one set of values is circulated that should constitute the norm for all; b) a critical attitude that views and uses the public as a space where norms and consensus are questioned in the name of reason or of particular interests and subjects.'; p. 409. Orsini, Francesca. 'What Did They Mean by "Public"? Language, Literature and the Politics of Nationalism.' *Economic and Political Weekly*. 34. 7 (1999): pp. 409-416. We shall continue with the discussion in the chapter on Krishna Mohan Banerjea.

<sup>34</sup> Schreuder, Deryck, and Geoffrey Oddie. 'What is "Conversion"? History, Christianity and Religious Change in Colonial Africa and South Asia.' *Journal of Religious History*, 15. 4 (1989): pp. 496-518.

<sup>35</sup> Brekke, Torkel. 'Baptism and the Bible in Bengal.' *History of Religions*, 45. 3 (2006): pp. 213-233.

recast the system of the Vedas in a foreign mould'.<sup>36</sup> He clarifies that Neo-Vedantism is an insufficient measure and has to yield to a more logical Christianity and it is upon the educated men of Bengal to choose the mature and logically sound religion.

Even as they recognized the superiority of the Christian faith, the Christian neophytes were unable to accept the colonial administration. As fierce nationalists they spoke against the discrimination in terms of pay and privileges of the native missionaries, the most famous examples being those of Lal Behari Day and Krishna Mohan Banerjea. A hymn book written in Bengali carried a preface written in English, evidently targeting a larger audience, possibly inclusive of the colonial ruling elite. The preface, clearly outlines that the native Christian community should vouch for its own identity as independent of the Western missionaries:

Though a grateful thanks are due to these gentlemen, specially to Rev. George Pearce of the Baptist Mission, yet it must be acknowledged, that the hymns so published, however useful in the first stage of the Native Christian community, are behind the mark and an anachronism now. Their poetry and music are poor. Again the *Raginees* and the *Tals* of the Indian airs, are not only of an inferior order but are never mentioned. [...] [W]hen our European friends, with their refined ears; hear us sing in the manner, they cannot help laughing at us, and the cause of Indian music suffers.<sup>37</sup>

In this regard the complete appropriation of the missionary narrative by the 'educated' and informed native becomes equally problematic. In the next section, we examine three kinds of texts to unravel these narrative complexities. The first three narratives are representatives of the white missionary attempts to write biographies of the native converts; second are two examples of the white missionaries trying to emulate the subject position of the native convert and write his/her autobiography. The native converts' response, the third kind, is set against both these positions and was in conversation with the larger Hindu conservative intelligentsia that routinely portrayed the convert as the aberration.

### *Conversion and the role of the exceptional*

Of the first kind was one of the earliest biographies about the Christian converts in Bengal, a memoir of Krishna Pal, the first significant successful convert

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<sup>36</sup> Banerjea, Krishna Mohan. 'Lecture 4: On Vedantism.' *Lectures to Educated Native Young Men*, Calcutta: WC s Eddington, 1850; p. 25.

<sup>37</sup> Byānārjī, Rebhāreṇḍ Si. En. *Khrīṣṭasaṅgīt*. Kalikātā: Sāptāhik Saṃbād Pres, 1870.

by the Danish missionaries in Sreerampore, written in 1822.<sup>38</sup> William Ward faithfully reproduces a letter written by Pal to Mr W. Skinner, who had supported Krishna Pal for a few years. Pal in this letter constructs a set of 'miraculous' events that prompted him to turn to Christ.

I was a disciple or worshipper of brahmuns and the goroo (the spiritual guide); and when the latter visited me, with the idea of obtaining his favour, I washed his feet, and took the water and sprinkled my breast and head therewith; this would relieve me from my daily worship, as 'there is no occasion for worship, when the presence of the goroo can be enjoyed'. While thus I spent my time, I was taken severely ill, when a person from Ghospara came, and told me, that if I would become the follower of the true goroo, I should then get over this affliction. I consented to this: he then taught me the first initiatory incantation, 'o Kurta, the moon, the Great Lord, I walk and speak at thy pleasure, thou art with me, and I am fed with whatever thou feedest me'. Sometime after I had received these incantations, the Lord restored me to health, and I became a goroo myself, teaching many others this incantation and making them my disciples.<sup>39</sup>

He rejects his former system to find it 'considered that no shastra made an end of sin'. He painfully recounts how the people of Ghoshpara, his native village turned against him once he had taken to the religion of the foreigners and ostracized him. His narrative of movement from a false religion without hope to the true religion is the repetitive theme in most first generation convert narratives. A particularly telling aspect of this narrative is creating an aura of the miraculous which is beyond the domain of the 'real'.<sup>40</sup> The experience of the 'miraculous' is what sets Krishna Pal apart from a host of other people destined to convert.<sup>41</sup> Assigning the role of the God's chosen people (alluding to Moses) legitimizes the act of writing the memoir of a common carpenter convert to Christianity. In a carefully

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<sup>38</sup> The first text is possibly by Dom Antonio in the sixteenth century, cf. Part I Chapter 1.

<sup>39</sup> Ward, William. *Brief Memoir of Krishna Pal, the First Hindoo in Bengal Who Broke the Chain of the Cast by Embracing the Gospel, By the late Rev. Ward*. Serampore: Mission Press, 1822; p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Krishna Pal's conversion found takers among American missionaries as well. The miraculous healing of Pal's arm is again central to the narrative. *The First Hindoo Convert, A Memoir of Krishna Pal*; Philadelphia: American Baptist Missionary Society, 1852; p. 16. It is interesting to note that Pal continued to publish several articles on his missionary activities after conversion but never sought to write an autobiography.

<sup>41</sup> Although Marshman shared the enthusiasm of their first conversion with Ward and Carey, he more cautiously reports the condition of one Mr Thomas who went mad with joy at the news of conversion: 'Mr. Thomas, who was present at the occasion, was mad with joy. It was seventeen years since he had commenced his labours among the heathen, and the fruition of his hopes, after so many disappointments, destroyed the balance of his mind, and he began to exhibit symptoms of insanity. Within three days he became so violent, as to render it necessary to place him under restraint.' Interestingly, in Marshman's account the spiritual conversion of the heathen is concomitant to the insanity of the European missionary and the context of restraint and excess is virtually reversed in this account. Marshman, Joshua. *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward, Volume I*. London: Longman, Brown, Green & Roberts, 1859; p. 138.

constructed Christian narrative, an ordinary man is propelled into icon when miracles cross his path. Ward's Krishna Pal is the ideal first convert and carrying the implication of being the 'chosen one'. This idealized version has been questioned by a number of other accounts where Krishna Pal is depicted as a hapless drunkard.<sup>42</sup> This is in continuum with other missionary narratives which depict the native convert often as biblical heroes or chosen ones in the subcontinent.<sup>43</sup>

Mrs Mullens, our second example for this kind of missionary narrative, in her now famous Bengali narrative, written in the form of an autobiography and published in 1852, *Phul'maṇi O Karuṇā*<sup>44</sup> relates the tale of a native Christian woman Karuna.<sup>45</sup> She is the model Christian woman, full of all the virtues that a Victorian woman can desire. In the opening scene we find our narrator, the devout Christian wife of the local magistrate, on a visit to native Christian home. She is struck by the neatness and order of the homestead and greatly appreciates the housekeeping skills of the lady of the house. Karuna in the later part of the encounter mouths the narrative that is desired of a 'modern Christian' woman. She supports the education of women, takes to sending her own daughter to the city to earn and most importantly gives to 'reason'.<sup>46</sup> It almost reads like a conduct book when the narrator insists that a good Christian mother can only properly take care of her children, when she abandons the false stories of the ghosts and demons and turns to the true knowledge about ethics which one can derive from Christian narratives.

There are several interludes in the course of the text and one of them talks about an old woman's predicament after she becomes a Christian and faces her relatives. She is ostracized by her family, but as a motivated and devout Christian she rejoices her union with the Christian God even as she is burdened with the

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<sup>42</sup> See for example, Biśi, Pramathanāth. *Keri Sāheber Munsī*. Kalikātā: Mitra āyāṅḍ Ghoṣ, 1973.

<sup>43</sup> While a lot of missionary euphoria accompanied the few conversions that Bengal witnessed there have been scathing criticisms of the same. Contrary to tall claims by the missionaries that the Indian converts were upright and had converted for spiritual reasons the report on the native converts in Bengal states; 'The first of these facts we shall notice, is the presentation of a petition to the late Bishop Middleton by seven native converts, complaining that the promises held out to them, by which they had been induced to forsake their former religion, were not realized. The supposition that any such promises were ever given by the missionaries, we of course put altogether out of question, knowing as we do that it is utterly unfounded; but the allegation of such promises by converts sufficiently indicates that in changing their religion they contemplated a quid pro quo.' 'Character of Native Converts.' *The Oriental Herald and Journal of General Literature*. Sept. 1827: pp. 555-559; 556.

<sup>44</sup> Mrs Mullens. *Phul'maṇi O Karuṇā*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1900 (1852).

<sup>45</sup> In 1853, it was published with an English translation *The History of Phulmoni and Karuna*.

<sup>46</sup> Taking on from where Pramatha Chudhuri had left, Meenakshi Mukherjee claims that Mrs Mullens seals the relationship between evolution of modern prose in India and the rational discourse. Mukherjee, Meenakshi. 'Mrs Mullens and Mrs Collins: Christianity's Gift to Indian Fiction.' *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 16. 65 (1981): pp. 65-75.

separation from her family. This narrative continues in the same vein and idealizes the life of ordinary Bengali Christians somewhere in a village in southern Bengal. This missionary narrative is interesting, as it deals with the after-life of 'conversion' and simultaneously highlights the possibility of finding a replica of Victorian ideals in humble Indian households. The narrator here is looking for elements of Victorian piety as the standard for measuring the native Christian households. Even as she describes several other characters in the villages she makes a pyramidal model of the village based on the expectations that she has of an 'ideal' household. Karuna with her near perfect appropriations of missionary teachings appears on the top of the pyramid while several others, who rarely care for the padre or the Christian God and only pay lip service as Christians occupy the base and receive severe disdain from our narrator.

While both these missionary narratives from Bengal create an aspirational model of an 'ideal' native Christian man/woman they concomitantly generate a normative ideal of a life narrative.<sup>47</sup> Ward's text promises to be a 'real' biography while Mrs Mullens' text is an observatory piece that contains the biographical elements of several native converts. One speaks about the life of a convert and the second concentrates on the after-life of conversion. Both the narratives, one written in English and the other in Bengali, albeit targeting different audiences, speak in the same language. They seek to create an example out of an 'aberration'(as perceived by the Hindu majority of the day). Even as these narratives celebrate the departure for normative indigenous religious practices, they create an 'expectational' transcultural model for the ideal.<sup>48</sup> To avoid a direct collision of systemic imperatives (in the manner of social behaviour) a complete overhaul of practices is bartered for an ideal based on contemporary notions of Victorian piety.

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<sup>47</sup> Eleanor Jackson observes that the missionaries in and around Bengal were very conscious of the converts that they chose because they hoped that these early converts would turn preachers. Hence they were very few 'rice Christians' in Bengal as compared to other parts of the country and there were no untouchable preachers. The prized converts were invariably the upper-castes. Jackson, Eleanor. 'From Krishna Pal to Lal Behari Day: Indian Builders of the Church in Bengal, 1800-1894.' Eds Dana Lee Robert. *Converting Colonialism: Visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706-1914*. Michigan: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 2008: pp. 166-205.

<sup>48</sup> Following the commentary booklets, Sugirtharajah observes that the missionaries construed the image of the ideal convert in contradistinction to the Hindus. 'They spoke relentlessly about the moral improvement of the Indian people. But they had an additional agenda—to build a cadre of Indian Christians who would set an example to their morally suspect and confused Hindu neighbours. Here is a typical passage from Weitbrech Stanton: '[t]he ideal Christian life is not like the Hindu, supposed to consist of four Ashrams or stages (religious student, householder, hermit, religious mendicant); the Christian has to develop the outer and inner life, practical and contemplative together.' Sugirtharajah, R. S. 'Imperial Critical Commentaries: Christian Discourse and Commentarial Writings in Colonial India.' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 21. 83 (1999): pp. 83-112; 87.

Models based on Victorian piety were used to measure and shape native Christian lives and any departure from them were marked as problematic behaviour. Zenana missionaries were especially popular in marking and ordering the lives of the upper caste women. Often seen as curious poor secluded women who needed to be rescued from becoming a sati, the upper caste zenana bound women were the particular favourites of the missionaries. Their incarcerated lives came to symbolize all that was evil in the traditional Hindu structure. In this context we shall discuss an autobiography and a memoir as tools to examine the feminine models of exception. Harriet G. Brittan<sup>49</sup> was one among many such 'missionaries sent to Calcutta by the "Woman's Union Missionary Society of America for Heathen Lands"'. The novel, written as the autobiography (interspersed with ethnographic accounts) of an upper caste woman who converted to Christianity was particularly popular in America to have run at least two editions. The oppressed Indian Hindu woman at the heart of the narrative was a fairly common trope in the missionary ethnographic novels of British India.<sup>50</sup> Written by an American missionary but in the first person narrative of a Hindoo zenana woman, the work lends itself to a complex narrative frame. The first person account of the upper caste (presumably Brahmin as she was married to a 'Koolen'[sic] Brahmin) is filtered through the prying eyes of the missionary meta-narrator.

Brittan tries hard to preserve a distance between the narrator Kardoo and herself but the narrative often collapses to render both the voices as similar or at least speaking in unison. Accounts of physical violence (which occur very frequently in the course of the novel, for example, killing of the uncle of Kardoo, Kardoo's mother being killed by her father to preserve the honour of the family, Kardoo's brother being sacrificed to appease the vengeful gods, etc.) are examined as abhorrent cultural practices and in these moments the two narratorial voices fuse. This narrative of an upper caste Hindoo zenana woman who converts to

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<sup>49</sup> Brittan, Harriet G. *Kardoo, The Hindoo Girl*. New York: William B. Bodge, 1869.

<sup>50</sup> Anna Johnston provides particular insight on these concerns among the British reading public of the day: 'The concentration of protestant missionary activity in India in the early years of the nineteenth century coincided with a degree of intense religious interest in ministering to the "heathen" among the church and community members within England, and these groups were eager for eye witness accounts of colonial encounters. Indian proved to be a culture of such fascinating although abhorrent, difference from the British experience that what could be defined as early "ethnographic" narratives—accounts of customs and manners—were readily produced by missionary observers and widely circulated and sold to the British reading public. The conjunction of the missionary expose' of Indian women's "'oppression" with the growing British debate about women's place in the world also provided an impetus to produce texts on these subjects.' Johnston, Anna. *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; p. 80.

Christianity is encased in the propaganda agenda of an American missionary, keen to establish the superiority of the Christian faith.<sup>51</sup> The book was clearly intended for an audience located in the United States as the author is keen to define the differences between the lives of American women and their unfortunate counterparts in the zenanas in India. It is the comparative knowledge that places the author/narrator at a critical advantage over the American women, achieved by the awareness of the lives of the Americans via the books she has read:

I have read many stories of children who have lived in your country; how much care their kind friends take of them, how faithfully they are taught, and especially how they are told of their great Father God, who loves them and takes care of them, and of the dear Saviour who dies for them, and has gone to prepare a home for them in heaven.<sup>52</sup>

Kardoo, the young Brahmin woman as the narratorial figure is quite convincing in her descriptions about the customs of a Hindoo household. As a new convert the narrator is presumably overzealous in constantly reminding the audience that 'sure you will thank God that you were born in a Christian land'. Even as she chants the advantages of being born in a liberal Christian country laden with the goodness of Christian moral values, she is extremely conscious of her caste location to the extent that she associates physical beauty with caste. While describing her mother, Kardoo observes, 'she was a very high caste woman, and like many of her caste, very fair; her skin just dark enough to give a rich, warm glow to her complexion; her eyes of a liquid softness, beaming with love and tenderness, shaded by long silken lashes; exquisitely formed feet and hands; and a voice low and soft whose every tone was music'.<sup>53</sup> The source of the external beauty of the loving and ever enduring mother figure in the narrative interestingly enough owes its lineage to the caste she belongs and which in turn makes the eventual conversion of Kardoo a prized affair. Kardoo in the first section of the book keeps complaining about the inadequacies of the life of a Hindoo girl bereft of playthings and gardens which are part of an idealized American childhood. She gets her first lesson on Christianity in early childhood from her uncle Chundroo.

All the descriptions of the customs of a Hindoo household presumably in Calcutta are punctuated by the statement addressed to the readers 'be grateful that

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<sup>51</sup> For counter reference see Sircar, Sanjay. 'Of Christianity and Culture: *Tulsi*, an Indian Missionary Novel.' *Childrens' Literature Association Quarterly*, 25. 1 (2000): pp. 3-20.

<sup>52</sup> *Kardoo*; p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> *Kardoo*; p. 9.

you were born in a Christian land<sup>54</sup>. But the conditions that build up the momentum towards the climax of the narrative reads like a checklist of all the presumable evils in a traditional Hindu home. Ranging from abhorrent child marriage practices and worshipping of the fearful goddess Kali (the goddess dear to the Thugs) to the mistreatment of widows and finally the sacrifice of a young child to the Ganges to appease the wrath of the gods, the litany of abusive practices prepares the reader for the climactic moment that seals the fate of the protagonist/narrator. Kardoo is married to a Kulin Brahmin whom she hardly gets to meet in her lifetime but as his first wife she is given the sole privilege of becoming an unwilling suttee, only to be rescued by a well-meaning missionary couple. With the convert as a marginalized member of a patriarchal society, the novel strikes a note as an empowering narrative. Having heaped all manner of negativities in the construction of the Hindoo family, Brittan ensures that the Christian conversion which comes at the end of the novel is seen as a social and spiritual enlightenment.

The prominent trope in the framing of this largely propagandist autobiography is that of propelling marginal figures into the speaking arena. After having been rescued by a missionary from the funeral pyre and having become an outcaste, Kardoo is left with little option but to become a Christian. So the rites of passage for the ideal convert were to have endured through the ill-practices that traditional Hinduism posed. Kardoo having suffered at the hands of Hinduism stood for a quintessential convert aware of the new social possibilities that Christianity has to offer. Hence, she becomes a beacon of hope for the futuristic goal of a Christian land.

In contrast to the autobiography of an unknown upper caste woman (Kardoo), *The Eastern Lily Gathered* (1856) is the memoir of Bala Shoondoree Tagore, the wife of Baboo Gyanendra Mohan Tagore of the illustrious pāthuriyāghāṭā Tagore family.<sup>55</sup> Bala Shoondoree's memoir like that of Kardoo is mediated via a missionary author. In this case however, the text is accompanied by a treatise on the condition of upper-caste women in India and their lack of education. What sets this narrative apart from the rest is the real possibility of entering a zenana. The plot is routine as the wish for conversion is generated by the encounter with a missionary

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<sup>54</sup> *Kardoo*, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> Storrow, Rev. Edward. *The Eastern Lily Gathered: A Memoir of Bala Shoondoree Tagore, With Observations on the Position and Prospects of Hindu Female Society*. London: John Snow, 1856. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

teacher. However, the formal act of conversion remains illusive as Bala Shoondoree merely proclaims her faith in her death bed rather dramatically. To quote:

‘Are you not afraid of death?’ ‘No’ she said, ‘I am not at all afraid of death. I am tired of this wicked world’. ‘Do you die in the spirit of faith and prayer?’ asked her husband. With a fixed majestic look, which her countenance assumed when expressing herself more decidedly than usual, she replied, ‘Do you doubt it? I die in the faith which is in Jesus Christ’.<sup>56</sup>

The narrative does not centre on the conversion per se of the protagonist, but the possibility of upper-caste educated women persuading their husbands to convert.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless the text promotes a central correlation in examining the life of real zenana conversion: importance of conversion of women is directly proportional to their influence on the conversion of men.<sup>58</sup> As a privileged participant (given her caste and social status) she is a social ideal at the functionalist level. In contrast to the zenana prototype (represented by Kardoo) her conversion, though prized still remains a blurred possibility.

The autobiographies and biographies written by native Bengali converts during this period are set against both these extremes framed by the Hindu conservative group and the overzealous missionaries. On the one hand they react to the overwhelming disdain against ‘conversion’ which looks upon the converts as ‘malcontents’ or the ‘prophets of doom’ and on the other hand they are set against a constructed notion of the ‘ideal native convert’.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>57</sup> ‘The subject of this Memoir saw that in their existing position she and her husband could not fully act up to the requirements of the Bible, she strongly urged him to consent to their baptism.’ Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>58</sup> ‘The conversion, therefore, of an Oriental woman of respectability seems morally impossible, unless some of her male relatives are favourably impressed in behalf of the Gospel. The truth of this statement is borne out by the fact that there is no instance of a Hindu lady singly and alone coming forth from the faith of her fathers and embracing the religion of the Saviour of Mankind.’ Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>59</sup> The upper-caste native converts were keen to acknowledge the role of the missionaries in transmitting Christianity to them. However, they were keen to accord the missionary the role of the facilitator. In a review article of a translation of the gospel into the Bengali, Lal Behari Day acknowledges the exceptional role of the missionary but reminds that ‘I do not suppose that the present Bengali version of the Scriptures will be the future Bible of the sixty millions of Bengal; that version must be the work of the natives of the country; but in the mean time every Bengali Christian must feel it to be his duty. No less pleasing than it is imperative, to assist in the right rendering into his mother tongue of the word of God.’ The Editor. ‘Review of Mr. Bom Wetsch’s Bengali Translation of the Gospel of Mathew.’ *The Bengal Magazine Vol VI*. May 1878; p. 112. Dorothy F. Lane insists that the autobiographies of the first generation of converts are ample proof that colonialism and Christianity could not be separated. This had to do much with the dual roles that the British missionaries in India played (both as priests and as traders or government functionaries). For example, Charles Grant who coined the phrase ‘One power, One mind’ was part of the administrative machinery. Lane, Dorothy. ‘“One power, One mind”: Religious Diversity and British Dominion in India.’ *Literature & Theology*, 19, 3 (2005): pp. 251-164; p. 253.

*The Bengal Magazine* (a magazine edited by Reverend Lal Behari Day that meant to accommodate the opinions of the Bengal converts) published several poems and small prose pieces by the first generation converts to Christianity. Such pieces highlight the recent convert's desire to appropriate all the qualities that the missionaries have framed for them. One such poem 'By a Young Hindu Lady—A convert' published in the October issue of the magazine titled 'Evening' is illustrative of the way the new converts were keen to project themselves as convert nonpareil.

How peaceful is this quiet hour!  
How bright the evening sky!  
Day's heat is past, from hedge and bower.  
Sweet birds to birds reply.

Listen, the leaves are stirring now,—  
There's music in the trees,—  
Thou'rt come, I feel thee on my brow,  
O welcome Southern Breeze!

'Tis meet all earthly thoughts to lay  
In this calm hour aside,  
And let religious feelings sway  
The heart where cares abide.

At such a time did Isaac muse,  
Alone, in fields retired\*  
And such a time did David choose  
To pour his hymns inspired+  
At such a time to deserts bare,  
'Our saviour oft withdrew,'  
And there in solitude and prayer,  
His spirit did renew.\*\*

I too, O Lord, at such a time,  
Will bend my suppliant knee,  
And ere be past youth's sunny prime,  
Ask Love and Grace from Thee!<sup>60</sup>

\*Genesis XXIV.63

+Psalm LV.17

\*\*Mathew XIV.23.

The poem quoted above brilliantly summarizes the subject position of the 'Young Hindu Lady' who has just converted. With her footnotes quoting the Gospels and the Psalms she is keen to demonstrate that she is well versed in the language of the new dispensation. It was particularly demonstrative of the fact that

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<sup>60</sup> S. D. 'Evening.' *The Bengal Magazine*. October 1872; p. 210.

it was a woman who was liberated and educated enough to have written this piece of celebratory poetry. Quite unlike the life of ostracization that the convert is likely to have led in nineteenth century Calcutta, she is at peace and ready to welcome the southern breeze. The lovely peaceful setting creates the perfect mood for her 'religious feeling' to sway. Therefore with these tropes of calm and serenity, the poet is successfully able to create the image of a dedicated convert in control over his or her life.

While these kinds of representations of the allure of a wonderful life as native Bengali convert abound, the spiritual and the social aspects of conversion collide. The responses interestingly have been woven around an 'absence' against an overwhelming body of both positive and negative expectations. Reacting to a mounted set of expectations, the life-writing is expressly woven around the absence of the moment of the leap of faith. While social factors might have been instrumental it was necessitated also by the desire to retain the agency over commonly shared narrative plots (it shall be discussed in detail in the following chapter).

In most biographies and autobiographies written by and about first generation converts, taking to Western modes of behaviour seems to be marked as the tipping point that organized social modes of behavior and made the crossing over possible. Ada Lee in 1902, reporting the life of an Indian princess, who for most part of her life lived and preached in Bengal, does not recount a formal religious procedure of conversion. The protagonist of this biography, Chundra Leela, is a Hindu princess born in Nepal and widowed at a very young age, sets out to discover God for herself and is soon disillusioned. She then 'reads' the Bible and eventually becomes a Christian. Her final act of conversion does not come with taking an oath but instead breaking taboos of the conservative Hindu society.

On a Tuesday morning shortly after this, she gathered together all her belongings, and took them over to the native pastor's house. The news soon spread everywhere that she had gone, and her disciples and many Hindus gathered together and went to persuade her, who so long had been their priestess and leader, to return to them. She went out on the verandah, and sure then she was no longer a Hindu, and could never teach Hinduism again. To prove to them that she meant what she said, she called the pastor's wife to bring her a cup of water and, taking it from this Christian's hand, drank it before them. She then asked another Christian for his hookah, and sat down and smoked with the group of Christians, thus breaking her caste in the presence of those who had come to take her back.

They went away saying, sorrowfully, 'now her caste is gone, she is nothing more to us'.<sup>61</sup>

This unusual account of a female preacher convert brings back the focus of the premises of excess and religious dissent. Not quite the ideal convert that the missionaries would like to envision, Chundra Leela desists breaking new spiritual ground by using Christianity (like most of her compatriots) to exhibit social dissent. However, the most interesting case in this regard has been the *munshi* of William Carey, who never converted to Christianity. He criticized Hinduism and often tantalizingly offered hope to Carey that he would soon become a Christian.<sup>62</sup>

In a letter written after he had converted to Christianity in 1862, Hur Chunder Dutt wrote to his bereaved mother distinguishing between *dharmāntar* and, *jātyāntar*. He proclaimed that he might have changed his *dharma* but he never gave up his *jat*. This self-conscious demarcation between a community identity and a religious identity often sets the tone for several autobiographies. As a proof of this, almost none of the upper caste converts to Christianity in Bengal used their Christian names and retained their surnames; which were a clear marker of their caste identities. Most autobiographies insist on the caste identity of the author, to suggest that they are upper caste converts to Christianity and not the '*dāl bhāt*' (lentils and rice) Christians. In fact, while lamenting the failure of Christianity in India a contributor to *The Bengal Magazine* wrote '[e]verybody knows how these Christians increase year by year. There is a famine, and the orphans are made over to the care of the missionaries. If not a famine, there is pestilence. What are *dal-bhat* Christians worth?'<sup>63</sup> In the Missionary Society records of Nadia district we find that the cobblers who had converted to Christianity were never given equal status as to the upper caste converts.<sup>64</sup> They came to be called as 'muchhi Christians' (cobbler Christians) along with the Muslim converts who were branded as 'Muslim

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<sup>61</sup> Lee, Ada. *An Indian Priestess, The Life of Chundra Leela*. London: Morgan and Scott, office of The Christian, 1902, p. 57.

<sup>62</sup> Fox Young, Richard. 'Was Rammohun Roy The "True Successor" Of Ramram Basu? A Critique of Certain Statements. *The Adyar Library Bulletin*, Vol. 51 (1987): pp. 276-93.

<sup>63</sup> 'Is Any Change in Progress in the Religious Aspect of the Hindu Society?' *The Bengal Magazine*. Vol. VI; p. 446.

<sup>64</sup> Most of these conversions were believed to have relied on the paternalistic efforts of the evangelists. When the state failed to provide basic necessities, the marginalized sections of the society looked towards the evangelists for sustenance. For example, see Studdert-Kennedy, Gerald. 'Evangelical Mission and the Railway Workshop Apprentices: Institutionalizing Christian Presence in Imperial Bengal, 1885-1914. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 33. 3 (2005): pp. 325-348.

converts'.<sup>65</sup> Inter-marriage was impossible between these groups. <sup>66</sup> In *The Bengal Magazine*, an article on Krishna Pal, believed to be the first convert to Christianity read: 'It is interesting to note that the first Bengali convert to Christianity, of whom we have any authentic record, was a Hindu of the Vaishnava sect'.<sup>67</sup> Nineteenth century high-caste converts detested low-caste conversion and pecuniary conversions. In their imagination, Christianity was an indicator of refined sensibilities that came with a dose of an English liberal education. Lal Behari Day for instance, had clearly outlined that Christianity was not *sahaj jñān* or common knowledge.<sup>68</sup> K.M. Banerjea went to suggest that the 'peculiar responsibility' of comprehending Christianity lay with the educated Hindus. 'An educated Hindu', reckons Banerjea, 'then means one who has been instructed in the literature, science and history of Europe'.<sup>69</sup>

B.C. Chatterjea, one of the late Judges of Bengal in his autobiography unmistakably proclaims his caste identity and promotes a scheme of what an ideal Christian should be. He is clearly disappointed with the economically backward sections of the native Christians and deems them suitable for what he calls 'exemplary lives'.

I would next ask you neither to be discouraged, nor neglect the investigation of Christianity, because very few of our countrymen care for it, or on account of the unsatisfactory character of the nominal Christians. I do not deny that Christianity has not made much progress in India. I admit that the major portion of Christians of this country is illiterate and has come from lower classes. I also acknowledge with some shame and sorrow that many of those who call themselves Christians do not lead exemplary lives.<sup>70</sup>

T.K. Chatterji stresses on the understanding of religion through one's own reading of the Bible and Gospel and clearly makes a case for Christianity as being suitable for an elite educated class, preferably from the upper castes. This is evident

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<sup>65</sup> Ascribing caste identities to Christians seems to have been fairly common in colonial Bengal. Some muchis who were converted to Christianity were also called muchi-rishis or just rishis. Zene, Cozomi. *The Rishi of Bangladesh, A History of Christian Dialogues*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2002: pp. 10-11.

<sup>66</sup> Bhattacharya, Aparna. *Religious Movements of Bengal (1800-1850)*. Calcutta: New Times Printers, 1981; p. 127.

<sup>67</sup> *The Bengal Magazine*. Ed. Rev. Lal Behari Day. Calcutta: S. M. Sirdar Heral Press. Vol. IV; p. 16.

<sup>68</sup> Day, Lal Behari. *Antidote to Brahmaism in Four Lectures*. Calcutta: Messrs. G. C. Hay and Co., 1869; p. 25.

<sup>69</sup> Banerjea, K.M. *The Peculiar Responsibility of Educated Natives and Their Duty Thoughtfully to Inquire into the Christian Scheme of Salvation, A Lecture to Educated Natives Delivered in St. Paul's Cathedral on Friday October 27, 1865*. Calcutta: Messrs R.C. Lepage and Co., 1865; p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> Chatterjea, B. C. *Papers for Thoughtful Men XI. A Brahman Convert's Testimony for Christ*. Calcutta: Calcutta Tract and Book society, 1899; p. 15.

also in the way caste was increasingly being accommodated in the urban elite Christians who were originally Hindu dissenters.<sup>71</sup> The story of becoming a Christian begins with the disillusionment with Hindu rituals and practices, which were more or less by then a popular form of dissent. He begins by outlining how the Hindu religion was not naturally a spiritual one but born out of coercion. His early idyllic childhood was overshadowed by the fear of the Hindu pantheon of Gods and Goddesses.

In my childhood I was taught by her (maternal grandmother) to bow down before the numerous Hindu gods and goddesses and worship them. I was told that if I did not thus honour them they would be angry and would punish me, either with disease or loss of property and friends, or with death. This teaching kept me in constant terror, and wherever I saw the idols—under the shade of a tree, or in the temples, or in the shrines, I used to bow down before them, thinking that this act would please them and would bring down blessings upon me,—not spiritual blessings, for at that time I knew nothing of spiritual blessings; the only blessing I was taught to care for was health, wealth, learning and long life.<sup>72</sup>

Reverend Mathuranath Bose who had taken to Christianity with the famous nationalist Kalichurn Banerji, in his early life, is said to have torn a Bible in front of a European missionary. In his youth as he began to be influenced by enlightenment rationalists, like many others of his age and disposition, he was disillusioned with traditional Hinduism and took to listening to the lectures of the Brahmo Samaj. But it was Christian theology which attracted him the most. Whether it was simply a question of social ostracization, is not clear, but Mathuranath was not keen on baptism. He consulted and debated with Kalichurn Banerji and Behari Lal Chandra in their secret meetings in the empty jute godowns about the possibility of becoming a Christian without having to convert. Joining the Quakers who were accepted as Christians but did not have baptism rituals was an option that they debated furiously. It was Reverend Duff who left Calcutta in 1863 who convinced him and

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<sup>71</sup> For instance, in an article in *The Bengal Magazine*, Nobin Krishna Bose authenticates the historicity of caste: 'On the retrospect of the past, it will be seen that the early annals of every nation, consists only of myths and legendary tales. At the dim horizon of authentic history, we light on an enchanted world peopled by superhuman beings, and the scene of marvellous and superhuman beings. These deeds might not be perhaps without some slender basis of truth. But imagination is busy at work long before the dawn of analytic reason. The glorification of one's own ancestors is also a natural feeling of the human heart, and hence the bards who ministered to this feeling of the great ones in pre-historic times, by rehearsing the achievement of their ancestors, were listened to with lively and sympathetic rapture. Their narrative however coloured or exaggerated, gained a ready credence from the rapport between their own excited imagination and that of their audience; and thus came genealogies to be invented and accepted as true, by which the princes traced their descent from gods and demi-gods, from the Sun and the Moon. Vol. VI, 1878, pp. 446-447.

<sup>72</sup> Chatterji, T. K. *Into the Light or How a Brahmin found the Christ, Being the life-story of Rev. T. K. Chatterji, Minister of the Bhowanipur Native Church*. Calcutta: London Missionary Society, 1895.

he was finally baptised on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1865.<sup>73</sup> Mathuranath's dilemma and his final baptism are telling of the fact that the 'crossing over' was a moment that was a result of a careful consideration and not the mere result of a spiritual epiphany.

Lal Behari Day's *Recollections of My School Days*, bears testimony to similar bonhomie between young native converts. Day admits right in the beginning of the section on 'Sunday Lectures' that his school's (The General Assembly's Institution, which was run by the Scottish missionary Dr Alexander Duff) chief objective was 'to convert the students to Christianity', and 'the course of studies pursued in it was thoroughly saturated with the spirit of that religion from the lowest to the highest classes'.<sup>74</sup> He would spend a considerable time reading and discussing with the two young converts, Mahendra Lal Basak and Kailas Charan Mukherjee. They often read, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, Pollock's *Course of Time*, Gramane's *Sabbath*, and several volumes of sermons by distinguished English and Scottish divines.<sup>75</sup> He attributes most of his knowledge of Christianity and Christian understanding to scriptural readings and associations in terms of discussions.

Throughout his recollections about his childhood, which speak of the turmoil and his journey from a small village called Talpur to the metropolis Calcutta and his gradual disillusionment with Hinduism, the seeds of which were sown in his very childhood, he is skeptical of a very narrow view of Christianity. In fact in the very end of the book when he thanks the three missionary fathers who were responsible for changing the course of his life, he never forgets to mention how Reverend John Macdonald compromised his teaching by referring to any non-Christian work. He said that John Mac Donald 'religiously avoided on all other subjects except the Bible and Biblical theology.' He hoped 'to teach for some months the poem of Cowper—a poet to whom he was partial on account of his evangelical spirit, and he doubted whether he would have agreed to lecture on any other English poet than Milton, in whose *Paradise Lost*, however he lamented the 'insinuation of a sort of semi-Arianism, the fabrication of a Christian or rather infernal mythology, and the investment of the Evil One with grandeur and

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<sup>73</sup> Bose, Rev. Mathuranath. *Diary*. Quoted by D. L. Dutt in the unpublished biography of Rev. Mathuranath Bose. *Mathuranath Bose, Saint of Gopalganj*, Scottish Church College Library, 1921.

<sup>74</sup> Day, Lal Behari. *Recollections of Alexander Duff*. London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1879; p. 56.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

sublimity'.<sup>76</sup> His snide remark about the blinkered perspective of a missionary is indicative of a nuanced understanding of Christianity in relationship to Western modernity. We have observed in the earlier narrative as well the importance of a peer group, necessarily equipped with an education that allows them an understanding through a textual world beyond the prescriptive potions of the missionary preachers. Therefore, it becomes all the more significant for them as elite high-caste converts to distance themselves from the pecuniary 'dal-bhat' Christians.<sup>77</sup>

Day's *The Life of Alexander Duff* in the strictest sense is not really a biography but his recounting the days he spent with Dr Duff. In his words: '[a]s the book is written in a language which is not the writer's mother tongue, it can scarcely be expected to have any literary merits. But it has this peculiar interest, that it is the life of a great Scottish Missionary, written by one of his own sons in the faith on the banks of the Ganges, and by one, too, who was wholly brought up in one of the Christian Colleges established and maintained in India by the people of Scotland. As such, the book, the writer believes, will touch a chord in the heart of every true-born son of old Caledonia.'<sup>78</sup>

The 'fashioned selves' in the first generation converts to Christianity rely on the normative hierarchical caste structure to accord them the legitimacy of the 'chosen-one'.<sup>79</sup> 'Life-writing' in this context comes at full circle to meet the excessive representational practices. With exaggeration as their key tool, they create the space where the converts' abject disregard for the Hindu religion and its norms becomes their point of departure. The pulse of this centre lies in the acknowledgement of the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>77</sup> Sekhar Bandyopadhyay notes that in colonial Bengal '[w]ithin Hindu society there was a space for transcending the boundaries of caste; but this transcendence occurred within its basic power structure, where the hegemony of the upper castes was sustained by factors both sacred and secular. In other words, this hegemony was maintained both through ideology and imperatives of structure—both through consent and coercion.' He goes on to state that 'the idea of the uniqueness of caste as a signifier of the cultural superiority of Hindus and the notion of its organic connection with Hindu unity and identity' was 'Bengali common sense.' Bandhyopadhyay, Sekhar. *Caste, Culture and Hegemony, Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004, p. 45.

<sup>78</sup> Day, Lal Behari. *Recollections of Alexander Duff*, p. xi.

<sup>79</sup> Contrary to a strain of critical opinion (Nicholas Dirks and Louis Dumont, etc.) that castes acquired an essential status with the British trying to frame them according to Aryan Brahmanic principles, Shekar Bandyopadhyay opines that castes were always a contested category in Bengal. 'It suggests that community boundaries, as they figure in the political space of contestable power, are imagined within certain historical contexts which privilege one or other of those categories without displacing the rest, and therefore, with a shift in that context, such boundaries can also be de-imagined and re-imagined.' Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. 'Difference and Transience: History of Caste, Power and Identity in Bengal.' Ed. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay. *Bengal Rethinking History*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2001: pp. 231-258; 257.

legitimacy of the 'conservative' opinion, and it is precisely at this point that the Christian neophyte lays the foundations of his 'identity'. Therefore, the Bengali native Christian revolutionary exemplar retains his authority as an upper-caste bhadralok.<sup>80</sup> In the context of liberal thought processes of the nineteenth century bhadralok, C.A. Bayly points out:

In reacting to both physical and discursive violence, the general stance of Indian liberals was for an epistemic compromise; to acknowledge the power of Western thought and the violence of imperialism, but to relativise, deflect or hybridise it with modernised Indian themes.<sup>81</sup>

The Christian liberal bhadraloks while acknowledging the presence of the colonizing force created their own hybridized identities which were interestingly premised on their own internal relational 'other'. The internal economy of identities that Christianity generated in the nineteenth century allowed the upper-caste converts to fashion themselves as romantic rebels. But this rebellion was located within a complex relationship with an 'internal other' (primarily differentiated in terms of caste and education) creating narrative simultaneities which shall be explored in the next chapter.

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<sup>80</sup> Eleanor Jackson notes that the writings that remain of the Indian Christians are fragmentary and selective, filtered through and heavily edited by the European missionaries, because the letters and journals were used mainly for fund-raising, and therefore were often formal and stereotyped. Jackson, Eleanor. 'From Krishna Pal to Lal Behari Day: Indian Builders of the Church in Bengal, 1800–1894.' Ed. Dana Lee Robert. *Converting Colonialisms: Visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706-1914*. Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008: pp. 166-205; 169.

<sup>81</sup> Bayly, C. A. *Recovering Liberties, Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012; p. 5.

## Chapter Three

### *Hindu Mythology and the Birth of a Christian Narrative Tradition*

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The two preceding chapters have dealt with the representations of Christian converts in the field of cultural production. The discussion has pointed to the problem of understanding the relationship between the converts and western modernity. In this chapter I focus on this key issue by turning the spotlight on the nature of the literary production of the converts.

Western modernity, understood as a salient contribution of colonialism, in the context of the knowledge practices of India is frequently represented by an epistemic break<sup>1</sup> with the pre-modern (often identified as a tyrannical Islamic past) in the bulk of both colonial and post-colonial intellectual historiographies.<sup>2</sup> In these readings, the defining logic of modernity has been to conceptualize time as episodic or at best stadial, which necessitated the conceptualization of sanskritic and Islamic traditions (pre-modern) as ossified in order to legitimize a caesura.<sup>3</sup> As colonial modernity harped on new knowledge practices, it consequently set fresh norms for reviving the past and furthered novel ways of negotiating this rupture.

A product of this churning was the birth of new textualities, which in turn engendered distinct narrative traditions<sup>4</sup> as efforts to construct collective identities.

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<sup>1</sup> Saurabh Dube draws upon what he calls the 'enduring enchantments of modernity' to highlight how the discourse of modernity has continued to place rupture as its foundational parameter. Dube, Saurabh. 'Introduction: Enchantments of Modernity.' *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101. 4 (2002): pp. 729-755.

<sup>2</sup> Tapan Raychaudhuri remarks that it was the nineteenth-century Bengali literature that popularized the concept of 'Muslim tyranny' to construe their modern present. Raychaudhuri, Tapan. 'The Mughal Empire in the Bengali Literary Tradition.' *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 11. 3 (2000): pp. 320-334; p. 325.

<sup>3</sup> Scholars are now trying to take cognizance of the fact that India's intellectual history has concentrated on the break to the effect that pre-modern literary connections and ways of history writing has faced an auto censure. See for example: Pollock, Sheldon. 'Is There an Indian Intellectual History? Introduction to "Theory and Method in Indian Intellectual History".' *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 38 (2008): pp. 533-542.

<sup>4</sup> I understand the birth of a new tradition in terms of 'invented traditions' (to use Eric Hobsbawm's term). To comprehend the functionality of 'invented traditions' in modernity, it is germane to quote Hobsbawm. In the context of revivalist traditions in liberal discourses in Europe in the nineteenth century, Hobsbawm remarks, '[s]uch movements, common among intellectuals since the Romantics, can never develop or even preserve a living past (except conceivably by setting up human natural sanctuaries for isolated corners of archaic life), but must become "invented tradition"'. On the one hand the strength and adaptability of genuine traditions is not to be confused with the "invention of tradition". Where the old ways are alive traditions need be neither revived nor invented. Yet, it may be suggested that where they are invented, it is often not because old ways are not available or viable, but because they are deliberately not used or adapted. Thus, in consciously setting itself against tradition and for radical innovation, the nineteenth-century liberal ideology of social-change systematically failed to provide for the social and authority ties taken for granted in earlier societies and created voids

As retrospective constructions in the age of colonial modernity, these new narrativities relied heavily on shared textualities and time. Mythology (Hindu) with its premium both on time and timelessness emerged as the key component of the discourses of modernity. In part this relies on mythology's elastic contours. On the one hand, mythology is habitually read as a mnemonic iteration where forms of reference could be changed and subverted thereby introducing an illusion of continuity. On the other hand, it could also be read within the frame of material textuality of an ancient Indian culture.

The Christian novitiates in colonial Bengal were keen to stake their claim to modernity, but were faced with the crisis of entitlement as their socio-political parameters betrayed the possibility of easy associations (either with the colonial intellectual framework or the Hindu elite intelligentsia).<sup>5</sup> One of the defining features of the literature by the Christian converts was their liberal use of Hindu mythology, and I contend in this chapter that this selective usage of mythology was a deliberate presentation. This was not a case of plain revisionism but was rather informed by an intricate network of intellectual practices that included three key components: literature, mythology, and history, which operated against a master narrative of modernity. Importantly, all these functioned as open categories as they were still not stable knowledge forms and their limits were being constantly negotiated.

The latitude that both mythology and literature enjoyed in nineteenth-century Bengal harboured the possibility of overlapping spaces. I argue that the eclectic scope of the terms of both literature and mythology created possibilities of new narrative genealogies to emerge. Such entanglements allowed marginal participants with stakes in modernity to fashion their narrative continuities, in this case the Christian converts. In particular, this chapter analyses the prospects of a new shared vocabulary derived from mythology that initiated possibilities of novel

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which might have to be filled by invented practices.' Hobsbawm, Eric. 'Introduction: Invented Traditions.' Eds. Hobsbawm, Eric and Terrence Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 (1983): pp. 1-15; p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> In this regard it should be noted that the Christian converts did not always derive the necessary benefits from the colonial government after their conversion. For instance, one of the newspaper reports suggests that the converts were in fact victims of discrimination (at least in the first half of the nineteenth century). 'The natives converted to Christianity are still more harshly treated than the immediate descendents of Europeans. Under a Christian government, they are seldom or never employed in any part of India; and under the Madras Government, are expressly excluded "by law" from such humble employments as *other natives* are eligible to hold!' Heber, Reverend Reginald (Archbishop of Calcutta). 'Freedom of Trade and Settlement in India.' *The Edinburgh Review Or Critical Journal*, 14. 48 (1828 ): pp. 312-347; p. 346.

narrative traditions. The first section explores the intertwined nature of literature and mythology in nineteenth-century Bengal and the following section concentrates on locating the genesis of a Christian narrative corpus in modernity.

### *The literary turn*

Given its broad horizons, it seems neither possible nor meaningful to separate the conceptual categories of literature, mythology and history. It seems to be far more productive to locate the interpretive meta-levels of mythology and literature by examining their terminological entanglements.

## I

Both in the nineteenth century and its post-colonial reconstructions, the intellectual foment of the Bengal renaissance came to be defined by the literary output so much so that the literary history and general history have often blended together.<sup>6</sup> While there have been several attempts to trace the love of the Bengalis especially for Romantic literature that gave rise to a neo-Romantic movement by the end of the century,<sup>7</sup> few comments have been made about the character of the 'literary turn', if we might call it thus, in the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Mulling on the Romantic nostalgia associated with Bengalis and the long nineteenth century, Dipesh Chakrabarty remarks that it was literature that sealed what it meant to be a Bengali.<sup>9</sup> Joginimohan Chattopadhyay, at the close of the nineteenth century seems

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<sup>6</sup> This was a key problematic that David Kopf had discussed in Kopf, David. *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance, The Dynamics of Indian Modernization*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969. Harder, Hans. 'The Modern Babu and the Metropolis, Reassessing Early Bengali Narrative Prose (1821-1862).' Eds. Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia, *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004: pp. 358-401; p. 359.

<sup>7</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty contends that Romanticism was particularly popular by the end of the nineteenth century (his point of departure is Tagore) because it privileged 'imagination' so as to accommodate counter currents of history and politics. Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 'Nation and Imagination: The Training of the Eye in Bengali Modernity.' *Topoi*, 18. 1 (1999): pp. 29-47.

<sup>8</sup> Malini Bhattacharya and Anasuya Ghosh have successfully demonstrated that the neo-romantic age was a self-conscious one, where litterateurs of the day themselves theorized on Romanticism in Bengal and their counterparts in Europe. Eds. Malini Bhattacharya and Anasuya Ghosh. *Romantic Literature in Bengal 1881-1922: An Anthology of Articles from Bangla*. Kolkata: Papyrus, 2003: pp. 73-75.

<sup>9</sup> He also however suggests that this feeling peaked during the Swadeshi movement. 'What once made the word *Bengali* more than a mere ethnic tag and gave it a seductive ring for many was the phenomenon of a romantic, anticolonial nationalism in Bengal that flourished in the period c. 1890–1910. Its high point was the so-called Swadeshi (*swadesh*: "one's native land") movement (1905–8) organized to protest, and eventually reverse, the first partition of the province of Bengal executed by the British—ostensibly for administrative reasons—in 1905. At the center of this romanticism was a perceived connection between identity and aesthetic activity in the realms of art, music, literature, and language. Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 'Romantic Archives: Literature and the Politics of Identity in Bengal.' *Critical Inquiry*, 30. 3 (2004): pp. 654-682; 658. Amitav Ghosh drawing from the Nirad C. Chaudhuri highlights the permeability of the literary in the everyday life of colonial Bengal. To quote Chaudhuri: 'It has to be pointed out that in the latter half of the nineteenth-century Bengali life and Bengali

to agree, but as a corollary adds that this 'literary turn' was prompted by the influence of Western education in Bengal:

A group of men have appeared in modern Bengal—not poets, nor religious men nor philosophers: they are neither men of contemplation, nor are they men of action. Poetry, religion, philosophy, contemplation, action—few can accuse them of having a special acquaintance with any of these things. However, they have dabbled at each of these at various times. But literature, or rather, 'pure literature', is their primary business. One may call it their vocation. It is literature they rehearse all day and night. The tribe is a product of English education: the species was not to be found in the Bengal of earlier times.<sup>10</sup>

If indeed the literary came to occupy centre-stage in the nineteenth century, it is perhaps important to ask: what did the Bengalis mean by literary and when did it become central to the Bengali imagination? The exact origin is difficult to determine but it is certain that it played a key role in the intellectual deliberations of the Bengal Renaissance.

With literature being part of the educated man's discourse in the late nineteenth century, the literary had conquered the spirit of the Bengali mind such that Rabindranath Tagore had equated literature with civilization.<sup>11</sup> Chattopadhyay (quoted above) indicates that a culture developed fuelled by Western education which not just wrote poetry but made it part of their everyday discourse.<sup>12</sup>

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literature had become very closely connected and literature was bringing into the life of educated Bengalis something which they could not get from any other source. Whether in the cities and towns or in the villages, where the Bengali gentry still had the permanent base of their life, it was the mainstay of their life of feeling, sentiment and passion. Both emotional capacity and idealism were sustained by it [...] When my sister was married in 1916, a college friend of mine presented her with fifteen of the latest novels by the foremost writers and my sister certainly did not prize them less than her far more costly clothes and jewellery. In fact, sales of fiction and poetry as wedding presents were a sure standby of their publishers [...]. Quoted in Ghosh, Amitav. 'The March of the Novel through History: The Testimony of My Grandfather's Bookcase.' *The Kenyon Review, New Series*, 20. 2 (1998): pp. 13-24; 15. Literature seems to have been a common node for embracing modernity, notably in the Urdu. See for example, Ahmed, Safdar. 'Literary Romanticism and Islamic Modernity: The Case of Urdu Poetry.' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 35. 2 (2012): pp. 434-455.

<sup>10</sup> Chattopadhyay, Joginimohan. 'Literary.' (Bhāratī o Bālak, 1892). Trans. Swapan Chakravorty. Eds. Malini Bhattacharya and Anasuya Ghosh. *Romanticism in Bengal*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 2003: pp. 102-106; 103.

<sup>11</sup> Rabindranath Tagore actually makes an interesting observation when he says that the flowering of literature in India has been contemporaneous with a retreat of the same in Europe. Ṭhākur, Rabīndranāth 'Sāhitya o sabhyatā.' *Rabindra Racanābali Volume 13*. Kalikātā: Bīśvabhāratī, 1996; p. 992.

<sup>12</sup> Seth stresses that literature was one of the key subjects of the Western education system. He also highlights that although in terms of number of people affected by this system and the funds spent on it were miniscule, 'Western education system was endowed with great significance.' Seth, Sanjay. *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2007; p. 2. It might be noted in this regard that the insistence on textualities altered social hierarchies by admitting participation of some lower castes through the new education system. But the new system still continued to endorse caste hierarchies as primarily the upper castes has access to education.

The bhadralok class, the primary beneficiary of the new system, set a premium on reading and writing practices as markers of education and culture.<sup>13</sup> As opposed to the decentralized educational practices in Bengal prior to the advent of the Western education system, in the manner of *ṭols*, *madrasas* and *pāṭh'śālās*, the new system changed the perceptions about education and gradually insisted on a perceptive homogeneity.<sup>14</sup>

In sum, literature emerged as a privileged entitlement for the bhadralok. However to understand the dynamics of the literary practices of the marginal bhadraloks (the upper-caste Christian converts) it is imperative to trace the perks that accompany the 'literary' in the nineteenth century.

As Sheldon Pollock succinctly put it, literary cultures have always been mired in 'ethnorepresentations', which ensured that the literary capital was utilized to construct cultural trajectories.<sup>15</sup> The harnessing of the cultural capital primarily in the form of literature had been of such a great scale that the later day social historians have all turned to literary sources to stake their claims on post-colonial histories.<sup>16</sup> Social histories of Bengal about the long nineteenth century have ever since rallied the 'literary' as evidence to study the socio-political landscape.<sup>17</sup> Preoccupation with the literary is not merely a post colonial construct but is also reflective of colonial modernity's prioritization of textuality. Jonardan Ganeri contends it is the sheer abundance of textual materials in India of the pre-modern

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<sup>13</sup> Tithi Bhattacharya locates the 'sentiment' of the bhadralok class in their investment in 'culture' as often opposed to materiality. Culture as the defining marker of a community practice comes with the shared understating of literary practices in colonial Calcutta of the nineteenth century. Especially refer to Chapter one, 'The Curious case of the Bhadrakok: Class or Sentiment?' Bhattacharya, Tithi. *The Sentinels of Culture, Class Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press: pp. 35-67. Andrew Sartori has argued that stress on culture was a transnational phenomenon that began with the German concept of redefining Kultur. 'Culture' in the nineteenth century becomes a 'global conceptual field' used to plot modernity. Sartori, Andrew. "'The Resonance of Culture': Framing a Problem in Global Concept-History.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 47. 4 (2005): pp. 676-699; p.698.

<sup>14</sup> This homogeneity was based on standardized notions of dissemination and appropriation of knowledge. Acharya, Poromesh. 'Indigenous Education and Brahminical Hegemony in Bengal.' Ed. Nigel Crook. *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia, Essays on Religion, History and Politics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996: pp. 98-118.

<sup>15</sup> Pollock in fact says: 'The commencement of literature that is a theoretical and historiographical necessity of literary cultures is typically coded in ethnorepresentations of literary history. These are crucial to adduce, since we are as interested in what was thought to have happened as in what we think happened.' Pollock, Sheldon. 'Literary History, Indian History, World History.' *Social Scientist*, 23. 10/12 (1995): pp. 112-142; p.118.

<sup>16</sup> The entire crop of post-independence historians of Bengal may be a case in point, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Sudipta Kaviraj, Sumit Sarkar, Tanika Sarkar, Partha Chatterjee to name a few.

<sup>17</sup> Tharu, Susie and Satish Poduval. 'Re-Figuring Literary/Cultural Historiography.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33. 25 (1998): pp. 1508-1509.

times which were effectively mined in the nineteenth century, and made literature a viable source.<sup>18</sup> Therefore the key question becomes, to borrow Sheldon Pollock's words, 'not whether to define or not to define, but how to make the history of definition a central part of our history of the literary'.<sup>19</sup>

Even though, assessing the Bengal Renaissance via its literature has become commonplace now, the phenomenon of the 'literary' as the chosen discipline possibly began with the late eighteenth century Orientalists who categorically took to extending its limits. Of the various stakeholders of India's past in the nineteenth century, the Orientalists were the earliest to successfully collect, translate and archive texts. Vans Kennedy had suggested in 1831, that in the absence of any other historical material the 'literary' had to be the source of knowledge about antiquity.<sup>20</sup> In addressing the future officers to India at Cambridge, Max Müller had extended the framework by suggesting that the Indian literature was a laboratory for studying the contexts of the 'modern' world.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> 'Extreme poverty of information about "physical" context is twinned with a superabundance of textual materials, which provides an immensely rich "literary" context. Moreover, there is good evidence for the conjecture that the principal context in which the Indian writers sought to make an "intervention" was a literary/intellectual rather than a physical/socio-political context.' Ganeri, Jonardan. 'Contextualism in the Study of Indian Intellectual Cultures.' *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36 (2008): pp. 551–562, 553.

<sup>19</sup> He elucidates the question by expanding the epistemological parameters: 'A history of definitions would not only take account of both the semantic and pragmatic aspects, but ask directly how such definitions were formed and, once formed, were challenged; whether they were adequate or inadequate to the existing textual field, and by what measure and whose measure of adequacy; whether, and if so, how they excluded certain forms even while—and precisely by—including others.' Pollock, Sheldon. 'Introduction.' *Literary Cultures in History, Reconstructions from South Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press: pp. 1-36; 9-10.

<sup>20</sup> 'Even during the last eight hundred years, when India has been subject to so many changes and revolutions, and the Hindu religion has ceased to receive encouragement and support from native princes, the ancient manuscripts of Indian literature has been scarcely decreased in number. In the absence, therefore, of historical data, the present state of the civil and religious state of the Hindus incontrovertibly prove the faithfulness with which they have been described in these works; and of their antiquity and authenticity, consequently, this faithfulness must alone to be as conclusive evidence as the nature of the case admits of.' Kennedy, Vans. *Researches into the Nature and Affinity of Ancient and Hindu Mythology*. London: Longman, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1831; p. 127.

<sup>21</sup> 'You will find yourselves everywhere in India between an immense past and an immense future, with opportunities such as the old world could but seldom, if ever, offer you. Take any of the burning questions of the day—popular education, higher education, parliamentary representation, codification of laws, finance, emigration, poor-law; and whether you have anything to teach and to try, or anything to observe and to learn, India will supply you with a laboratory such as exists nowhere else. That very Sanskrit, the study of which may at first seem so tedious to you and so useless, if only you will carry it on, as you may carry it on here at Cambridge better than anywhere else, will open before you large layers of literature, as yet almost unknown and unexplored, and allow you an insight into strata of thought deeper than any you have known before, and rich in lessons that appeal to the deepest sympathies of the human heart.' Müller, F. Max. *India: What It Can Teach Us, a Course of Lectures Delivered at the University of Cambridge*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls Publication, 1883; p. 32.

Far from the narrow commonsensical term that we understand as literary<sup>22</sup>, the Orientalists used it as an umbrella term encompassing what we after the post-structuralism/post-modernism would like to call 'texts'.<sup>23</sup> Vinay Dharwadkar has argued that the Orientalists had a very unique feature to their writings. Beginning with Alexander Dow and most prominently with William Jones the term literary<sup>24</sup> acquires certain latitude of reference 'which turns "literature" into an umbrella term for a wide range of ritual, philosophical, social, theoretical, didactic, scientific, and poetic texts'.<sup>25</sup> Kumkum Sangari extends this argument to suggest that 'literature itself was a subset of "knowledge" without clear boundaries developed simultaneously with reference to eighteenth-century Europe and to a localized Indian or more broadly Asian context'.<sup>26</sup> In a convincing argument, Dharwadkar insists that the Orientalists were in fact borrowing from their European contemporaries like Herder, Lessing, Ferguson, Johnson, etc., to move towards an inclusivist conceptualization of literature (as a portmanteau term) where it refers to 'all kinds of writing, including those of an erudite nature, history, philosophy, theology, etc.'.

In the long nineteenth century the term 'literary/literature' and its implications were never homogenous and were rather defined by a multiplicity of

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<sup>22</sup> For this statement I largely rely on Richard Rorty's argument that the 'textualists' of the twentieth century draw their emotional succour partially from Heidegger and for most part rely on the literary criticism of nineteenth century. Therefore the literary criticism has a direct bearing on the production of textualities in the twentieth century (especially after post-structuralism). Rorty, Richard. 'Nineteenth Century Idealism and Twentieth Century Textualism.' *Monist*, 64. 2 (1981): pp. 155-174.

<sup>23</sup> The post-structuralists use texts and literature often interchangeably to connote what Barthes calls 'speech' and therefore literature exists only in a linguistic field. 'Literature itself is never anything but a single text' which 'always involves a certain experience of limits' and it 'goes to the limit of rules of enunciation.' Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, p. 157.

<sup>24</sup> Sujit Mukherjee offers a similar suggestion: 'in English usage the word Literature originally meant 'knowledge or study of literature', but later came to mean 'literary production in general' or 'body of writings in a period, country or region' before it was narrowed down to the modern meaning of imaginative production.' Mukherjee, Sujit. *Towards a Literary History of India*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1975, p. 41.

<sup>25</sup> Dharwadkar, Vinay. 'Orientalism and the Study of Indian Literatures.' Eds. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer. *Orientalism and the Post-colonial Predicament*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993: pp. 158-185; p. 161.

<sup>26</sup> Sangari concurs with Dharwadkar when she says that English literature was impossible to distinguish from English education and 'in the first three decades of the nineteenth century in Bengal, "literature" as defined through the structuring activities of interconnected institutions, documents and debates on education, colonial self-descriptions, and popular usage emerged as a wide, amorphous category, fed from several directions, including the Orientalist domain and cultural semantic of gender centred non-interference. Literature was used in the evaluative yet generalized, class-specific, eighteenth-century sense of polite and higher learning.' Sangari, Kumkum. 'Literature, female literacy, colonial English: an interface.' *Politics of the Possible, Essays on Gender, History, Narratives, Colonial English*. New Delhi: Tulika Books, 1999: pp. 124-162, 124.

perspectives.<sup>27</sup> While some extended the concept to include everything under the terms literary, others chose multiple defining markers like Sanskrit literature, Indian literature, Hindu literature, Bengali literature, etc. Even these formulations were highly debated in the field of Orientalist studies of the day. To cite a concrete example, Hindu Literature by Epiphanius Wilson clubs together stories from 'Aesop's fables', 'Hitopadesha', 'Nala Damayanti', 'Ramayana and Mahabharata', and 'Sakoontala' with poems by Toru Dutt.<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Reed's discussion on Hindu literature takes up debates under the chapter headings of 'Suttee and the Vedas', 'Codes of Manu', 'The Upanishads and its Monotheism', 'Cosmogony', 'The Origin of Man', 'Ramayana', 'Rewards and Punishment', 'Mahabharata', '[t]he Bhagavat Gita', '[t]he Puranas' and chooses to conclude the book with a section on Krishna.<sup>29</sup>

The ambivalence in terminologies could be largely accepted, given that the Orientalists engaged with a variety of often unrelated subjects from Botany to mythology to Mathematics.<sup>30</sup> Albrecht Weber for example in the late nineteenth century devised a method to study the history of Indian literature. His extensive study of only Sanskrit sources from ancient India, which he paraded as Indian literature, focussed on all the four Vedas, Sutras, Brahmanas, some early poetry and also included 'science and art' (science of language, philosophy, astronomy, medical

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Dodson suggests that the project of Orientalism in India carried immense subversive potential. A certain section of the Indian populace had equal stake in this enterprise: 'Orientalist research into Indian history and language initiated in the eighteenth century through the employment of pundits helped to naturalize the Company into India's accepted socio-political practices of religious and scholarly patronage.' Dodson, Michael. *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture, India 1770-1880*. New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2007; p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> '[N]o one listens now to the precipitate ignorance which would set aside as "heathenish" the high civilization of this great race; but justice is not yet done to their past development and present capacities. If the wit, the morality, and the philosophy of these "beasts of India" (so faithfully rendered by Mr. Harrison Weir) surprise any vigorous mind into further exploration of her literature, and deeper sense of our responsibility in her government, the author will be repaid.' Wilson, Epiphanius. *Hindu Literature*. Middlesex: Echo library, 2006 (1876); p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth A. Reed. *Hindu Literature or The Ancient Books of India*. London: S. C. Griggs and Company, 1890.

<sup>30</sup> As Dharwadkar remarks, these formulations lie 'not so much in the "nature" of the Indian materials as in the intellectual contexts of European disciplinary thought, before, during and after enlightenment.' However, one cannot accept these formulations of the Orientalists as an outcome of the enlightenment as Raf Gelders and S. N. Balagangadhara would like to point out. They claim that undue importance has been accorded to the standardizing practices of the Orientalists and locate the etiology of these readings in the limitation of post colonial historiography. Such formulations seemed to trace back the steps of intellectual thought of the colonizers only until reformation, thereby obliterating the complexity of Western intellectual lineage. While this charge carries significant weight it is impossible to ignore the wealth of novel textualities that sought wider provenance in the nineteenth century. Dharwadkar; 160. Gelders, Raf and S. N. Balagangadhara. 'Rethinking Orientalism: Colonialism and the Study of Indian Traditions.' *History of Religions*. 51. 2 (2011): pp. 101-128; p. 107

science, art of war, music, formative and technical arts), works on Law, custom, and religious worship, Buddhistic Sanskrit Literature.<sup>31</sup>

Some like J.Z. Holwell placed themselves at the other extreme by including almost everything in his oeuvre under one heading, published in 1757.<sup>32</sup> Maurice Winternitz in his *History of Indian Literature* apart from accommodating the usual suspects of Sanskrit literature, carefully includes what he terms as 'scientific literature'.<sup>33</sup> However, other prominent Orientalists make it a point to relate these elements closely together; Warren Hastings writes 'Literature, the Mythology, and Morality of Ancient Hindoos'(1785), Henry Colebrooke's 'Essays on History, Literature, and Religions of Ancient India: Miscellaneous Essays', to name a few.<sup>34</sup>

The Orientalists of the latter half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have also been credited for 'reviving' the past as mythology with the written material text as their primary source.<sup>35</sup> The first supplementary essay to the *Arian Witness* published in 1880 opens with a gratuitous dedication 'to the very scholars [Orientalists] to whom the world is indebted for the publication of the Vedas,' and K.M. Banerjea goes on to say that 'we owe the gigantic feat of recovering the Indian Vedas from the obscurity in which they had so long reposed'.<sup>36</sup> Revival also ensured a spate of translations of ancient Sanskrit texts which were then circulated via the new booming print culture.<sup>37</sup> The knowledge

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<sup>31</sup> To quote: 'The Literature of Indian passes generally for the most ancient literature of which we possess written records and justly so.' Weber, Albrecht. *The History of Indian Literature*. Trans. John Mann and Theodor Zachariae. Edinburgh and London: Ballantyne, Handson and Co, 1882 (1875 in German); p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Holwell, J. Z. *Interesting Historical Events, Relative to the Provinces of Bengal and the Empire of Indostan with a Seasonable Hint and Persuasive to the Honourable, the Court of Directors of the East India Company and also the Mythology and Cosmogony, Fasts and Festivals of the Gentoos and the Followers of the Shastah and a Dissertation on the Metapsychosis, Commonly though Erroneously called the Pythagorean Doctrine*. London: T. Beckett and P. A. D. Hondt., 1767.

<sup>33</sup> Winternitz, Maurice, Trans. Mrs Ketcher. *A History of Indian Literature*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986 (1927) (published earlier in German in 1905).

<sup>34</sup> Herder in his book *Ideen* (1785) published before the major translations from Sanskrit were available also sticks to similar categories, 'again and again, in his discussions of the Brahmans, the caste system of India, the religion, mythology, literature and arts, Herder remarks upon the great antiquity necessary for the development of such a complex, varied, and enduring culture', and 'It was a land where poesy permeated every aspect of human wisdom, creating a sublime harmony of all knowledge. Here philosophy was one with religion, and a Universal Spirit was immanent in every creature and in every creation of nature.' Quoted in Willson, A. Leslie. 'Herder and India: The Genesis of a Mythical Image.' *PMLA*, 70. 5 (1955): pp. 1049-1058.

<sup>35</sup> Taking cue from Edward Said's critical work *Orientalism*, Ronald Inden for instance adapts it to the South Asian context in his monograph *Imagining India*. Raymond Schwab calls it the 'Oriental Renaissance.'

<sup>36</sup> Banerjea, K. M. *Two Essays as Supplements to the Arian Witness*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1880.

<sup>37</sup> Hatcher coins the term 'sastric modernity' to assess the popularity of Sanskrit sources in building new forms of 'exclusionary legacy.' Hatcher, Brian. 'Sastric Modernity, Mediating Sanskrit Knowledge in Colonial Bengal.' Ed. Kaushik Bandyopadhyay. Kolkata: Setu Prakashani, 2010: pp. 117-152; p.151.

hierarchies, although not completely upset (as upper-caste/class people still had the primary access to education), were altered. The availability of reified texts in a language that could be comprehended by a larger audience also introduced new participatory constituencies (the global Anglophone public and the new colonial educated elite among others). In the process it subsequently prioritized certain literatures over the others: 'The literature of India passes generally for the most ancient literature of which we possess written records, and justly so'.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, literature also emerged as a new method of textual organization which was consequently used by the native intelligentsia to fashion certain interpretative meta-levels<sup>39</sup> such as history and mythology.

I contend that mythology as a category of textual organization came into being only in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was appropriated under various conditions. The terms of these appropriations, as I shall elaborate below, facilitated the entry of new participatory constituencies (in this case the Christian converts).

When literature was not applied as an umbrella term, it was used as a relational co-ordinate and cohabited spaces with other disciplines. One of the most important interactions was between ancient Indian literatures and mythology. On the one hand, the Orientalists intended to extend the limits of literature to comprehend an unknown culture and on the other hand with the rise of comparative philology/mythology,<sup>40</sup> there was an attempt to tally antiquarian cultures together. But these interactions were fraught with interpretive tensions. For example, significant amount of scholarly attention has already been devoted to how comparative philology prompted the Aryan Race theory and in a way promoted the theory of comparative civilizations.<sup>41</sup> These engagements gave expression to the

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<sup>38</sup> 'Indian literature divided into two great periods, Vedic and Sanskrit.' Weber, Albrecht. *History of Indian Literature*. Trans. John Mann and Theodor Zachariae. Edinburgh and London: Ballantyne, Handson and Co, 1882 (1875 in German); p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Gerard Genette's concept of metatextuality as invoking texts both explicitly or 'silently' might be contributive. Genette, Gerard. *Palimpsestes*. Paris: Seuil, 1982.

<sup>40</sup> Some have suggested that German Orientalism played a key role in establishing a relationship between comparative philology and mythology. For example, see Cowan, Robert. *The Indo-German Identification, Reconciling South Asian Origins and European Destinies 1765-1885*. Rochester: Camden House, 2010: pp. 61-65 and Tzoref-Ashkenazi, Chen. 'India and the Identity of Europe: The Case of Friedrich Schlegel.' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67. 4 (2006): pp. 713-734; p. 716.

<sup>41</sup> It has been argued that the Aryan Race theory became particularly prominent post the Mutiny to 'urge and justify greater respect for and fairer treatment of Indians.' While the theory promised an association with the British it rejected the possibility of a permanent racial equality. Leopold, Joan.

idea of a common glorious heritage (Europe and India) which saw a steady decline in India (a fallen race) of the 'present'.<sup>42</sup>

The formation of the Asiatic society in 1784 played a significant role in the production of knowledge about India, and their first publication of the *Asiatick Researches* indicates the scope of the organization. It intended to inquire into the 'History and Antiquities' and 'Arts and Sciences and Literature' by placing several disciplines under one rubric.<sup>43</sup> The first publication in 1788 sought to promote the group as the source of inspiration to study literature and philosophy of a country 'every part of which abounds in objects of curious and useful speculation'. Although the society promised to study arts and sciences it still maintained that it was within the domain of 'literary and philosophical pursuits'. As an institute of considerable influence located in a growing colonial metropolis, it was looking towards organizing the study of Orient where the revival of its 'glorious Hindoo past' would be through its 'grand poetry'.<sup>44</sup> On the one hand, the interpretation is extended to include the literary bravura of the past and on the other, it was framed within the expectations of the category of mythology. By extending the frame of reference of literature, the Orientalists preferably sought to draw equivalence largely between mythology, history and literature, as I shall elaborate.

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'British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India 1850-1870.' *The English Historical Review*, 89. 352 (1974): pp. 578-603, 585.

<sup>42</sup> The two major biographies have been of critical importance in this regard: Cannon, Garland. *Oriental Jones: A Biography of Sir William Jones (1746-1794)*. New York: Asia Publishing House, 1964 and Mukherjee, S. N. *Sir William Jones: A Study in Eighteenth-century British Attitudes to India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

<sup>43</sup> *Asiatick Researches or Transactions of the Society for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts and Sciences and Literature of Asia*. London: T. Mairers, 1806. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. The missionaries were not far behind as Wilkins of the London Missionary Society had remarked that the Vedas were 'amongst the oldest literary productions in the world.' Wilkins, William Joseph. *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic*. Calcutta: Thacker Spink and Co., 1882, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Figuera makes a debatable claim in this regard. She opines that it was in fact the nineteenth century that first began to challenge the authority of the Vedas as mere ritualistic texts: 'In India, while the Vedas are revered and recognized as omniscient, the texts themselves, were weakened, altered, or even lost. Although, traditional Hinduism accedes to the infallibility and authority of the Vedas, their importance in practice was textually and historically limited. Before the nineteenth century, they were not used beyond their ritual status as a practical guide. The Vedas were invoked, rather than laboriously analysed as communicative texts. In Europe, different hermeneutic issues presented themselves, since the Veda engendered critical discussion in the form of spurious fragments, misattributions, and forgery. When we speak of the reception of the Veda in pre-nineteenth century Europe and India, we are referring to either an absent or a falsely present text. In critical terms, the Veda functioned as an aporia.' M. Figueira, Dorothy. *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins, Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.

## II

Literature of ancient India shares a significant overlap with what modernity would term as mythology; Susan Sontag would go as far as equating modernity with a post-mythic consciousness.<sup>45</sup> Both the categories of ancient literature (as understood in relation to the medieval and the modern) and mythology are products of the nineteenth century. Given that there is no direct translation of the word mythology in either Hindi or Bangla (words which imply marvellous are the closest) one could question the existence of a well defined discipline of mythology in pre-modern India.<sup>46</sup> In Europe although the term *mythos* was prevalent since antiquity, the underlying concept came to be concretized as a disciplinary category only with modernity. Until the 1700s in Europe, mythology primarily related to Greco-Roman literature and gradually expanded to include Indic, Nordic and African.<sup>47</sup> A large body of texts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was thus systematized as mythology.<sup>48</sup> Given mythology's fairly recent roots it is

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<sup>45</sup> Mythology as a scientific rational concept gains popularity only with Max Müller in the nineteenth century. But the major development and interest in myths seems to have taken place in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Because 'the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century saw the rise and triumph of the rational spirit of inquiry, produced a flood of travel narratives revealing new customs and manners and myths, and saw the rise of deism and natural religion and the related attack on Christianity via the attack on pagan myth. It also witnessed the rise of the historical spirit and the rise of comparative method of inquiry. All these factors encouraged and demanded a complete reinvestigation of pagan myth, for it appeared to be related to religious truth, prehistory, current savage ideas and practices, and philosophical and artistic expression of contemporaneous ideas.' Feldman, Burton, and Richardson, Robert D. *The Rise of Modern Mythology, 1680-1860*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000 (1972); p. xx. For the semantic compass of mythology in the West see: Honko, Lauri. 'The Problem of Defining Myth.' Ed. Alan Dundes. *Sacred Narrative, Readings in the Theory of Myth*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984: pp. 41-52. Most importantly, Susan Sontag identifies the first 'modern' consciousness in the inpretive legacy of scientific enlightenment that began to question myths on the basis of 'realistic' principles. Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Macmillan; p. 5

<sup>46</sup> This problem is part of a larger crisis of translation of concepts that India faced with key empirical categories of the West such as history (*itihāsa*) and religion (*dharmā*). But perhaps it was the part of the larger project of what Halbfass calls the comparative method. Halbfass, Wilhelm. 'India and the Comparative Method.' *Philosophy East and West* 35. 1 (1985): pp. 3-15. But one must not forget that mythology was a fuzzy category even in nineteenth century Europe. With its roots in the Greek *mythos*, mythology was often used to denote something that lay outside the religious purview of Christianity. Lindow observes that mythology or mythography often was a 'philological and literary matter' and frequently uses them 'purely for explication of religious history' as an 'exercise in reconstruction.' Lindow, John. 'Mythology and Mythography.' Eds. Carol J. Clover and John Lindow. *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, Volume 45, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005; p. 23. Also see, Hāns Hārḍār. 'Rabīndranāther purāṇ'bhittik byaṅgalikhan.' *Tumi naba naba rūpe eso prāṇe. sārḍha-janmaśatabarṣe rabīndranāth*. Ed. Debabrata Ghoṣ. Kal'kātā: Progressive Publishers: pp. 138-50.

<sup>47</sup> Feldman, Burton, and Robert D. Richardson. *The Rise of Modern Mythology, 1680-1860*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000 (1972); p. xxi.

<sup>48</sup> But perhaps it is important to note that the Portuguese missionaries had begun collecting 'mythological narratives' as early as the seventeenth century. For example, see Casartelli, L. C. 'Hindu Mythology and Literature as Recorded by Portuguese Missionaries of the Early 17th Century.' *Anthropos*, 2. 2 (1907): pp. 275-281.

important to understand its relationship with colonial modern knowledge practices.<sup>49</sup>

Mythology was used as a legitimate source of knowledge within specific contexts in the colonial knowledge framework.<sup>50</sup> The fuzzy temporal (ancient) and authorial (written and re-written down the ages) origins of mythology coupled with its textual continuity (in terms of Sanskrit texts) makes its credibility malleable. Mythology in the form of literature under controlled conditions could be used as legitimate sources of knowledge in the absence of other forms of material history (or history writing).<sup>51</sup> The duality of mythology both as a confined (for example, within Brahminical ritualistic practices) and porous (for instance, adapted in localized oral cultures) knowledge pool allowed it to be appropriated within varied (often contradictory) epistemic paradigms. Two paradigms are pertinent to the discussion here—mythology as the reservoir of knowledge about Hindus and as source of high literature, dissociated from ritualistic practices.

Revival of mythology as literature divorced from religious practices (for example brahminical codes) generated new possibilities of interpretative authority. In his 'Third Anniversary Discourse' Jones had highlighted the 'antiquity' of the Sanskrit language which was 'more perfect than Greek, more copious than Latin',

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<sup>49</sup> Sukumari Bhattacharji for instance would trace the roots of studying Indian mythology to Western traditions. Bhattacharji, Sukumari. *The Indian Theogony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 1-3.

<sup>50</sup> One of the most contentious issues was the codification of the Hindu legal subjects in colonial India with the help of textual sources. For example, see Cohn, Bernard S. 'Law and the colonial state in India.' Eds. June Starr and Jane F. Kollier. *History and Power in the Study of Law: New Directions in Legal Anthropology*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989: pp. 131-152. This practice incidentally found its takers in 2013, when the Allahabad High Court declared that a temple at Ayodhya indeed marked the birthplace of the mythological god Rama.

<sup>51</sup> There is a debate as to the context of the 'absence' of history. Contends several scholars that this absence was centred around a positivist definition of modern history propagated by Robert Orme and James Mill (among others) and successfully resurrected by post-colonial scholars like Ashis Nandy, Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha. Others have refuted these claims by invoking pre-modern Indian concepts of writings about the past (Sheldon Pollock, Sanjay Subramanyam, David Schulman among others). But the common denominator for both these interactions remains their return to mythologies. An apt example is perhaps Kumkum Chatterjee's discovery of itihāsa in the depths of *maṅgal'kavya*. Chatterjee, Kumkum. 'The Persianization of "Itihāsa": Performance Narratives and Mughal Political Culture in Eighteenth-Century Bengal.' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 67. 2 (2008): pp. 513-543. A handy tool to understanding the complexity of the alleged paucity of history in India is to take to the five point summarization that Arvind Sharma offers: '(1) lack of chronology (Pitt 1958: 20), (2) lack of history (McCrindle 1960: 109; Aiyangar 1941: 145; Mill 1975: 35), (3) lack of sense of history (Aiyangar 1941: 416), (4) lack of historiography (Majumdar 1952: 47-51), and (5) the lack of a theory of history (Asthana 1992: 20), the net effect is the same. The alleged lack of historiography and a theory of history in India only buttresses the previous claim of a lack of a sense of history, while its abundant history makes the lack of a sense of it only stand out more starkly.' Sharma, Arvind. 'Did the Hindus Lack a Sense of History?' *Numen*, 50. 2 (2003): pp. 190-227; p. 191.

and suggested a common origin for the antiquarian cultures.<sup>52</sup> But the theory that linked these ancient cultures together for Jones is the mythology that they shared. According to him there are four 'principal forces' of mythology: 'historical or natural truth has been perverted into fable by ignorance', 'a wild admiration of heavenly bodies' linked to astronomy, 'numberless divinities have been created by the magic of poetry', and lastly, 'metaphors and allegories of moralists and metaphysicians'.<sup>53</sup> His ideas about mythology point to later studies in mythology and psychoanalysis, which illustrate compelling 'archetypes' that frame similar myths in different cultures. Jones not only studies myths to reveal the ignorance of the less rationally endowed ancients, but grants them the power of imagination to have created a mythic corpus of divinities.<sup>54</sup> The engagement with mythology hinged on the power of the revivalist to prioritize recovery of certain texts and grant them literary merit. In this formulation, reviving mythology enroute literature allows credence to both the person (that is, the Orientalist) 'reviving' it in the late eighteenth century and the magical poets of mystified antiquity.

In terms of the response of the colonial machinery, the East India Company seemed to agree that the revival is best savoured when it pertains to the 'literary treasures of India'. These treasures can then be used to induce wonder in the European mind. Even when the 'absurd theology' of the Hindu could be dismissed, the literary quality of its mythology could still be appreciated.

It is little more than half a century since Sanscrit literature began to attract the attention of the European scholars. Previously to that period it was, with few exceptions as little known among them as that of any region under heaven. And when after the triumphant progress of our arms in the east such men as Jones and Wilkins favoured us with the glimpse of the literary treasures of India, the astonishment of Europe was extreme. Little it

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<sup>52</sup> Jones, William. 'On the Hindu' (Delivered at the Asiatic Society of Bengal 2nd February 1786). *Asiatick Researches*: pp. 422-3.

<sup>53</sup> Jones, William. 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India.' *The Works of Sir William Jones. Volume III*. London: John Stockdale and John Walker, 1788; p. 318. *A discourse on the Institution of a Society for Enquiring into the History, Civil and Natural, The Antiquities, Arts, Sciences of Asia*. Vol. 3. His ideas about mythology point to later studies in mythology and psychoanalysis which talk about 'archetypes' that frame similar myths in different cultures. Carl Jung highlights the possibility of mythology provided psychic archetypes which are 'ancient or archaic images that derive from the collective unconscious.' Jung, C. G. 'Approaching the Unconscious.' *Man and his Symbols*. New York: Laurell-Dell, 1968; p. 34.

<sup>54</sup> Javed Majeed is of the opinion that Jones successfully blended different mythologies to render them indistinguishable to the end, threading together disparate cultural locations of the British empire. '[W]hat has been ignored is the fact that Jones's attempt to define an idiom in which cultures could be compared and contrasted was in part a response to the need for such an idiom in the late eighteenth century. It was only through the use of such an idiom that the cultures of the heterogeneous British Empire could be compared, the nature of British rule overseas determined, and the empire unified by the same ethos.' Majeed, Javed. *Ungoverned Imaginings, James Mill's The History of British India and Orientalism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992; p. 14.

had been thought that the absurd theology of the Hindoos contained poems, which for grandeur of conception and fertility of invention, were not often surpassed by the productions of the Western world. We found that the obscure nations of Hindoostan could boast of compositions so ancient, that the languages in which they were preserved had, during more than twenty centuries, ceased to be oral; and that, even rejecting the exaggerations of Indian chronology, some of them must have existed considerably more than 3,000 years.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, a revival entailed a filtered approval which clearly championed literary taste over other forms of textual engagement. Romanticism's taste for the Oriental complemented the interest in the literary investment in India.<sup>56</sup> In keeping with the later day Orientalist charges, it could be well added that literature was perhaps the chosen vehicle because the artistic calibre could be appreciated by a discerning audience or dismissed as temporally discontinuous in an age defined by rationalism.<sup>57</sup> As K.M. Banerjea had noted, '[t]he idea of education or the improvement of the mind was suggested to our rulers for the first time by the Charter Act of 1813, which ordained that lakh of Rupees should be annually spent from the public purse as, "for reviving literature in India", so also, for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories'. He goes on to suggest that the Indians' thirst for Western science was quenched with liberal doses of Oriental literature.<sup>58</sup>

But as a category, literature has also been significantly used by the most prominent of Anglicists of the day, Thomas Macaulay. His 'Minute upon Indian Education' (1835), had commenced on working out a mechanism of understanding and defining parameters of civilization on the basis of their literature. First, in rejecting the entire stock of native knowledge and then, advocating a new English-medium education, he takes recourse to 'native literature' which he had studied in translation. He barterers all 'native literature' for a single shelf of a good European

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<sup>55</sup> Review Article. *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies*, Vol. 25, 1828. By East India Company; p. 218.

<sup>56</sup> Particularly famous were Thomas De Quincy's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822), Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), Wordsworth's *Excursion* (1814), Robert Southey's *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), Lady Morgan's novel *The Missionary* (1811), Elizabeth Hamilton's two-volume *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796). For a discussion on the Romantic engagement with the Orient see Schwab, Raymond. *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. Rudd, Andrew. *Sympathy and India in British Literature, 1770-1830*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

<sup>57</sup> For the effect of positivism and enlightenment aesthetics on the colonial Bengali intellectual see Forbes, Geraldine. 'The Colonial Encounter: The Ideas of Auguste Comte in Nineteenth-century Bengal.' *Historical Papers*, 10. 1 (1975): pp. 147-166.

<sup>58</sup> Banerjea, K. M. *The Proper Place of Oriental Literature in Indian Collegiate Education. A lecture, read before the Bethune society on February 13, 1868*. Calcutta: Thacker Spink and Co., 1868; p. 24.

library and in this mechanism, literature has to stand test to 'facts', but 'when we pass from works of imagination to work in which facts are recorded, and general principles investigated, the superiority of the European becomes absolutely immeasurable'.<sup>59</sup>

This was not just limited to the members of the administrative class but included the missionaries as well. William Ward on the one hand denounced Hinduism as 'the most PUERILE, IMPURE, AND BLOODY OF ANY SYSTEM OF IDOLATRY THAT WAS EVER ESTABLISHED ON EARTH' [sic], and on the other hand suggested that a society be built to study the ancient literature of the Hindus that included the entire corpus of texts that the Hindus were believed to have written. He promoted a textual independence of literature at the cost of participatory religious practices.

The author would recommend that a society should be formed, either in Calcutta or London, for improving our knowledge of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos, that after collecting sufficient funds, this society should purchase an estate, and erect a *Pantheon* which should receive the images of the most eminent of gods, cut in marble—a Museum to receive all the curiosities of India, and a library to perpetuate its literature [...] Ancient writing and the monuments of the Hindoos are daily becoming more scarce, and more difficult of acquisition: they will soon irrecoverably perish [...] carrying down to latest posterity.<sup>60</sup>

Such ambivalences therefore set mythology as a master narrative which could be used to fashion a vocabulary common to all the stakeholders of colonial modernity. Having said that, one crucial clarification is in order. The mythology that both the Orientalists and the Christian converts wanted to appropriate was selective. It was important that the literature that they sought to vilify or exalt had little to do with Islam or Islamic mythology, thereby severing the crucial tie with the more immediate pre-modern. Orientalist appropriations coupled with a growing sense of Hindu nationalism forged a modern mythic revival that sought to order Hindu mythology as the only subterranean continuity unhindered by a foreign Islamic rule. The Hindu converts to Christianity themselves were weary of the

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<sup>59</sup> In his statement he had said: 'I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education.' Macaulay, Thomas. 'Minutes on Indian Education.' *Lord Macaulay's Legislative Minutes*. Cumberlege: Oxford University Press, 1946 (1835); p. 31.

<sup>60</sup> Ward, William. *A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos: Including a Minute Description of Their Manners, Customs and Translations From Their Principal Works*. Vol. IV. London: Black, Kingsbury, Parbury and Allen, 1820. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.

Islamic past, let alone Islamic mythology. Shoshee Chunder Dutt, for example, uses the Islamic past to talk about tyrannical rule and oppression which has been successfully overcome with the British rule. In the same breath he squarely blames the 'false' religion for all manner of misgivings.

This country is full of intellect. It were absurd to dispute or deny it. There is not a single heathen region on the face of the world, wherein, in its palmist tune, more proofs of vigorous intellect have been displayed than this. Great powers of mind have been evinced here even from the earliest days of antiquity; nor can they be said to have disappeared now altogether from lapse of time. They have undoubtedly been weakened. False religion had given them a wrong impetus; misrule and oppression had attempted to crush them down. But better days have dawned on India. Tyranny has passed away, and it is only necessary to withdraw the present generation from the influence of a corrupt religion, to ensure the resuscitation of worth and intelligence.<sup>61</sup>

Yet another article published in *The Bengal Magazine*, which sought to outline the national character of the Hindus suggested, 'the greatest evil that the long continued Mahomedan rule or rather misrule, inflicted on the Hindus of Bengal was the deterioration of their intellectual and moral character, which it brought about'.<sup>62</sup> Brahmabandhab Upadhyay goes even further to suggest that in the strict codes of conduct which prohibited the Hindus from eating, drinking or touching the muslims, was instrumental in avoiding a catastrophe for the race (*jāti'bibhrāt*).<sup>63</sup>

Therefore recovery, if any, had to be limited to the untainted ancient Hindu corpus where the Islamic rule served as a temporal break, which in turn made the existence of modernity tenable.<sup>64</sup> This was in tandem with the history writing processes that governed the upper caste Hindu intelligentsia. The break from the

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<sup>61</sup> Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. 'Young Bengal; or, the hopes of India.' *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*. Calcutta: F. Carbery, 1854: pp. 8-9.

<sup>62</sup> 'The National Character of the Hindus of Bengal.' *The Bengal Magazine*. Vol. 4, 1874; p. 334.

<sup>63</sup> Ghosh, Bārid'baraṇ. *Brahmabāndhab Upādhyāyer Racanā Saṁgraha*, Kalikātā: Kalej Strit Pāblikeśan, 1987; p.34.

<sup>64</sup> Originating in the nineteenth century, these ideas found their way into the reading of literary histories. The well known Indian English poet and critic, R. Parthasarathy observes: 'Seven hundred and fifty years of uninterrupted foreign rule (1192-1947) had disrupted the continuity of the Indian tradition. However, the tradition survived underground, and fertilized the Indian worldview. With the islamization of the subcontinent, the spirit of free, critical enquiry that had earlier so characterized Indian thought became muted, only to reappear in the encounter with the West. The Indian renaissance began in the late eighteenth century with the rediscovery of the past by both European and Indian scholars, and its significance is best expressed by William Jones in "The Third Anniversary Discourse".' Parthasarathy, R. 'Tradition and the Indian Writer.' *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 32. 2 (1992): pp. 134-148; p.134.

'past' that the nineteenth-century Bengal imagined came with a leap in 'time'. The immediate Muslim past was sacrificed for a distant misty present, with the promise of high literature.<sup>65</sup>

Mythology which was 'revived' in the form of a written high literary culture was also often easily dissociated from the everyday ritualistic practices. In this scheme (which has been used extensively by the Christian converts) the ancient mythology was revived as literature (highly textualized and formal) and not as living religious methods. Comparative religious studies endorsed the revered mythological narratives of the Greek and the Latin, (whose antiquity as a glorious lineage was 'discovered' during the European Renaissance,) to be compared to the Hindu mythological narratives.<sup>66</sup> While the Greek and the Latin Gods were emblematic of a glorious past which bore no direct relationship to the everyday practices of the Europeans, the Hindu mythology was an integral part of the daily ritual practices of a Hindu. Reverend Sir George W. Cox points to this central difference as he advocates a differentiation between Greek theology and their mythology, and suggests that it works only 'if we use religion in the sense attached to the word by Locke or Newton, Milton or Butler'.<sup>67</sup>

This process of understanding mythology as stultified, however, often drew from the perception that mythology is derived from a high Sanskrit literature. While it is true that Sanskrit always occupied an exalted status in the linguistic imagination of South Asia, Pollock has argued that by the sixteenth century the importance of Sanskrit had dwindled.<sup>68</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj has recognized that in the

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<sup>65</sup> This was not limited to Bengal. It finds parallels at least in North India where this opposition is more clearly etched with language acting as the barrier. I am particularly hinting at the formation of the Hindi public sphere in opposition to Urdu. Orsini, Francesca. *The Hindi Public Sphere: Language and Literature in the Age of nationalism 1920-1940*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002. Dalmia, Vasudha. *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhāratendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth-Century Banaras*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

<sup>66</sup> Schlegel in fact directly compares the revival of ancient Indian texts with the European Renaissance. 'May Indic studies find as many disciples and protectors as Germany and Italy saw spring up in such great numbers for Greek studies in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and may they be able to do as many things in as short a time. The Renaissance of antiquity promptly transformed and rejuvenated all the sciences, we might add that it rejuvenated and transformed the world. We could even say that the effect of Indic studies, if these enterprises were taken up and introduced into learned circles with the same energy today, would be no less great or far-reaching.' *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808). Quoted in Schwab, Raymond. *The Oriental Renaissance, Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East 1680-1880*. Trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984; p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> Cox, Reverend Sir George W. *The Mythology of the Aryan Nations*. London: Kegan Paul and Co, 1878; p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> Pollock vociferously argues for a Sanskrit culture in Asia in pre-modern times which geographically extended beyond the limits of South Asia. But Sanskrit progressively lost its agency in

context of Bengali, the reduced accessibility of Sanskrit in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century Bengal brought with it a rupture in the traditional continuity of literary culture.<sup>69</sup> According a premium to Sanskrit mythological texts (best exemplified by the resounding success of William Jones’s translation of *Sacountala*)<sup>70</sup> ensured that it was at once part of a textualized culture militating against all its subterranean living variants. In aligning what we might call a ‘dead mythology’ with a ‘living’ one, the literary revival was successful in regarding mythology as a survivor. Besides, the mythology that was revived was not of a uniform category. The latitude that mythology offered permitted its appropriation both as ‘living’ and as ‘dead’.<sup>71</sup> The obvious limit to this premise is the assumption concerning the category of mythology itself.<sup>72</sup>

An imperative question underlies this proposition: for whom? Even for the elite intellectual Hindus we have observed that mythology as textual culture was separate from mythology as lived religious practices. But these categorizations were continuously challenged, and most prominent among them was the creation of the figure of the *bhārata mātā* (Mother India) in the late nineteenth century, where ritual practices were used to retrospectively construct a textual history.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, it was not just the specific meanings of mythology and literature but perhaps their lack of it that promoted a common vocabulary and, in extension, new constituencies.

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the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; Pollock, Sheldon. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006; p. 105.

<sup>69</sup> Kaviraj, Sudipta. ‘The Sudden Death of Sanskrit Knowledge.’ *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 33 (2005): pp. 119–142.

<sup>70</sup> The enormity and the implications of the success of Jones’s translation is discussed in detail in Figueira, Dorothy Matilda. *Translating the Orient: The Reception of Śākuntalā in Nineteenth Century Europe*. New York: SUNY Press, 1991: pp. 9–13.

<sup>71</sup> Mircea Eliade beginning with the Greek *mythos* discusses the various stages of the change of the meaning and value of myths and points to the fact that it was indeed Enlightenment Europe that provided ‘the intellectual stage and historical moment when myth became a “fiction”’, but he believes that in some societies like India “myth is —or was until very recently—“living”, in the sense that it supplies models for human behaviour.’ Eliade, Mircea. *Myth and Reality*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper and Roy Publishers, 1963; p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> This unique churning of mythologies to stand testimony not only to literature but to law, history, science and all manners of disciplines in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century, came to organize Hindu mythology first as Hindu and secondly both as dead and alive. A body of texts which promised a continuum was identified as representative of a religion, namely Hindu.

<sup>73</sup> The figure of the *bhārata mātā* was a modern mythology forged by drawing from several mythological sources related to the jāti identity as well as the female source of power (śakti). A significant body of work exists in this regard but for an insightful discussion on the interaction between a textual culture and ritual practices related to the cult of *bhārata mātā* in colonial Bengal see: Chowdhury-Sengupta, Indira. ‘Mother India and Mother Victoria: Motherhood and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal.’ *South Asia Research* 12. 1 (1992): pp. 20–37 and Ramaswamy, Sumathi. ‘The Goddess and the Nation: Subterfuges of Antiquity, the Cunning of Modernity.’ *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, 2002: pp. 549–66.

This follows the conception of mythology as a second order semiotic system, a pre-existing order of symbolic relationships which can be appropriated in the present to imbue it with new meanings.<sup>74</sup> Often for the Orientalists, mythologies of the Hindu past were stultified (if not dead they were comatose) and hence could be easily appropriated as imaginative legacies (the results of which could be discerned in the Romantic literary output in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries).<sup>75</sup> For missionaries the mythology was often an indicator of the continuity of a debauched Hindu moral universe, which reformists like Raja Ram Mohan Roy would turn around to propose a hierarchical understanding of ancient sources which would later be appropriated by the Christian converts and religious reformers to a large extent. Roy proposes that the Vedānta philosophy supported by the Upaniṣads account for a monotheistic religion which can be called pure and which has since then witnessed corruption and that it should be distinguished from myth.<sup>76</sup>

Mythology came to stand for a porous category that stood the test of time but whose testimony was essential nevertheless not quite credible (for example,

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<sup>74</sup> For example, Roland Barthes notes: 'Semiology has taught us that myth has the task of giving a historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal.' Barthes, Roland. 'Myth Today.' *Mythologies*, selected and translated from the French by Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972; p. 142.

<sup>75</sup> A lot scholarly attention has been devoted to the imaginative legacies of Orientalism in European literature. To name a few, Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Brantlinger, Patrick. *Rule of darkness: British literature and imperialism, 1830-1914*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

<sup>76</sup> Roy like many others to follow would criticize the worship of a-moral gods of the Hindu pantheon. His opposition to the worship of Krishna may serve as a case in point. 'His worship was made to consist in the institution of his image or picture, accompanied by one or more females, and in contemplation of his history. And behaviour, such as his perpetration of murder upon a female of the name Putana; his compelling a great number of married and unmarried women to stand before him denuded; his debauching them and several others to the mortal affliction of their husbands and relations; his annoying them, by violating the laws of cleanliness and other facts of the same nature.' Roy, Rammohun. 'A Defence of Hindu Theism'(Calcutta, 1817) in Eds. Kalidas Nag and Debajyoti Burman. *The English Works of Rammohun Roy, Part II*. Calcutta: Sadharan Brahma Samaj, 1946: pp. 81-94, 92. As it sought to establish a covalence between antiquarian mythologies it also came to ratify biblical ones. The most common among them was the myth of the deluge in the book of the Genesis which brought together different schools of mythologies on the same plane. Alun David argues that the criss-crossing of biblical references in the studies concerning Hinduism in the late eighteenth century came from conflicting understandings of history itself in Britain. 'Investigations of the unfamiliar religion of India had been used in attempts to discredit orthodox Christianity, most notoriously by Voltaire in his *Philosophie de l'histoire* (1765). By contrast, the fundamental accuracy of the Bible as history was not questioned by most Britons, a belief shored up by a number of works aiming to reconcile the records of far-flung ancient cultures with Mosaic history—the most popular was Samuel Shuckford's *Sacred and Profane History of the World Connected* (1728).' David, Alun. 'Sir William Jones, Biblical Orientalism and Indian Scholarship.' *Modern Asian Studies*, 30. 1 (1996): pp. 173-84; p. 175. 'Jones also deciphers Indian histories in terms of the mosaic chronology. He declares, "we might produce the same account of creation and the fall, expressed by symbols very nearly similar, from the Puranas themselves, and even from the Vedas, which appears to stand next in antiquity to the five books of Moses. Similarly, the deluge is 'an historical fact admitted as true by every nation, to whose literature we have access.' Majeed, Javed. *Ungoverned Imaginings* (1992), p. 35.

'enlightenment rationality' challenged the claims of mythology as testimony). It was dead so long as it was identified with an antiquarian past buried in the depths of time, but came alive when it cohabited the debased present.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, unlike the Greek and the Roman mythologies, Hindu mythology could enjoy an exalted status as much as it could stand for ethical paucity of the Hindus.<sup>78</sup> For example, the degradation of the Hindus was explained in terms of a moral decline in relationship to time as *kaliyuga*. Here myths and mythologies played a key role in discerning the moral compass of the Indians (we shall discuss the crucial relationship of mythology with time in the following section).<sup>79</sup>

### III

The literary revival was concomitant with the desire to propel 'native subjects' into modernity (manifested in the eager valorization of the literary by the Bengali colonial intellectuals as we have discussed in the beginning of this section). One of the key markers of modernity was the subsequent claim to history.<sup>80</sup> With the advent of colonial modernity, Indians were faced with the possibility of confronting History<sup>81</sup> as the enlightenment understood it (characterized by the

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<sup>77</sup> What makes this equivalence even more complicated is the fact that the overpopulated Hindu pantheon had all too human Gods who were unable to cope with the pressures of conforming to the ideals of Christian morality. '[T]he Gods and Goddesses are neither remote nor really frightening or incomprehensible, as in many other religions. Their adventures are real enough for us to empathise with time, and what makes us for this feeling of reality is that they not only maintain lofty principles but also have some of our own weaknesses and feelings.' Jairazbhoy, Nazir Ali. *Hi-Tech Shiva and Other Apocryphal Stories: An Academic Allegory*. CA: Apsara Media, 1990: pp. viii-ix.

<sup>78</sup> This line of argument was adopted by most native converts. For instance, refer to the chapter on Shoshee Chunder Dutt.

<sup>79</sup> Dorothy M. Figuera's definition of myths in the context of eighteenth and nineteenth century India is quite apt in this context: 'Myth functions as a narrative which possesses credibility and authority and whose charters are manipulated to elicit sentiments which, in turn, construct social formations or legitimize changed social and political conditions.' Figuera, Dorothy. *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins, Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002; p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Kumkum Chatterjee takes on the theoretical premise of Eric Hobsbawm to suggest that a potential modern nation must have a history. The nineteenth-century Bengali intelligentsia responded to the call for history by the making the search for it a public discourse. Chatterjee, Kumkum. 'The King of Controversy: History and Nation-Making in Late Colonial India.' *The American Historical Review*, 110. 5 (2005): pp. 1454-1475.

<sup>81</sup> Recent research has also suggested that there existed a concept of history in the manner of truth producing narratives in sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century South India. However, these claims are equally problematic, as they are part of an agenda to parade the pre-modern India as the genesis of most 'modern' ideas. Rao, Velcheru Narayana, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600-1800*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001; p. 253. One interesting question that Subrahmanyam poses is pertinent to our discussion. 'As we know, the 20th century prejudice is that history must be written in prose and that it must approximate the novel in its structure. The claim by Hegel that prose was the only viable medium in which history could be written is well known. Our contention, on the contrary, is that history can and has been written in a variety of genres. Indeed, we posit that at different moments in time communities expressed history through the dominant, or most prestigious literary genre that was available to them. Therefore, separating "history" from "non-history" is often not a problem of separating two distinct and given literary

tripartite division of ancient, modern and medieval).<sup>82</sup> As modernity began to be understood in relative temporal terms, a break with the medieval was necessary to forge a relationship with the modern. This often entailed the process of flattening ‘time’ as history struggled to animate a narrative of linear movement. As has been argued extensively by Sudipta Kaviraj<sup>83</sup> a literary revival entailed obvious questions about the relationship between history and mythology. Faced with the possibility of writing the History of India, the Orientalists had depended on the ‘literary’ narratives which were suspect.<sup>84</sup> But during the course of the nineteenth century the bhadrakal would time and again call upon it to frame their own history while looking to construct a pre-colonial past where selective Pauranic narratives would serve as historical facts.<sup>85</sup> Nebulous origins of mythology and its even more obscure and allegorical authorship meant that locating it on a colonial temporal scale was fraught with difficulties.<sup>86</sup>

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genres. Rather, it is one of identifying the key “sub generic markers” that are meant to lead us to understand what the intention of the text is, and whether it is in fact making claims to being history.’ Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. ‘Europe and the People without Historiography; or, Reflections on a Self-Inflicted Wound.’ *Historically Speaking*, 5. 4 (March 2004): pp. 36-40, 37.

<sup>82</sup> However historians have contrary claims to show that Indians in fact had indigenous modes of history writings. Ranajit Guha explicates the ‘Indian’ understanding of history: ‘It alerts us to the possibility that there might have been a time when the Indian idea of historicity did not conform, as it does now, to the Western notion of history. A twofold distinction is at work here. In the first place, *aitihya*, etymologically a cognate of *itihāsa*, the generic name for narratives of the past, concerns, as we have seen, a process of transmission from one generation to the next. An ordered but absolutely open-ended succession, it is a temporal flow with no room in its concept for deposits or even sedimentation. Which is why—and this is the other distinctive feature of its content, as a serialized story (*kathā*) or a set of shastric lessons (*upadesā*), has no standing at all as objective evidence.’ Guha, Ranajit. ‘Writing the Past where Generations Meet.’ *The Small Voice of History*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2009; p. 334.

<sup>83</sup> Kaviraj, Sudipta. *The Unhappy Consciousness*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

<sup>84</sup> Majeed had noted: ‘Jones’ emphasis on the use of the imagination to re-construct distant events which could be called mythical was close to the notion of mythological history as articulated in the biblical criticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which entailed the view that myth was not mere fable or unworthy fiction, but “the oldest history and oldest philosophy”’, Majeed, Javed. *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill’s The History of British India and Orientalism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992; p. 35.

<sup>85</sup> With Bankim, as many other stalwarts of his age, there would emerge a ‘literary’ turn for ‘history.’ In his essay on history, Bankim would urge to create a continuum by discrediting the Muslim past of Bengal. It is at this juncture that ‘Purāṇa’ would make for a historical past. However, it was not an easy task for Bankim to have accomplished which is apparent in his *Kṛṣṇacarita*, where he tries to find a real kernel garbed in mythology. Krishna becomes humane to inhabit ‘historical time.’ Tagore in his essay, *Imrej o bhārat’bāsī* translated as ‘The English and the Indians’ accorded Purāṇa a sacred iconic status, as the true history. ‘We read in our ancient Purana history, there only on the occasion of a lapse does Alakshmi get a chance to enter.’ Finding historicity in the legions of Purāṇas perhaps began with the close interactions of the pandits with the Orientalists. It began with *Purāṇārthaprakāś* (1783) by Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīś (the acolyte of William Jones). For details, see Rocher, Rosane. ‘The Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa, an Eighteenth-Century Pandit in British Employ.’ *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 109. 4 (1989): pp. 627-633.

<sup>86</sup> Rudd, Andrew. *Sympathy and India in British Literature 1770-1830*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. ‘Indian religion particularly Hinduism, became less an object of scholarly curiosity and increasingly one of moral alarm and revulsion in the eyes of the assurgent evangelical lobby. Hindu beliefs, ceremonies and rites were construed in new ways that may be characterised as gothic. As with

Mythology as literature and mythology as history,<sup>87</sup> both discoveries of colonial modernity were faced with the challenge of confronting concepts of 'time'.<sup>88</sup> Mythology could be conceptualized in this regard both within the limits of time and outside it. This dialectic of belonging both within and without time offered the complex identities (in this case an upper caste Christian identity) occasioned by colonialism to appropriate their own time.

### *Mythology, modernity and the politics of 'time'*

Time is a category under siege in the narration of modernity. Apart from the obvious scientific conceptualization of time as a mathematical fourth dimension, it came to function as a highly resonant mode of cultural and political praxis. The project of Western modernity (which posited itself as irrefutable) allowed different concepts of time to co-exist, even as it looked towards a linear movement.<sup>89</sup> Modernity was inevitable and it was obvious that not all cultures, races, ethnicities could have access to similar paces of time. In the colonial context, even as modernity (firmly grounded in the present) suggested a movement towards progress, it was understood that the advancement would be of varying dimensions and orders.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, even within an umbrella concept of universal progressive time, several understandings of movements of time (progressive, regressive, stagnant) could potentially co-exist. As I have elaborated in the earlier section, mythology is a modern construct. Incorporating mythology in the lore of modern narratives came with its own share of problems of temporal ambivalences. Mythology in regard to

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the gothic novels of the eighteenth century, this involved an interplay of sympathies and antipathies between the reader (or spectator), the perpetrators of evil and their victims. [...] British sympathies were newly being marshalled to reform a religion that was widely regarded as cruel, corrupt and irrational, the diametric opposite of Protestant evangelicalism'; p. 118.

<sup>87</sup> The understanding of the Bengal Renaissance has been both in terms of the 'literary' and the 'historical.' An apt example perhaps would be David Kopf's understanding of this problem, wherein he says, '[t]he literature of the nineteenth-century Bengal Renaissance falls into two broad categories: the popular image of the renaissance among Bengalis proud of their recent heritage and the scholarly notion of renaissance as a problem in British Indian historiography.' David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, Chicago: University of California Press, 1969; p.3.

<sup>88</sup> Clare Talwalker in the context of textbooks for children in Maharashtra makes an interesting observation, mythology played an important role in 'drawing together of Europe and India—the naturalizing of the conjoining of colonial power and colony mediated by such things as science and Christianity “and worked towards a ‘universal moral code, derived from Christianity.’” Talwalker, Clare. 'Colonial Dreaming: Textbooks in the Mythology of “Primitive Accumulation”.' *Dialectical Anthropology*. Vol. 29 (2005): pp. 1-34; p. 14.

<sup>89</sup> The most vociferous proponent of this phenomenon was perhaps Hegel. His concept of monolithic world history (where components other than the occident by design were unintentional participants), has defined modernity as a universal and inevitable phenomenon in the context of *weltgeist*. Quoted in Halbfass, Wilhelm. *India and Europa*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988; p. 303.

<sup>90</sup> The most obvious example is the Eisenstadt's concept of multiple modernities. Eisenstadt, Shmuel Noah. 'Multiple Modernities.' *Daedalus* (2000): pp. 1-29.

modernity embodied the twin functions of being in and out of time. To establish the pre-modern, the logic of modernity had to partially digest mythology even when it was paraded as the antithesis of modernity. I shall argue in the course of this section that this temporal schizophrenia was essential to the literary imagination of nineteenth-century Bengal for several narratives to co-exist.

The Christian converts clearly advocated Westernized modernity (as we have observed in the last two chapters) and brandished their Christian identity as the source of partaking in the inevitable movement towards progress. They were assured a berth in Western modernity owing to their stake in a universal Christendom. Concomitantly as colonial subjects they were doomed as they lagged behind in time (in the sense of stages of historical development) in relation to their European modern contemporaries. The colonial intelligentsia centred their claims to modernity by activating latent Hindu concepts in new frames of reference. In the colonial Bengali society, the converts were marginalized by the largely Hindu elite intelligentsia as social outcasts. The Christian converts' stake in the Hindu imagination was to ensure the legitimacy of their elite social standing (their insistence on caste hierarchies being a case in point, as demonstrated in the last chapter). Therefore, both in the colonizer's concept of time and in the native intelligentsia's negotiation they were denied complete participation. I shall argue that this crisis was mitigated by the crucial invocation of mythology as shared 'time'.<sup>91</sup> The previous section has contended that the productive ambiguity of mythology came to be the model relativistic tool that allowed one to selectively tap into the cultural subconscious where the literary met the historical. The overlapping spaces of history, mythology and literature initiated a unique opportunity to carve particular genealogies in the interstices of larger determining narratives (for example, Nationalism and Modernity). The Christian neophytes therefore used this

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<sup>91</sup> Kumkum Sangari suggests that the revival of the pre-colonial past suited the interests of both the colonizer and the elite colonized as it could provide 'models of "feudal" governance for the purpose of colonial rule. In this sense it was, selectively, to become the usable past both for some of the colonizers and a fraction of the colonized; the traditions they invented were extrapolated from and engrafted on existing and emerging structures of inequality. For both, civilization, or at least one meaning of it, was a useable past composed of hierarchical stratifications and the cultural products and practices of upper-caste or elite and ruling groups; it was based on a joint elision of the fact that in earlier historical periods too assertions of continuity implicated in the production of ideologies on behalf of such groups.' Sangari, Kumkum; *Politics of the Possible, Essays on Gender, History, Narrative, Colonial English*, New Delhi: Tulika, 1999; p. 103.

porous terrain, drawing from a common vocabulary, to forge new linkages and create their own narrative tradition.<sup>92</sup>

To fathom the modalities of narrative time of the Christian converts it is essential to read into the chronological compass of Western modernity. Contemporary Western critical narrative theories have tried to come to terms with 'time' as the most elusive yet potent signifier which made its mark with modernity. Although modernity places a premium on the break with the past, the relationship between 'past' and 'present' as mutually exclusive categories is abounding with contradictions. In the Western concepts of modernity time is a porous category that is sanctioned by relativities and defined by a break with the past. David Lowenthal suggests that past is always a foreign country because history occasioned by modernity looks for a 'rupture' to define the 'present' in terms of the 'past':

If recognizing the past's difference promoted its preservation, the act of preserving made that difference still more apparent. Venerated as a fount of communal identity, cherished as a precious and endangered resource, yesterday became less and less like today. Yet, its relics and residues are increasingly stamped with today's lineaments. We may fancy an exotic past that contrasts with a humdrum or unhappy present, but we forge it with modern tools. The past is a foreign country whose features are shaped by today's predilections, its strangeness domesticated by our own preservation of its vestiges.<sup>93</sup>

Accordingly the past is not a constant but a variable vector that arises from the necessity of the present to plot itself against the enormity of 'time'. 'Time' as Paul Ricoeur would like to believe is inherently marked by an inconsistency. There exists a 'historical time' which acts as an axis and is independent of human agency and there is another 'time' which is defined by human experience. The 'historical present' as experienced by an individual is framed by the twin principles of 'space of experience' and 'horizon of expectations'. This is a discourse which can give expression to complex relationship between human actions and their contexts of experience only in 'narrative'. By the virtue of the 'narrative' the 'historical time' becomes 'human time' 'to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full significance when it becomes a condition of temporal

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<sup>92</sup> Perhaps this also stands to benefit from the post second War theoretical premises on myth that involved Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade and Carl Jung who were looking for a source of 'ultimate truth' building on Huxley's principle of 'perennial philosophy' and 'myth seemed like a true voice of primordial and eternal world, the ultimate nonmodern pole of human experience.' Myth also functions as category that exceeds religion. Ellwood, Robert. *The Politics of Myth, A Study of C. G. Jung, Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999.

<sup>93</sup> Lowenthal, David. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; p. xvii.

existence'.<sup>94</sup> The necessity to acquire time and consequentially narrative has been best represented by the angel of history who is constantly trying to move away and yet looking back at it.<sup>95</sup> Walter Benjamin quotes Gerhard Scholem's poem 'Grüß vom Angelus' thus: 'My wing is ready for flight./I would like to turn back./If I stayed timeless time./I would have little luck'. Benjamin's description is indicative of the desire of modernity (often manifested in history writing) to establish the pre-modern as a subset of the modern. Winning over time therefore comes with the dilemma of both being in the past and constantly having to move away from it. Appropriation of 'time' as *human time*, in nineteenth century India has been imagined as a complex combination of both the 'co-existent' and the 'sovereign'. Where the co-existent allows the 'present' to exist in the same temporal frame as the 'past' and the 'present' is often presented with the credence to claim its sovereignty over the reins of time. Therefore, Western modernity in a sense necessitated narrativities of negotiations of autochthonous time. Analogously the fractured nature of the narrative of Western modernity in the context of colonial knowledge paradigms open the space for the indigenous and the Western knowledge networks to co-exist thereby fostering multiplicity of narratives.

(Colonial) modernity [mediated often by the colonial knowledge network] opened to mixed reviews in India as it neither elicited uncritical acceptance nor a complete rejection. Nevertheless it unlocked the debate to include the status of the colonized in terms of time in the colonial knowledge network that held modernity as one of its redeeming features.<sup>96</sup>

While 'time' has been important to the Indians since antiquity (with various indigenous concepts of time), ordering and contesting 'time' seems to have been the marker of 'modernity'.<sup>97</sup> The rupture in time (signalled by a break with the pre-

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<sup>94</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. Vol. 1; p. 52.

<sup>95</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Trans. H. John New York: Fontana Collins, 1968; p. 257. (first published in 1955 as *Schriften*).

<sup>96</sup> Asish Nandy in his psycho-social study on nineteenth-century Bengal furthers the schematization of the understanding of colonization as a break in the continuity of knowledge practices. Nandy, Ashis. *Intimate Enemy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989.

<sup>97</sup> Jenny Sharpe introduces the paradoxical character of looking at the past introduced by the Orientalists. 'The Orientalists appropriated an ancient Hindu past that could then be bestowed upon the colonized as the gift of history. This sleight of hand—an emptying out of history before restoring it—kept India outside of historical time in the very act of bringing it into a Western narrative of progress.' Sharpe, Jenny. 'The Violence of Light in the Land of Desire: Or How William Jones Discovered India.' *Boundary 2*. 20. 1 (1993): pp. 26-46, 44.

modern) became an indicator of the emergence of 'time' as a political category in nineteenth century India.<sup>98</sup> The native intelligentsia appropriated modernity's concept of break and movement to generate their sense of time. One of the key strategies was enclosed in the twin understanding of the prophylactic Hindu mythic end of time and its possibilities of regeneration.<sup>99</sup> It has been successfully argued that Indians themselves in the nineteenth century were obsessed with the notion of the *kaliyuga* or the end of time, quite in tune with the Orientalist's notion of the desuetude<sup>100</sup> of India's ancient heritage.<sup>101</sup> The varied dimensions of *kaliyuga*

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<sup>98</sup> For example in a meeting of 'The National Society' or 'Jatiya Sabha' at the residence of the grandson of Prasanna Coomer Tagore, Bhujendrabhushan Tagore, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1893, Rajnarain Basu in a lecture '*Se Kāl āṛ e kāl*' ('Those Days and These Days') singularly identified this break with the introduction of the Western education system. Time here is burdened with a sense of irreparable loss; exudes almost a sense of lost innocence. As the title itself suggests, this lecture is idiomatically defined by a rupture in the conceptualization of 'time.' Interestingly enough, temporal rupture comes not with imperial control alone but with the introduction of the colonizer's knowledge system. Says Basu, '1816 was the year that Hindu college was established in this mega-city. 1830 was the year that bore the first fruits of education. This was the year that a few youths successfully learnt English and left the college. They were enlightened by a European education and began social reform. This was the time when the "Hindu Samaj" was enthused with a new mood. From the beginning of the English era to the establishment of the Hindu college is how I define "those days" and the time thereafter I shall call "these days".' Basu, Rāj'nārāyaṇ. *Se Kāl āṛ e kāl*. Kal'kāṭā: Cīrāyāta Pāb'likeśāns, 2008 (Sept. 1878); p. 23. While admitting to the temporal chasm initiated by two different epochs of colonial rule some insisted that colonial modernity has in fact changed the natives for the better. One article published in 1881 reports a similar nostalgic lament: 'Even the race of old Indian natives, down to the very servant-class, has passed away. With passing away of the "ancients" and the "ancient landmarks", manners and society have altered, play has altered, though here, in hunting and in racing, much of the old traditions linger; and even work is different from what it was. This will be seen more in detail as we proceed; suffice it to say here, what every old Indian of even a quarter of a century ago—the transition period—now living will know, that Indian society, men, manners, work and play, are now so entirely altered, that it is almost impossible to recognize the India of their time in the India of the present day.' Old Indian. 'Social Life in Bengal Fifty Years Ago.' *Calcutta Review*, October 1881; p. 378. Tanika Sarkar however reads it as the preserve of the postcolonial critics, '[t]he difference, moreover, is one between modernity and tradition, the west embodying a modern rationalism and India living in its pre modern traditionalism. There is something curious in the way the argument is posed: modernity is seen as a Western privilege, as cultural traditionalism is India's. We have, in these terms, a relegation of spaces to temporalities. Any Universalist project would, therefore, need to negotiate not only cultures but times.' Sarkar, Tanika. 'How to Think Universalism from Colonial and Postcolonial Locations: some Indian Efforts.' Petter Korkman & Virpi Mäkinen Eds *Universalism in International Law and Political Philosophy*. Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, 2008; pp. 239–254; p. 242.

<sup>99</sup> According to the Hindu notions of temporality there are four yugas which are arranged in sequential order indicating a decline of civilizational ethos. *Kaliyuga* is the last of the four yugas and is often depicted as the age of complete mayhem and a harbinger of destruction.

<sup>100</sup> Quite in opposition to the views proposed by the Orientalists the evangelical movement in England, which found takers in the missionary movements in India, projected the Hindu religion as cause for moral alarm. Both in terms of scope and this duality of existence, mythology provided the link between continuity and break, the two cardinal points that marked colonial modernity. The desire to associate with a misty ancient past defined the process of continuity whereas the cleft with the immediate pre-modern past signalled the break.

<sup>101</sup> Heinrich von Stietencron maintains that the concept of *kaliyuga* originated with the murder of the last king of the *Śiśunāga* dynasty in Magadha in the fourth century BC and since then has been a regular feature with the foreign invasions thereafter. According to the Purāṇas the *kaliyuga* begins with the death of Kṛṣṇa. Although this might seem to be the nadir of mankind it is paradox that it is this age in which liberation is attainable. *Kaliyuga* with its premium on the individual seeks to strike a balance between the dualism of progress and decline. Stietencron, Hienrich von. 'Calculating Religious Decay.' *Hindu Myth, Hindu History*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005; pp. 31-50.

conveniently played on the anti-modernist charges of the colonial knowledge (both the missionaries and the colonial knowledge machinery projected the current state of Hindu religion as the site of moral decay), even while it sought to alter the hegemonic narratives of modernity. The disillusionment finds expression in a host of writing that posited the modern age as the nadir of civilization.<sup>102</sup> As the British colonial system of ordered time<sup>103</sup> was imposed as an everyday practice coping strategies involved creating narratives of doom.<sup>104</sup> The popularity of the narrative of *kaliyuga* was coeval to the coping mechanisms associated with the imposition of colonial time.<sup>105</sup>

‘Time’ was an overwhelming presence as its materiality was made visible in the form of clocks and calendars.<sup>106</sup> These clocks were indicative of a new regime of bureaucratic-industrial time which was not confined to the urban centres, but had registered its presence in the rural areas with the Railways and the schools.<sup>107</sup> The

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<sup>102</sup> Sumit Sarkar takes exception to the tale of the *kaliyuga* in the late nineteenth century and points to its rather upper-class/caste origin, although he is quick to admit that the proliferation of this idea was mainly through the cheap booklets and prints that flooded the market: ‘*kaliyuga* thus became a language for expressing the anguish, frustration, and resentments of the less successful high-caste educated men’ [...] ‘the tonalities of *Kaliyuga*, however, could appeal at times also to the “high” *bhadralok* in their darker moods, for colonial domination kept the self-image of the successful enterprising male always fragile, unstable, and open to racist humiliation.’ Sarkar, Sumit. ‘Time, Myth, and History in Colonial Bengal.’ Eds. Sider, Gerald and Gavin Smith. *Between History and Histories, The Making of Silences and Commemorations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997: pp. 98-126; p. 102.

<sup>103</sup> This directly impacted the clerical cadre of the populace (of which Bengali *bhadralok* formed a major bulk) who had to work according to prescribed office schedule. *Cākri* or a regular job entered the vocabulary of the Bengalis and transformed the concept of everyday time/routine. For a detailed discussion see, Sarkar, Sumit. “‘*Kaliyuga*”, “‘*Chakri*” and “‘*Bhakti*”, Ramakrishna and his *Times*.’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27-29 (1992): pp. 1561-1566.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas Trautmann suggests that Europe was going through a deep crisis of time following Darwin when biblical time was replaced by what he calls as the revolution in ‘ethnological time.’ [T]he revolution in ethnological time was the sudden collapse, during the decade of Darwin, of the short chronology for human history based on biblical narrative, a chronology in which the whole of human history had been crowded into the space of a few thousand years. The discovery of human remains in association with the bones of extinct animals changed all that. What replaced it was an ethnological time that extended human history indefinitely backward, for tens or hundreds of thousands of years or more. Very suddenly the bottom dropped out of history and its beginnings disappeared into the abyss of time. The sudden, dramatic enlargement of the scale of human history demanded new content: and what rushed in to fill out the vast blank spaces in this newly enlarged frame was social evolutionism.’ Trautmann, Thomas. ‘The Revolution in Ethnological Time.’ *Man, New Series*, 27. 2 (1992): pp. 379-397; p. 380.

<sup>105</sup> Ishita Dube Mukherjee contends that the imaginations of *kaliyuga* were particularly important as it helped organize a chaotic colonial present. To quote: ‘*Kaliyuga* occasions novel understandings of the past that make the present meaningful and envisage the future.’ Banerjee-Dube, Ishita. ‘Reading Time: Texts and Pasts in Colonial Eastern India.’ *Studies in History*, 19. 1 (2003): pp. 1-17; 2.

<sup>106</sup> It would be interesting to note that the calendars combined the concepts of Indian and European time. The chormolithographs used to print the calendars were accompanied by mythic images and often contained both the Gregorian calendar and the Bengali almanac. Jain, Kajri. ‘Gods in the bazaar: The subjects of calendar art.’ *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 21. 1 (1998): pp. 91-108.

<sup>107</sup> Sumit Sarkar suggests that while Europe had taken five hundred years to be able to cope with time as an indicator of control (largely bureaucratic and industrial) India had to make a sudden transition: ‘[c]olonial India had to undergo a similar process, and that under conditions of alien rule, within a

gnawing gap between the native time and the one of the colonizer refused to be bridged. The new colonial time introduced the necessity of parallel times, one official and the other native. The co-existence was one of accommodation, where the contrast between the ‘mellifluous vowels’ of Bangla and the ‘harsh consonants’ packed into the voice of the hour-gun’ was a constant reminder as to who was in command.<sup>108</sup> The mytho-poetic diffused time of the native collided with the material presence of the colonial time, necessitating if not a hybridity but essentially a multiplicity. Mythology in this context played to the tune of modern time standing as a testimony of both stagnant traditions (represented by Hindu social reform) as well as the basis for a linear movement when pressed for historicities.

Modernity in the nineteenth-century Bengal posed several problems for the indigenous intelligentsia and materializing a ‘historical now’ was one of them. This insistence on the ‘present’, the historical ‘now’, has also manifested itself in the way nineteenth century responded to the most effusive element of cultural memory—mythology. ‘Mythology’ appeared to link the ‘literary’ with the ‘historical’, as mythology came to testify as history and was simultaneously appropriated as literature. The Orientalists had already established the literary magnificence of ‘mythology’, and the indigenous elite would complement it by mapping it in a ‘historical’ frame.

As the ‘literary turn’ established itself, Rosinka Chaudhuri has argued, the advent of history as a discipline in late nineteenth-century Bengal initiated a self-conscious project where there was an attempt to ‘separate myth from history by amateur and professional historians struggling to define “history” and its relation to literature and to truth’.<sup>109</sup> The marking of ‘time’ is concurrently reflective of an attempt ‘to construct an autonomous time of the present, behind which Indian

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couple of generations.’ Sarkar, Sumit. ‘Time, Myth, and History in Colonial Bengal.’ Eds. Sider, Gerald and Gavin Smith. *Between History and Histories, The Making of Silences and Commemorations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997: pp. 98-126; p. 101.

<sup>108</sup> Ranajit Guha uses *Hutom Pyāncār Nakṣā* to illustrate the importance of plenitude of festival time as the time of ruptures which the natives could call as a time of their own. ‘However, in the Age of the Empire, that possibility is always and necessarily precarious, as the world with which the indigenous discourse is concerned is no longer hermetically sealed. Even the festival, with the native speaker as its poet and participant, must learn to live with alien intrusion. Colonialism would not allow it to forget its presence.’ Guha, Ranajit. ‘A Colonial City and its Time (s).’ *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45. 3 (2008): pp. 329-51; p. 349.

<sup>109</sup> Chaudhuri, Rosinka. ‘History in Poetry, Nabinchandra Sen’s “Palashir Yuddha” and the question of truth.’ *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 66. 4 (2007): pp. 897-918; p. 899.

history stretched into the mists of antiquity'.<sup>110</sup> It is the markers of time that separate the past from the present to organize a foundational rupture that 'make history a scientific discipline clearly distinct from myth'.<sup>111</sup> This history or history writing, which in more ways than one has influenced conceptualization of 'time', is in direct relationship with religion and its corresponding mythology.<sup>112</sup> Beginning with the Orientalists, 'time' has often been plotted against religion. For example, antiquity came to testify for the laws for governing the Hindus in the nineteenth century.<sup>113</sup> The biblical frame that was used as a reference point for contending mythological time frames was simultaneously exposed to varied structures of conceptualizing time. The biblical time frame of some 6,000 years was suddenly opened to almost infinity. The repercussions of this were felt in all disciplines that began to reorient the 'now' against a time-scale of progression.

As has been observed during the course of this discussion, the intelligentsia which had rejected the 'present' (relating it to *kaliyuga*) was looking for a continuity that could connect them to their 'glorious past'. 'Mythology' with its 'historical' variant served for many as this magic link between the 'past' and the 'present'.<sup>114</sup> Some 'material' attempts were made to collect and record samples of the same to verifiably seal this connect. This characteristic was exploited by a number of people like Jogendranath Sarkar, Dineshchandra Sen, Lal Behari Day, Dakshinaraman Mitramajumdar, and others who sought to give a historical immediacy to the folklores, ballads and popular forms of mythological ranting. Renewed interest in

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 898.

<sup>111</sup> Banerjee Dube, Ishita. *Religion, Law and Power, Tales of Time in Eastern India 1860-2000*. New York: Anthem Press, 2007; p. 2.

<sup>112</sup> The missionaries and the most of the Europeans had tried to interpret the Indian forms of time and the loose concepts of history in biblical terms. The Tower of Babel was where all the civilizations were united until they were dispersed in various parts of the world. By and large they believed 'that certain basic truths and certain moral principles were common to all religions, although present in their most refined form in Protestant Christianity.' Marshall, J. *The British Discoverers of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1970; p. 43. Kalpagam, U. 'Temporalities, History and Routines of Rule in Colonial India.' *Time and Society* 8. 1 (1999): pp. 141-159.

<sup>113</sup> Halhed's Gentoo Laws and the subsequent creation of the Indian Penal Code in 1862. See for example, Derrett, J. Duncan M. 'The administration of Hindu law by the British.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1961): pp. 10-52.

<sup>114</sup> 'I am to explain why re-workings of narratives from the epics and Puranas so conveniently coincided with the aims of both Hindu nationalists and proponents of the Hindi movement. In pauranik literature we can witness a broad process of sanskritization that extends beyond language. By this, I mean that writers sought to imitate the conventions, styles, and themes of classical Sanskrit literature even as they infused their language with vocabulary derived from Sanskrit. Then too Indian nationalists seemed to require a way of imagining an Indian nation, with its own unique myths and history that was somehow different from European models; pauranik literature provided just that.' Lothspeich, Pamela. *Epic Nation, Reimagining the Mahabharata in the Age of the Empire*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009; p. 18.

the localized literary forms such as the bauls and the kartabhajas gave legitimacy to these forms.<sup>115</sup> It mingled with a sense of preserving the 'collective memory' with a firm historical necessity. Hence the diffused 'past' was assimilated as the part of the 'present'. Tagore says that '[t]he characteristic primitive and natural rasa (essence) associated with children's rhymes attracted me to their preservation. This sense of primitiveness may not be appealing to everyone, but certainly no one can doubt that it is our duty to collect these rhymes for posterity. They are our national treasures. These rhymes, long stored in our society's collective memory, echo the loving voices of our mothers and grandmothers and reflect the rhythms of our ancestors' childhood play'.<sup>116</sup> In quite different terms, Trautmann observes that this diffusive pool of mythology and folklore has been the precise tool of placing India in terms of cultures other than modern.<sup>117</sup> These pre-modern narratives within colonial modernity allowed the native intelligentsia to create their possibilities of movement by functioning as internal others. The logic of modernity, identifies Partha Chatterjee, could be encapsulated in two key words in Bengali: *nabya* (new) and *unnati* (improvement or progress).<sup>118</sup> Most importantly, these two key factors ride on the central concept of the 'present'. He says that the relationship between the 'imagined past' and the 'present' is that of escape. Sense of inadequacy that pervades the construction of the 'present' forces the colonized to devise strategies of escape. The logic of Western modernity has ensured that the 'incompleteness' of the present is always in relation to a glorified imagined historical past.

When Chatterjee imbues the 'present' with a sense of escape, Prathama Banerjee finds answers to the possible ways of coping with the eternal sense of loss

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<sup>115</sup> Urban, Hugh. 'Songs of Ecstasy: Mystics, Minstrels, and Merchants in Colonial Bengal.' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 123. 3 (2003): pp. 493-519.

<sup>116</sup> Quoted in Sen, Sushmita. 'Tagore's "Lokasahitya": The Oral Tradition in Bengali Children's Rhymes.' *Asian Folklore Studies*, 55. 1 (1996); p. 4.

<sup>117</sup> Trautmann, Thomas R. 'Indian Time, and European Time.' Eds. Dane Owen Hughes and Thomas R. Trautmann. *Time, Histories and Ethnologies*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995:167-200. This is an argument which has been levelled against the Orientalists for a long time. Dumont in 1964, finds ample reason to believe that 'to be certified by distances taken from various "pasts"', "a process of co-existence and re-absorption" is the "cardinal fact" of Indian history.' This is possible because 'being an object thrown behind so that an autonomous present will be possible, the past is a treasure placed in the midst of society that is its memorial.' Indian intellectual thought, as Dumont perceives it, makes 'memorial' of the past to accommodate it in the 'present.' Thus, movement becomes a possibility only when the 'past' is preserved delicately as a 'relic.' This understanding can be equally problematic as it proposes to stall the movement of the past with respect to the present. Louis Dumont quoted in Michel de Certeau, 'Le problème de l'histoire.' *La civilisation indienne et nous*. Paris: Colin, Coll. Cahiers des Annales, 1964: pp. 31-54.

<sup>118</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. 'Our Modernity.' The Srijnan Halder Memorial Lecture, 1994 delivered in Bengali in Calcutta on 3 September 1994. Translated by the author; p. 4.

of the past.<sup>119</sup> While 'time' gains its political authority, it also needs someone within to help establish a 'present' that can hold together elements of the 'past'. Arguably, another defining feature of Western modernity was the introduction of the concept of the modern nation-state, which consequently relied on framing a past to be able to legitimise a present. Nineteenth century thus emerges as a site of temporal multiplicities within the rubric of nationalist assumptions of a 'homogenous empty time'. It was this political imperative—of defining some as modern and others as "primitive"—that made time appear as an empty, common denominator, wherein different peoples could be positioned in successional terms'.<sup>120</sup> This leads us to an understanding of the charged 'present' and its ability to fuse concepts of chronology and space together for the primitive and the modern to cohabit. This sense of a layered concept of time, concurs Homi Bhabha, is in the guise of a psychoanalytical temporality. He says, 'psychoanalytical temporality' 'invests the utterance of the "present"—its displaced times, its affective intensities—with cultural and political value'.<sup>121</sup> Hence, it can be argued that the concept of time in the majoritarian responses of colonial India and in its cultural and political aspirations was determined by the narrative spaces that allocated movement strategies within the larger discourses of nationalism and modernity. The idiom of a continuity in modernity is often premised on selective ideological breaks, theorized to facilitate the chimera of history and myth fusing together (as Pauranic narratives stand testimony to history or ancient texts serve as the template for governance), thereby allowing the colonial elite to partake in the larger modernity project designated by the historical vector of progress. To understand the complex temporal co-ordinates of mythology in the literature of the Christian converts, it was necessary to outline the notional boundaries of Western modernity and its implications in the majoritarian negotiations in colonial Bengal. The Christian convert was marginalized both in the colonizer's and the native Hindu intelligentsia's concepts of time in modernity. The only method of successfully realizing their dream of partaking in this journey of continuous progress was to fashion their own narrative

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<sup>119</sup> Banerjee suggests that the prerogative of a colonial modernity was to create multiple networks of time so that the colonial elite intelligentsia could always position a lesser privileged social group as held in a warp of time thereby attaining their own stake in modernity. Banerjee, Prathama. *Politics of Time, Primitives and History-writing in a Colonial society*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006; p. 5.

<sup>120</sup> I borrow this concept from Benedict Anderson. 'Empty homogenous time' is imagined as the driving force of modern nationalist ideology in which 'a sociological organism moving calendrically through [it] is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily through history.' Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1983; p. 26.

<sup>121</sup> Bhabha, Homi. *Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994; p. 307.

of modernity which was both distinct and yet identifiable with the two established realms of the colonizer and that of the Hindu intelligentsia. While their Christian identity ensured their stake in a universal Christendom, albeit laterally as native converts to Christianity, their identification with the Hindu intelligentsia remained suspect. Revival of the 'historical' in terms of the 'literary' created a space where selective 'forgetting' was legitimate. This tiny window of 'forgetting' that this narrative produced, allowed the Christian converts to fashion a 'time' that they could claim to be their own. Forgetting entails a re-writing of their Hindu past in their own terms where mythology ceases to be equated with merely religion. Thus, mythology at one level functions as a textual repository outside time (often within the rubric of a nationalist consciousness). At another level it is summoned in the present to stand to a host of evaluative civilizational problems of colonial modernity. A case in point might be Tony Ballantyne's demonstration of the ways in which some Indian Christians had used the idea of an Aryan race to strike a balance between the loyalty to the crown and their racial fraternity that stretches back to an antiquarian past.<sup>122</sup> This seems to be the space in the fashioning of the 'present' where the literary provides the legitimacy to the 'historical'. Immediate historical differences, however tenacious, can be garbed in the continuity of the literary. As an outcome, 'selective forgetting' rather than 'remembering' would come to define literary continuity. This crucially ensured a stake in the textual corpus, which could be used to formulate new narrative traditions.

Toru's cousin, Hur Chunder Dutt, read an essay at the Bethune Society in 1853, titled 'Bengali Life and Society, A Discourse'.<sup>123</sup> This essay among other things was defensive about the manners and customs of the Bengali and constantly compares them with the loopholes in the mannerisms of the contemporary British. He is deeply critical of both the idolaters and superstitious Hindus and the extreme anglophiles who had taken to wear 'stockings and turbans in the society of Englishmen'.<sup>124</sup> He imagines the 'present state' as a 'fall from intellectual eminence'. Interestingly enough, the quantum of this fall is measured in terms of 'literary' merit.

Time was, when dramas of such exquisite pastoral beauty as the *Sacoontala*, and of such fearful grandeur as the *Malati and Madhava*, were actually

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<sup>122</sup> Ballantyne, Tony. *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire*. New York: Palgrave, 2002; p. 157.

<sup>123</sup> Dutt, Hur Chunder. *Bengali Life and Society, A Discourse*. Calcutta: Sander Cones and Co., 1853.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

represented with appropriate music, sceneries, dresses and decorations. Time was, when the *nepathya* and *Rungabhumi*, the dressing-room and the stage, were in almost as well-ordered a state as they are in Drurrylane or Hay-market at the present day, and far more so than they were in any part of England.<sup>125</sup>

He is quick to point out the various vices of Hinduism based on his understanding of 'morality' even as he draws his comparisons constantly from literary sources. From Addison's essay on superstition to the 'extolling pleasures of a hermit's life' in the 'unequaled romance of Ivanhoe', and from *Sacoontala* to the contemporary 'miserable performances called *yatras*', literature seems to have taken over the narrative of 'human time'. In his unique bilingual encyclopaedia, K.M. Banerjea maintains that the ancient mythology of the Hindus should be appreciated for its poetic genius and not its historical content.

In the ancient chronicles of this country, many a personage King and hero, has been described as of celestial extraction. It is evident that our forefathers in the times of yore were more fond of the marvellous than of sober truth. The authors of the Puranas, while they turned their lyres to the notes of poesy, and proposed no less to amuse than to instruct their readers, did not feel themselves called up to restrain the flights of their imagination by the mere narration of events as they occurred. They were well versed in poetry and rhetoric, and their professed object was to please those around them by the display of their genius and their powers of description and to set forth the glory of the kings and heroes whose praises they sang.<sup>126</sup>

By appropriating a textual tradition, he forges a narrative space that is distinct both from the European and the Hindu, yet retaining his claim to a narrative continuum. Madhusudan Dutt had remarked in one of his letters, that as much as he hated Hinduism he loved the poetry of the grand mythology of his ancestors.<sup>127</sup> These negotiations in the broader rubric of the literary (as we have demonstrated in the earlier section) allow the Christian to tap into master narratives to draw new legitimacies. It is hardly a mystery, therefore, that Toru Dutt prefers 'novels' to 'histories'. Classira Bader's introduction Toru Dutt's French novel, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle D'Arvers*, recounts Aru and Toru's meeting with Lord Lawrence, the viceroy of India (1864-1867).

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>126</sup> Byānārji, Ke. Em. *Bidyākālpadrum*. Kalikātā: Samācār Candrikā, 1847; p. 4.

<sup>127</sup> Dutt, Michael Madhusudan. *The Heart of a Rebel Poet: Letters of Michael Madhusudan Dutt*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004; p. 73.

One day, lord L.... visited the Babu and his family in Calcutta, and having surprised Aru with a novel in her hand, he told the two girls, 'Ah! You should not read too many novels, you should read histories'.

Toru replied, 'We like to read novels, lord L...'

'Why?'

The bright young girl replied smilingly, '*Because novels are true, and histories are false*'.<sup>128</sup>

The 'novels' or narratives get a clear preference because they seem to be 'truth-producing'.<sup>129</sup> By granting a subjective narrative the legitimacy, Dutt places her oeuvre out of the context of a linear 'historical time' thereby claiming her stake in a new narrative tradition. In other words, the literary provides for the link between the temporal multiplicities as it forges a textual corpus.<sup>130</sup>

Mythology, on the one hand was given the 'star' literary value and on the other hand provided fodder for the sceptics who saw it as deterrent that would define India as non-modern. This cohabitational unease creates a sense of 'temporal schizophrenia', of belonging to both the 'past' and the 'present' that makes mythology such a compelling literary tool in modernity. When revived as literature, it serves as a textual template which can be dexterously moulded by a discerning hand to suit the altered frames. It creates a space that is not defined by stipulated boundaries and which can be appropriated even by the most marginal of social categories to create their own narrative traditions. While mythology in its ritualistic form continued to be a largely Hindu preserve (although some performative genres like the kirtan and the bhajan were used by others) its textual components were used as a palimpsest to create the possibility of a shared time. The productive ambiguities and enduring oppositions between history, literature, and mythology engineered novel shared spaces which could be effectively used as ciphers for initiated narrative traditions. The Christian convert, as an outsider both in the world of the colonizer and the Hindu intelligentsia, therefore could claim their own narrative of modernity within the framework of mythology where they could

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<sup>128</sup> Dutt, Toru. *Toru Dutt, Collected Prose and Poetry*, Ed. Chandni Lokuge, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006; p. 31. Italics are mine.

<sup>129</sup> Rosinka Chaudhuri taking cue from Partha Chatterjee interrogates the question of time in relation to literature and history on a different plane. Rather than use history as a philosophical category she uses it as representative of 'real historical events' as markers of time. Therefore, '[i]n asking the question about historical time, the eighteenth-century poets above do not experience the particular time of the writing of the narrative as a new temporality, as "modernity" as experienced as a succession of historical generations, as the finitude of personal life, or as demands made on the future.' Chaudhuri, Rosinka. 'Three Poets in Search of History: Calcutta 1752-1859.' Calcutta: unpublished manuscript, 2011; p. 3.

<sup>130</sup> Sen, Amiya P. *Explorations in Modern Bengal (1800-1900)*. New Delhi: Primus Books, 2010.

successfully accommodate aspects of both. Mythology as a diffusive template consequently promotes these shared spaces. In the next part we shall look at the possibilities that mythology engenders in the literary production of six prominent authors of nineteenth-century Bengal.

## **Part II**

# **Being Christian, Being Bhadralok/Bhadramahila: Literature by Christian Converts of Nineteenth- century Bengal**

## Chapter One

### *Toru Dutt: Of Myths and Temporal Multiplicities*

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It is fair to commence the discussion of individual Christian convert authors with Toru Dutt (1856-1877) on several counts. The complex linkages between literature, history and mythology in Colonial Bengal as they have been elaborated in the course of Part I Chapter 3 are most poignantly etched in the poetry of Toru Dutt and its reception both in the nineteenth century and the post-colonial times. Unlike the other authors we discuss in this section who had converted in the prime of their youth, Toru had changed her religious affiliation along with her family at the tender age of six and hence it is difficult to slot her as a first generation convert. In a male dominated literary scene of nineteenth century India, she was the only female poet writing in English to have made a mark. Apart from such obvious markers of gender and religion, she is also one of the few poets to have attempted to write in languages and about cultures which were separated from her by a continent.<sup>1</sup> Although she wrote only in English and in French, as has been stressed very often, her poetry traverses the linguistic domains of English, Sanskrit, Bengali and French.

A fair amount of celebratory rhetoric (bordering on hagiography) accompanies Toru Dutt's name in the context of the most important writers of nineteenth century India. Most of the exegetical valedictions that sought to announce the arrival of India in the literary scene of the world concentrate on the Indian ethos promoted by Dutt as opposed to a pervasive 'colonialitis'.<sup>2</sup> Majority of these critical assumptions have concentrated on finding the authentic Indian voice in Toru Dutt's poetry, as suitably flagged in the use of Hindu mythology in the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Diary of Mademoiselle D'Arvers* is a novel that she wrote in French. Dutt, Toru. *The Diary of Mademoiselle D'Arvers*. New Delhi: Penguin Global, 2005. *Bianca, The Spanish Maiden* is an eponymous incomplete novel about the travails of a Spanish girl. For a detailed discussion on the different cultural locations of the oeuvre of Dutt see Lootens, Tricia. 'Bengal, Britain, France: The Locations and Translations of Toru Dutt.' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34. 2 (2006): pp. 573-590.

<sup>2</sup> I borrow this term from R. Parthasarathy who claims that Toru Dutt's frames of references are different and hence she doesn't suffer from colonialitis as is evident in the de-nationalized poets like Manmohan Ghose. 'Indian English verse is over one hundred and fifty years old. Henry Derozio's (1809 — 31) Poems and Kasiprasad Ghose's (1809 — 73) The Shair or Minstrel and Other Poems appeared in the 1830s. The tradition imitated by them is still in the making, in spite of the attempts of Toru Dutt (1856 — 77) and Aurobindo Ghose (1872 -1950) to indianize it.' Parthasarathy, R. 'The Exile as Writer: On Being an Indian Writer in English.' *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 24. 1 (1989): pp. 1-11; p. 3.

posthumously published collection of poems, *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan* (1882). While some studies have unravelled her Christian identity, her use of Hindu mythology in relationship with her religious affiliation has suffered relative neglect. Her religious affiliation and the liberal use of Hindu mythology in her poetry have been treated as different spheres of action without anything much in common.

This chapter proposes to analyse the use of Hindu mythology in the text, transcending the cosmetic engagement with the 'Indianness' quotient. Dutt's highly inter-textual collection of poems deals with the complex interactions between Hindu mythology, biblical references and topical debates. While mythology aligns itself comfortably with tradition or an unbroken past, its invocation in the high noon of colonial modernity by a woman convert to Christianity poses questions regarding 'narrative time' (as outlined in Part I chapter three). As a poet trapped in the warps of temporal narrativities, her poetry seeks to carve unique narrativities which are reflective of her complex religious and social affiliations as a Christian Indian woman. I would further argue that the author's entry into Hindu mythology exposes the tense narrative interface between privilege and powerlessness.

### *Reading and re-reading Toru Dutt*

To fathom the context of Toru Dutt's poetry, it is germane to take a detour into the reception aesthetics that have influenced both the production and the criticism of her oeuvre.<sup>3</sup> Owing to her rather phenomenal reception both in India and in Europe, she figures not only in the list of the early Indian writers in English, but has been hailed as the champion of Indian women's poetry and of Victorian women's literature at large.<sup>4</sup> In this context, her canonization can be best understood on broadly two temporal layers, one of contemporary nineteenth century and the other of the twentieth century reconstructions, as I shall elaborate below.

Dutt was born in a privileged upper class mercantile family of north Kolkata, Rambagan. Her grandfather Rosomoy Dutta is believed to have been influenced by the prominent Danish missionary at Śrīrām'pur, William Carey. Christianity brought with itself unusual opportunities. Unlike many upper-caste Hindu women

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<sup>3</sup> Reception aesthetics have been critically informed by hermeneutics and phenomenology. They firmly establish a dialectical relationship between production and reception thereby instituting the reader as a participant. Holub, Leon C. *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*. London: Methuen, 1984; p. xi.

<sup>4</sup> Kohli, Devendra. 'Passionate Sincerity in Indian Poetry in English.' *The Journal of Commonwealth Studies*. 19. 1 (1974): pp. 282- 291.

who were prevented from travelling across the seven seas or acquiring formal education (because of religious traditions)<sup>5</sup>, she was well travelled and educated in the intellectual traditions of Europe.<sup>6</sup> Although her access to formal education in Calcutta was limited, she received unusual patronage from her father, Govind Chunder Dutt.<sup>7</sup> With her sister Aru, Toru in 1869 had begun her journey to France, Italy and England where she studied for two years in Cambridge.<sup>8</sup> In these years, Toru was successful in establishing a link between an Indian (more specifically English-writing Bengali) and the international (a European more specifically English, much less French) literary circuit.<sup>9</sup> Not only was she aware of the contemporary literary movements in Europe but she was also acutely interested in being heard;<sup>10</sup> one of her poems explicitly expresses her desire to be spared from 'Oblivion's curse'.<sup>11</sup>

Like another fellow Bengali poet, Madhusudan Dutt (we shall discuss his oeuvre in detail in the following chapter), she felt drawn towards Europe for a poetic recognition which in turn shaped both the form and the content of her poetry. Trained in both Western classics and contemporary European poetry and prose

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<sup>5</sup> Himani Banerjee contends that it was primarily the Brahmo and the Christian women who took eagerly to education in the nineteenth century. Bannerji, Himani. 'Mothers and Teachers: Gender and Class in Educational Proposals for and by Women in Colonial Bengal.' *Journal of Historical Sociology* 5. 1 (1992): pp. 1-30.

<sup>6</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question*. Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 1987. Chatterjee, Partha. 'Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: The Contest in India.' *American Ethnologist*, 16. 4 (1989): pp. 622-633.

<sup>7</sup> Thanks to a conservative Hindu backlash, even by the end of the nineteenth century, women's education or rather higher education was a distant dream. Most women who had access to education were either Brahmos or Christians. See for example, Bagchi, Barnita. 'Two Lives: Voices, Resources, and Networks in the History of Female Education in Bengal and South Asia.' *Women's History Review*, 19. 1 (2010): pp. 51-69.

<sup>8</sup> Conversion in terms of travel have proven to be a liberating force. Other notable Christian convert women who travelled to the West in the Nineteenth century were Cornelia Sorabji and Pandita Ramabai. For a detailed discussion on the role of travel in the lives of Indian women of the nineteenth century see Grewal, Indrejal. 'The Culture of Travel and the Gendering of Colonial Modernity in Nineteenth Century India.' *Home and the Harem, Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel*. London: Leicester University Press, 1996, pp. 133-178.

<sup>9</sup> For understanding the linkages in the literary economy between India and Britain see: Joshi, Priya. 'Culture and Consumption: Fiction, the Reading Public, and the British Novel in Colonial India.' *Book History*, 1. 1 (1998): pp. 196-220.

<sup>10</sup> For instance in her correspondence with Miss Martin (whom she met during her stay in England), Dutt was keen to know whether her books were being reviewed in England or France. She was equally eager to report to Miss Martin about her literary accomplishments across the seas. Ed. Chandni Lokuge, *Toru Dutt: Collected Prose and Poetry*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006: pp. 201-204.

<sup>11</sup> 'Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,  
And Time, the shadow; and though weak the verse  
That would thy beauty fain, oh fain rehearse,  
May Love defend thee from Oblivion's curse.  
Dutt, Toru. 'Our Casuarina Tree.' *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan*. London: Kegan and Paul, 1870; p. 55.

under the able tutelage of her father, Toru developed a distinctive taste for European literature. This was part of the colonial elite's prerogative as the new aspirational class looking to associate with the hyperreal image of the colonial power centre through the mediated knowledge of Western education.<sup>12</sup> Direct participation in the British literary scene meant that she was not a distant observer from across the seas but was part of the same 'reading public' that criticized her work.<sup>13</sup> Belonging to disparate literary cultures separated by a continent, receptions<sup>14</sup> and acceptance of her works interestingly concentrated primarily on her ability to write on 'authentic' subjects.<sup>15</sup>

Contemporary responses and reviews from Britain could be attributed to the transformation of the reading public.<sup>16</sup> Although 'reading' cannot be termed a homogenous collective experience, Britain seems to have been confronted with a 'literary civilization' where millions of readers became part of the literary market in the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> This dramatically changed the character of the literary consumption; which in turn influenced literary choices.

Print went hand in hand with the extension of the geographical limits of the empire and it travelled across the seas to Africa, Australia, America and other

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<sup>12</sup> Travel to the heart of the colonial empire involved what Mukhopadhyay calls a *déjà vu*. To quote: 'For these colonial tourists, travel to England was not so much a journey into the un-known as a confirmation of what was already known about England thanks to "print capitalism" and "travel capitalism". Our travellers were not on the look-out for the marvellous and the unknown-their gaze constantly scrutinized whether the real England measured up to their hyperreal image of England.' Mukhopadhyay, Bhaskar. 'Writing Home, Writing Travel: The Poetics and Politics of Dwelling in Bengali Modernity.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 44. 2 (2002): pp. 93-318; p. 293.

<sup>13</sup> Typically the travels to England by Indians (which became frequent in the nineteenth century) are read as 'counter-flows to colonialism.' Most representative are the studies by Burton, Antoniette. *At The Heart of the Empire, Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian England*. California: University of California Press, 1998. Michael Fisher calls these travels as 'counter-flows.' Fisher, Michael. *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain (1600-1857)*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004. Also see, Sen, Simonti. *Travels to Europe: Self and Other in Bengali Narratives 1870-1910*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Linton, James William and Richard Henry Stoddard Eds. *English Verse: Translations*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1890.

<sup>15</sup> Dwight, Timothy. Ed. *The World's Great Classics, Volume 38*. London: Julian Hawthorne Colonial Press, 1899.

<sup>16</sup> Raymond Schwab in his influential study proposed that Europe during the nineteenth century and a little before that had undergone a second renaissance by the study of the Orient. Due to the enthusiastic efforts by several Orientalists, Sanskrit and the study of the Vedas and in turn India came to occupy a central position in this knowledge churning. Schwab, Raymond. *The Oriental Renaissance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984; p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Wilkie Collins in 1858 had commented: '[a] reading public of three millions which lies right out of the pale of literary civilization, is a phenomenon worth examining. It is perhaps hardly too much to say, that the future of English fiction may not rest with this Unknown Public, which is now waiting to be taught the difference between a good book and a bad.' Quoted in Small, Helen. 'A public of 124: Charles Dickens and a pathology of the mid-Victorian Reading Public.' Eds. James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996: pp. 263-290; p. 127.

British colonies in Asia.<sup>18</sup> This transaction was a symbiotic process where the colonized was not merely a consumer of the literary produce but sought to actively participate in its production. Britain's literary produce had found a larger international market and it was ready to accommodate the demands of a diffused reading public. The literature authored in the colonies and the body of literary work produced in the English speaking world (Britain and United States of America) came to be circulated in similar spaces. But the literature of the colonies continued to be used as exhibition pieces that were to be admired as works demonstrative of the native's ability to learn the English tongue. The impact in the case of Toru was suitably heightened by the fact that she was woman in an oppressive culture which did not allow women to engage in intellectual pursuits.<sup>19</sup>

While women were conspicuous by their absence from the colonial archives, Dutt had a prominent presence.<sup>20</sup> This had in large measure to do with her being seen as an 'exception' to the otherwise demure and silent Indian (most often Hindu) women. In fact, her legitimacy in the Fin de Siècle canon stems from her unusual achievements as a Hindu Indian woman.<sup>21</sup>

In the West, Indian women were often portrayed as the subjugated and oppressed, denied an education and forever caged in the mysterious zenanas.<sup>22</sup> The nineteenth century witnessed women in Britain and in the Americas who were keen to demonstrate their solidarity with the marginalized women in India, waiting to be rescued from their miserable predicament.<sup>23</sup> Antoinette Burton has called this

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<sup>18</sup> In 1854, Britain alone was said to have exported 445, 000 pounds worth of printed books. See for example, Altick, R. D. *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998 and Mitch, D. F. *The Rise of Popular Literacy in Victorian England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> D'Souza, Eunice. 'Recovering a Tradition, Forgotten Women's Voices.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41. 17 (2006): pp. 1642-1645.

<sup>20</sup> Indrani Chatterjee, observes that most women in the colonial archives are quite often completely absent. Chatterjee, Indrani. 'Testing the Local against the Colonial Archive.' *History Workshop Journal*, 44 (1997): pp. 215-226.

<sup>21</sup> Bradley, Matthew. 'Poetry of the Fin de Siècle.' *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 50. 2 (2007): pp. 220-224. Thain, Marion and Ana Parejo Vadillo. "'Fin-de-Siècle" Renaissance: Diversity, History, Modernity.' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34. 2, Fin-de-Siècle Literary Culture and Women Poets (2006): pp. 389-403.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Part I Chapter 1 discussion on the zenana missionaries.

<sup>23</sup> The most common symbol for such reference was the burning of widows (sati). For details on the sati propaganda in India see: Midgley, Clare. 'Female Emancipation in an Imperial Frame: English Women and the Campaign against Sati (widow-burning) in India, 1813-30.' *Women's History Review* 9. 1 (2000): pp. 95-121.

phenomenon 'the white woman's burden'.<sup>24</sup> As a result of this propaganda, Toru was soon positioned with reference to the '[...] relational pluralities in terms of feministic scholarship i.e. of poets in Europe and the rest of the world'.<sup>25</sup> She came to represent a woman's voice from across the seas who had fought against all the odds of the Hindu society and soon figured in the literary anthologies of women in the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, she became the ideal Indian subject who had been salvaged from the oppressive native regime and was suitably educated to have produced 'authentic' Indian tales.<sup>27</sup>

She scored a first on many counts to have made a mark in the literary scene in nineteenth-century Britain: linguistic dexterity, apart from her gender, was the other most important register that ensured her popularity. As an author she was exhibited as a 'discovery', worthy of mention because of her ability to write in both English and French.<sup>28</sup> The mystification of her identity as a poet is indicative of the British attitudes towards Indian English poetry from India as a chance encounter, wrapped with an element of surprise. As Charles Dudley Warmer had remarked, her poems "' [...] give a sense of original power'" and "these poems are revelations of the Eastern religious thought, which loves to clothe itself in such forms of mystical beauty".<sup>29</sup>

The first reviewer, the famous Edmund Gosse in the introduction to one of the earliest editions of *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan*, provides an anecdote that dramatizes the entry of Toru Dutt into the public domain of Britain. He recounts how in a 'dead season for books' in August 1876, 'in a thin shallow packet

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<sup>24</sup> Burton, Antoniette. 'The White Woman's Burden, The British Feminists and the Indian Women, 1865-1915.' *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13. 4 (1990): pp. 293-308.

<sup>25</sup> Sharma, Alpana. 'In-Between Modernity: Tou Dutt (1856-77) from a Postcolonial Perspective.' *Women's Experience Of Modernity, 1875-1945*. Edited By Ann L. Ardis And Leslie W. Lewis. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003: pp. 97-110.

<sup>26</sup> Parton, James. *Noted Women of Europe and America*. London: Phoenix Publishing Company, 1883. 'The Trumpets of the Mind.' Ed. G. Barrie. *Selected Poems from the Definitive Edition, Volume 2* Victor Hugo, 1897; p. 56. Mrs E. F. Chapman, Harriot Georgina Blackwood Dufferin and Ava. *Sketches of Some Distinguished Indian Women*. London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1891. This tradition has been maintained in current anthologies of poets across the worlds such as Tamara M. Valentine. 'Bilingual Women's Creativity and Literary Canon.' Eds. Kachru, Braj, Yamuna Kachru and Cecil Nelson, *The Handbook of World Englishes*, Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2009; p. 574.

<sup>27</sup> For example Massey, Rani. 'Women and Resistance in Indo-Anglian Fiction.' *Women's Studies in India: Some Contemporary Contours* (2005): pp. 187-223.

<sup>28</sup> Harish Trivedi is of the opinion that French as a language/literature became important to the Indians not only because of a pronounced anti-British thrust but also because the English deemed French literature as refined. Trivedi, Harish. 'India, England, France: A (post-) Colonial Translational Triangle.' *Meta:Journal des traducteurs*, 42. 2 (1997): pp. 407-415.

<sup>29</sup> Dudley, Charles and John William Cunliffe Eds. *Library of World's Best Literature, Ancient and Modern*. London: J. A. Hill and Company, 1897; p. 5076.

with a wonderful Indian postmark on it, and containing a most unattractive orange pamphlet of verse' by sheer providence evaded ending up in the waste-basket.<sup>30</sup>

Gosse was prepared to discount her lack of skill due to her circumstance as an oppressed Hindu woman who was unsure of her audience back home.<sup>31</sup> The 'fabulous' story of Toru Dutt's entry into the British public memory complements the reading public's thirst for travelling beyond known geographies.<sup>32</sup> However, the extension of the boundaries of British imagination was complemented with the colonized circumscription of the same. This was reflected in other responses which featured her lack of authenticity in her attempts to write on European subjects.<sup>33</sup>

While the mood for the acceptance of 'knowledge of the East' was allowed to exist, there also seems to have been a particular concern with Toru's religious identity. For instance, *The New York Times* had reported: "'The Dutt Family Album", a volume of

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<sup>30</sup> It is worth quoting the entire passage: 'It was while Professor W. Minto was editor of the "Examiner, that one day in August, 1876, in the very heart of the dead season for books, I happened to be in the office of that newspaper, and was upbraiding the whole body of publishers for issuing no books worth reviewing. At that moment the postman brought in a thin and shallow packet with a wonderful Indian postmark on it, and containing a most unattractive orange pamphlet of verse, printed at Bhowanipore, and entitled "A Sheaf gleaned in French Fields, by Toru Dutt". This shabby little book of some two hundred pages, without preface or introduction, seemed specially destined by its particular providence to find its way hastily into the waste-paper basket. I remember that Mr Minto thrust it into my unwilling hands, and said "There! see whether you can't make something of that". A hopeless volume it seemed, with its queer type, published at Bhowanipore, printed at the Saptahiksambad Press! [...] When poetry is as good as this it does not much matter whether Rouveyre prints it upon Whatman paper, or whether it steals to light in blurred type from some press in Bhowanipore.' Gosse, Edmund. 'Toru Dutt, Introductory Memoir.' *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan*. London: Kegan and Paul, 1885: pp. ix-x.

<sup>31</sup> 'It is a wonderful mixture of strength and weakness, of genius overriding great obstacles and of talent succumbing to ignorance and inexperience. That it should have been performed at all is so extraordinary that we forget to be surprised at its inequality. The English verse is sometimes exquisite; at other times the rules of our prosody are absolutely ignored, and it is obvious that the Hindu poetess was chanting to herself a music that is discord in an English ear. The notes are no less curious, and to a stranger no less bewildering. Nothing could be more naïve than the writer's ignorance at some points, or more startling than her learning at others. On the whole, the attainment of the book was simply astounding. It consisted of a selection of translations from nearly one hundred French poets, chosen by the poetess herself on a principle of her own which gradually dawned upon the careful reader. She eschewed the Classicist writers as though they had never existed. For her André Chenier was the next name in chronological order after Du Bartas.' *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

<sup>32</sup> *The Saturday Review* (1879) for example reads: 'It is not too much to say that in her [Toru Dutt] passed away the only writer of Indian birth who has yet shown any prospect of enriching English literature. The writings of other Hindoos in our language have been creditable and even clever, experiments; Toru Dutt alone seems to have possessed the combination of original genius and absolute knowledge which would have enabled her to succeed. From the ruins of her career have been collected the translation of the *Vishnu Purana* and some original poems in English, neither yet published, and a novel in French which has been presented to the public by Mlle. Clarisse Bader, the author of *La femme dans L'Inde antique*, with the assistance of M. H. Garcin de Tassy.'

<sup>33</sup> Another newspaper article reads, '[e]very reader, however, will regret that Toru Dutt's ambition led her to imagine life in Europe instead of describing what lay around her. A novel of Hindoo manners by a Hindoo of such genius and insight would have been, not a mere curiosity, as Mlle. d'Arvers must always remain, but an invaluable addition to our knowledge of the East.' 'A Hindoo Poetess.' *The Saturday Review*. London, Vol. 48, no. 1243, August 23, 1879: pp. 241-42.

English verse, and good verse too, written entirely by the members of a Hindu family. But Toru's powers went far beyond this as any reader of the Saturday will see. A Hindu girl of 22, who could with equal facility translate into English verse the "Vishnupurāṇa" of her own land or the poems of Victor Hugo and Alfred de Musset... "Toru Dutt."<sup>34</sup>

This persists with most writings on her where her religious identity is often deliberately compromised. Given her credential (upper class/caste, education), quite surprisingly, she was never appropriated as the model convert: instead her Hindu identity became the focal point.<sup>35</sup> The nomenclature of the *Saturday Review* article quoted above is one example of her image in Britain. Edwin Arnold's collection of 'Hindu Literature' contains some of his translations of Sanskrit classics, and as a sample of authentic Hindu literature he has for good measure included Toru Dutt.<sup>36</sup> Not only was it expected that Toru would provide or add to the body of authentic 'knowledge of the East', there was even an attempt to parade Toru as a part of a larger body of 'Hindoo literature'. *A Library of the World's Best Literature—Ancient and Modern Vol XIII Dutt—Emerson*, (1896) while singing praises about her essay in *The Bengal Magazine* on the Creole poet Le Conte de Lisle, comfortably mistakes her for a 'high-caste cultivated Hindu'<sup>37</sup>. And the reviewer of the *Monthly packet* had similar claims; 'A Hindu Lady of Letters': 'Toru Dutt—the young Hindu lady of whom I am about to write—has achieved a reputation for literary powers both in India and in France.'<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> It is evident also in the accounts of the American press. *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 1879; p. 4. Her authentic rendition of tradition is often accompanied by a grudging accommodation of her Christian faith. To quote: 'Just as Greek and Roman poetry have become the classics of Christian Europe, and have not been put under a ban because pagan mythology is mingled with them, so the ancient Sanskrit literature of India will always remain the classics of the land, and its stories will be cherished in future ages by Christians. To Toru Dutt such an assimilation of the best life of India to Christianity came as a natural instinct. Her passionate love for the traditions of her country, inherited from her mother, in no way militated against her Christian faith [...].' Quoted in *Nineteenth century Literature Criticism*, Vol. 29. Gale research, Detroit, 1991; p. 120.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Part I Chapter 2, discussion on Bala Shundoree Tagore.

<sup>36</sup> Arnold, Edwin. *Hindu Literature*. The Colonial Press, 1900.

<sup>37</sup> Warmer, Charles Dudley Ed. *A Library of the World's Best Literature- Ancient and Modern Vol XIII*. New York, 1896.

<sup>38</sup> Charlotte Mary Yonge, Christabel Rose Coleridge and Arthur Innes. *Monthly Packet, Volume 30*, 1880; p. 284. Most of these varying sentiments are summed up by the French critic James Darmester, who says: '[t]he daughter of Bengal, so admirably and so strangely gifted, Hindu by race and tradition, an English woman by education, a French woman at heart, poet in English, prose-writer in French; who at the age of 18 made India acquainted with poets of France in the rhyme of England, who blended herself in three-souls and three traditions [...]'. Das, Harihar. *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*. New Delhi: General Books, 2009 (1921); p. 34.

But the efficacy of her poetry lay in the fact that it could be used to access the minds of a 'Hindu woman'.<sup>39</sup>

This elaborate apotheosis creates an atmosphere where imagined 'incongruities' inadvertently expose the shifting relationship between religious identities and literature.<sup>40</sup> If the general unease with Oriental literatures did not directly contaminate Toru Dutt and her reception in Britain, this changes once we turn to late nineteenth century India where, albeit coloured by different ideological perspectives, this disquiet in the response of the intelligentsia in India was persistent and enhanced, in Toru's case, by quite another problem, namely with conversion. In retrospective constructions of the literary histories in English there remains a constructive debate about the location of Toru Dutt as a poet.<sup>41</sup> Against this background, it is least surprising that Toru Dutt's *Legends and Ballads of Hindustan* (1882), which signals this sense of historic continuity (via references to Hindu mythology), would emerge as the veritable trump card among her works. Harihar Das presents it thus:

It is impossible to read Ancient without visualizing the affinity, discovered and established long ago, between the two great classical languages of Europe, the parents of many of its modern languages, and the great classical language of India, to which many of Toru Dutt's modern vernaculars owe their origin. With the passage of time proceeded the gradual unfolding of the affinity between the classical literatures of ancient Europe and those of ancient India. Both the ancient epics of Hindustan, like

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<sup>39</sup> 'This book, begun, as it appears, before the family returned from Europe, and finished nobody knows when, is an attempt to describe scenes from modern French society, but it is less interesting as an experiment of the fancy, than as a revelation of the mind of a young Hindu woman of genius.' Ibid., xxi. This perception was not just limited to the readers in Britain but extended to include the reviewers in America. New York Times reported that Toru Dutt was 'the daughter of a high-caste Hindu.' 'Toru Dutt.' *New York Times*. May 7, 1882; p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> A reviewer had succinctly put these diverse strands together: '[i]n point of fact, the verse of Toru Dutt is only remarkable by reason of its authorship. Coming from a native Englishwoman it would be of scant account. As a work of a Bengalee girl hardly out of her teens it is a literary curiosity. It is probably the only work of its kind in existence. Again, as an essay in a foreign tongue it has great and genuine merit. As a linguistic feat it is—its author's age, origin, and circumstances being taken into consideration—a thing unparalleled. When it is said, however, there is little more to say. Toru Dutt is a thousand times more interesting than her poetry, which indeed is chiefly interesting because it is Toru Dutt's—because it introduces the reader to a curious and striking little individuality, and helps him to understand a strange and melancholy little life.' 'Review *The Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*.' *The Athenaeum*. Jun 24, 1882; p. 793.

<sup>41</sup> Some have remarked that women in a patriarchal society chose to write like a fugitive to escape censure. To quote Geok-Lin: '[e]arly twentieth century Indian women poets writing in English, for example, adopted strategies of the fugitive, the adaptive chameleon. \* Like the black slave woman, Phillis Wheatley, Toru Dutt wrote patriotic English poems which could be read with approval by Anglo critics in London; with the move for political home rule and independence from Britain, Sarojini Naidu wrote patriotic national poems, and engineered her acceptance into the new Old Boys' Parliamentary Club by her activism in the cause of male-dominated Party line.' Geok-Lin Lim, Shirley. 'Semiotics, Experience, and the Material Self: an Inquiry into the Subject of the Contemporary Asian Woman Writer.' *World Englishes*, 9. 2 (1990): pp. 175-191; p. 176.

the ancient epics of Europe, contained many episodes in Song and Legend that gave birth to the lyrical literatures of those two continents. In both, these episodes preserved in the writing what had, before the epic ages, been handed down orally by successive generations of bards and minstrels. It is from these writings that lyrical poets, in both East and west, have found the sources of inspiration, and have given it expression in language of delicate sentiment and fervid emotion. One of these later poets was Toru Dutt in India.<sup>42</sup>

Das's reaction is symptomatic of the general response of the English reading public in Bengal, a sense we can derive from the reviews in *The Bengal Magazine*. Dutt is continually praised for turning to her 'roots' after having dabbled with translations from classical and contemporary French poetry. The lyrical quality of her poems is highlighted which is incidentally feminine in its 'delicate sentiment' and 'fervent emotion'.

In the preface to the *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, the same tone is persistent in Raja Rao, a prominent Indian novelist writing in English, as late as 1972, almost a hundred years later. The preface begins by narrating the biography of Toru Dutt such that it sounds like a fable. 'Once upon a time there were two sisters, Aru and Toru'.<sup>43</sup> This acceptance or reverence has chiefly come from the critics who were desperately looking for traces of 'counter-transference' in the writings of the nineteenth century. They were in fact looking for spaces where Indians retained their Indianness and were responsible in turn for influencing literary productions in the Anglophone world of the West.<sup>44</sup> Kasiprasad Ghose's self-reflexive poem 'To a Dead Crow', included in V.K. Gokak's *Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglican Poetry*, is a telling reminder of the generation of imitative poetry that Dutt was in many ways going to defy. Dutt never resorted to extensive footnotes that many of her contemporaries would consider as a hallmark of erudite poetry or prose nor did the Indian subjects in her poetry ever conspicuously try to find European reflections, as is the case in the following quote from Kasiprasad Ghose:

Gay minstrel of the Indian clime  
How oft at morning's rosy prime  
When thou didst sing in caw, caw numbers,  
Vex'd I awoke from my sweet slumbers,  
And to avoid that hateful sound,

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<sup>42</sup> Das, Harihar. *Life and letters of Toru Dutt*. London: Oxford University Press, 1921; p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> Dutt, Toru. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1972; p.i.

<sup>44</sup> For the relationship between the critics of the nineteenth century and the literary production of the times see: Ratté, Lou. 'A Dangerous Alliance: Anglo-Indian Literary Criticism and Bengali Literary Production (1870-1880).' *Genders* 2 (1988): pp. 42-59.

That plagues a head how'ver profound,  
 Have walked out in my garden, where  
 Beside the tank, in many a square,  
 sweet lilies, jasmines and roses bloom,  
 Far from those trees with whose gloom  
 Of foliage thick, thou hadst thy nest  
 From daily toil at night to rest.<sup>45</sup>

Ghose's attempt as one of the earliest in the nineteenth century follows the parameters of his Western counterparts writing on Indian subjects characterized by detachment with the subject. He begins with an affective Romantic tone and ends up with a literary hotchpotch that borders on the profane with the cacophonous calls of the crow. The reader is to read the poem as a subversive dig at the European decadent romantic poets. While Ghose might have been an extreme example, other contemporaries like Manmohan Ghose and Michael Madhusudan Dutt were keen on demonstrating their knowledge of Greek and Latin poetics.<sup>46</sup> This attempt to get away from derativeness or European reflections was part of the process of inventing progressive 'nationalistic' literary histories which pushed for a movement away from colonial histories, thus mapping a journey from imitation to authenticity. Owing to their imperialistic origins, writings in English were particularly favourite suspects.<sup>47</sup> They were fuelled by the obvious British championing the progress of Indian Writing in English.<sup>48</sup> P. Lal, for example, was relieved that the 'stilted and mythic-incense of Aurobindo and the romantic fireflies dancing through the neem trees of Sarojini Naidu' also 'have this great common strength, though in varying degrees: they have Indian responses to life and things'.<sup>49</sup> In this scheme of things, Toru Dutt belongs to the early generation who were trying to imitate the colonizers

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<sup>45</sup> Ghose, Kasiprasad. 'To a Dead Crow.' Ed. V. K. Gokak. *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglican Poetry*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 2006 (1970); p. 59.

<sup>46</sup> Ghosh. Lotika. *Manmohan Ghosh, Makers of Indian Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1975.

<sup>47</sup> According to Sumit Sarkar: '[i]t needs to be emphasized, perhaps, that the Indian colonial intelligentsia of the nineteenth century chose Indian languages not English, as their primary indeed overwhelmingly predominant, media for imaginative expression. "Indo-Anglican" writing had to wait for post-colonial times to become a significant literary genre, under conditions of intensified Globalization.' Sarkar, Sumit. *Writing Social History*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999; p. 174.

<sup>48</sup> Lord Curzon on Indian Writing in English: 'If there is a possibility of literary prognostication with any success, it may be said that there will spring up a class of Indo-English poets in the future who will do for the poetic interpretation of India what Longfellow, Lowell and Walt Whitman have done for America.' Quoted in Mund, Subhendu. 'India, Indian, Indianness: Problematizing the Indian English novelists' Identity.' Eds. Christopher Rollason. Rajeshwar Mittapalli. *Modern Criticism*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2002: pp. 173-186; p. 181.

<sup>49</sup> Henry Schwarz, observes that in the late nineteenth-century Bengal there was a deluge of literary produce, which, with a jaundiced romantic eye, blatantly celebrated the British influence in India. The aesthetics as he suggests was closely linked with the idea of governance: 'aesthetic sensibility was cultivated in singular relationship with the colonial power'. Schwarz, Henry. 'Aesthetic Imperialism: Literature and Conquest in India.' *Modern Language Quarterly* 61. 4 (2000): 563-586; p. 569.

both in terms of form and content.<sup>50</sup> As a result it is no wonder that Dutt continued to be known as the 'Indian Keats'.<sup>51</sup> Dutt's multiple jeopardies as a woman, as an Indian writer in English, and as a Christian convert in the heydays of Indian nationalism set the frames for her narratives. As an upper caste woman with an unprecedented access to education she was privileged but on the other hand her position as a Christian outcaste in a largely conservative patriarchal society makes her ventures seem powerless. It is at this precise tense interface that her interaction with mythology is located, as I shall explore further.

Dutt's quasi-hagiographic status as a 'great' Indian poet both in her times as well as in the twentieth century comes not only with a compromised understanding of either the 'colonial' or the 'nationalist' lens but is often connected to a cavernous understanding of religion. Toru Dutt converted along with her parents to Christianity and in fact in a letter to Miss Martin in 1876, wished that her grandmother would also join their new religious dispensation.<sup>52</sup> Even though Dutt's religious identity is often evident in her poetry, her writing significantly differed from overt religious didactic writing, which was a staple of the nineteenth century 'New Women's writing'.<sup>53</sup>

The 'new woman' (a term used by Geraldine Forbes in her analysis of the nineteenth-century Bengali women which drew from the popular concepts of *Nababibi* (1825), the *nabīnā*<sup>54</sup>) was conceived by a curious union of contradictions. They were marked by identity conflicts which were born out of their confused religious and social identities.

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<sup>50</sup> 'The early phase, the period of Toru Dutt and then that of Sarojini Naidu was one of imitation; the Western poets became a storehouse of models and motifs, to be followed religiously by the Indian poets both male and female. As imitation cannot bring out the true voice of feeling, so of that period were hardly much more than intricate intellectual exercises, largely bereft of the stamp of originality. The outcome was as strange as watching Arnold in a saree or Sakuntala in skirts. In the nineteenth century Indian English poetry, it was either exaggerated Romanticism or Victorian philosophizing; in the twentieth century it was the lingering romantic strain of the Georgians. Thus on the whole, it was the exotic British sapling assiduously planted on the Indian soil; the sprouting flowers giving out mostly alien and stale smell.' Jha, Pashupati. 'The Emerging "I" among Indian Woman Poets.' Eds. U. S. Rukhaiyar and Amar Nath Prasad. *Studies in Indian Poetry in English*. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2002: pp. 233-239, 234.

<sup>51</sup> Ashley, E. Myles. *Anthology of Indo Anglian Poetry*. New Delhi: R. Mittla, 1991; p. xi

<sup>52</sup> de Souza, Eunice Ed. *Nine Indian Women Poets*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997; p. 38.

<sup>53</sup> Dutt was acutely aware of such possibilities, as she notes in her correspondence: 'Miss Tucker, better known as A.L.O.E, who has written a great many small tracts (who gave some time ago a prize for the best Bengali poem by an Indian girl on the subject of Jesus Christ).' (Dutt 2006: 297)

<sup>54</sup> Forbes, Geraldine. *Women in Colonial India, Essays on Politics, Medicine and Historiography*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2005.

Owing to the restrictions on women's education by a conservative Hindu lobby it was no wonder that women who wrote in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were either Brahmos or Christian converts.<sup>55</sup> Most of these women like Krupabai Sathianadhan, Sevantibai Nikambe, Cornelia Sorabji, were converts to Christianity and were polemically vocal about the ills of the traditional Hindu society. Unlike Toru, her anglophile contemporaries were more candid about their religious choices, and their novels openly criticized the superstitious Hindu society and vociferously promoted reform.<sup>56</sup> The name of their novels made it more than evident, for often they carried a subtitle which explicated the content of the book. Fitting examples are Sevanti M. Nikambe's *Ratanbai, a Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Child Wife* (1895) and Krupabai Sathianadhan's *Kamala, the Story of a Hindu Child Wife* (1894).<sup>57</sup> Both in terms of execution and content, her oeuvre is also significantly different from overtly didactic missionary literary enterprises. Toru's mystical poetry was not in harmony with caustic narratives that vocalized reformist agenda and her equivocal stance allowed her to be easily subsumed in a literary canon that oozed of 'Indianness'.

While the West was keen to parade her 'Hinduness', their Indian counterparts were relieved by her abstinence from overt religious propaganda. To understand the literary cosmos of the nineteenth century, it is exigent to situate Toru in the perceived affray of the religious and the literary. The religious and the literary quotients exchange notes most evocatively in Toru's portrayal of a politically charged space, namely contemporary colonial Calcutta. Toru's position as a socially ostracized Christian woman in a colonial city is reflected in most of her poems where she seeks refuge in the natural repose of the garden house of Baugmaree.<sup>58</sup> Having been born and raised in Manicktolla which was located well

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<sup>55</sup> Nalini, Marthal. 'Gender Dynamics of Missionary Work in India and its Impact on Women's Education: Isabella Thoburn (1840-1901)—A Case Study.' *Journal of International Women's Studies* 7 (2006): pp. 266-289, 266.

<sup>56</sup> Dutt was acutely aware of such possibilities, as she notes in her correspondence: 'Miss Tucker, better known as A.L.O.E, who has written a great many small tracts (who gave some time ago a prize for the best Bengali poem by an Indian girl on the subject of Jesus Christ).' (Dutt 2006: 297). Missionary novels were quite popular in the nineteenth century. Cf. Part I Chapter 2.

<sup>57</sup> Nikambe, Sevanti. *Ratanbai*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 2003 (first published by Marshall Brothers, Kiswick house, Paternoster Row, E. C., London, 1895).

<sup>58</sup> The growing social ostracization was a source of concern for the family of converts. The Dutt family collective in fact begins with the poem 'Home':  
Appears before mine inward eye  
In foreign climes when doomed to roam—  
Its scene my own dear native home.

within the precincts of the bustling North Calcutta, the city is conspicuous by its absence in her poetry.<sup>59</sup> It is the garden retreat which appears in her poetry as a refuge caught in a temporal limbo. The still surrounding of abject natural beauty has no part to play in the active modern life of the colonial Calcutta.

A sea of foliage girds our garden round,  
 But not a sea of dull unvaried green,  
 Sharp contrasts of all colours here are seen;  
 The light-green graceful tamarinds abound  
 Amid the mangoe clumps of green profound,  
 And palms arise, like pillars gray, between;  
 And o'er the quiet pools the seemuls lean,  
 Red, —red, and startling like a trumpet's sound.  
 But nothing can be lovelier than the ranges of bamboos to the  
 eastward,  
 when the moon Looks through their gaps,  
 and the white lotus changes Into a cup of silver.  
 One might swoon Drunken with beauty then,  
 or gaze and gaze on a primeval Eden, in amaze.<sup>60</sup>

The hub of all commercial activity and as a centre of intellectual foment in Colonial India, Calcutta as a city was a cognitive presence in the literary accounts of its times. Representations of colonial Calcutta, the metropole, were rampant and ranged from being portrayed as a land of opportunities to a centre of all vice.<sup>61</sup> Toru's Calcutta is 'a horrid place, socially and morally' where 'backbiting and scandal are in full swing'.<sup>62</sup> The Indian Christians in the city do not inspire her confidence either: 'even among the Bengali Christians, the *moral* is so execrable'.<sup>63</sup> By turning it to a romantic locale untouched by the colonial modernity and locked in time of the 'primeval Eden', Toru Dutt is conscious of setting a diffused temporal frame for her ostracized colonial urban existence.<sup>64</sup> Apart from being a social

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*The Dutt Family Album*. London: Longman, Green and Co., 1870; p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Inderpal Grewal suggests that the conversion of the sisters Aru and Toru created a lonely environment for them in colonial Calcutta. Apart from being ostracized by the Hindu community, they found little in common with their Hindu counterparts, who were married as children. Life in Calcutta was a 'cage' as opposed to the 'freedom' of Britain. Grewal, Inderpal. *Home and the Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel*. Duke University Press, 1996; p. 171.

<sup>60</sup> 'Baugmaree.' *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan*; p. 135.

<sup>61</sup> For detailed references see, Banerjee, Sumanta. *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1989.

<sup>62</sup> (Dutt 2006: 280).

<sup>63</sup> She goes even further to suggest that 'the manners of Bengali Christian Society (with a very few exceptions) are such as would sadden the merriest heart and dishearten the most hopeful.' (Dutt 2006: 282)

<sup>64</sup> In contrast, some contemporary western accounts find the city as a bustling colonial metropolis. For example Atkinson's poem 'City of Palaces' reads:

Yes, thou'rt a little London in Bengal,  
 A microsom; loose, and yet compact;  
 A snug epitome, a capital

outcaste (by virtue of her conversion), she was also unable to associate with her peers, owing to her superior education and her unmarried status.<sup>65</sup> The sheer physical beauty of a space bereft of human presence except for the poet rarely matches the spirit of her other poems written on Hastings and France in the same collection. The poems on Hasting and her time in France record '[t]he distant town its murmurs sent, Strangers,—we were alone'.<sup>66</sup> There is an invitation to the readers to participate even in dismal circumstances: '[N]ot dead, —oh no, —she cannot die! Only a swoon, from loss of blood! Levite England passes her by, Help, Samaritan! None is nigh; Who shall stanch me this sanguine flood?'<sup>67</sup> Banishing Calcutta from her poetry and setting her poems in her homeland in a diffused temporal frame, she consciously presents her contemporary as a lost present.<sup>68</sup> I shall argue that it is this connection with the present that she wishes to construe through her conceived literary lineage.

As explored in the section, apart from the indices that govern the relationship between colonial modernity, literature and the native Christian convert,

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Concentring every folly; brief, abstract,  
 The essence of all worldliness, in fact  
 A wonder, formed like island on the main  
 Amidst a sea of pagans, to exact  
 Allegiance from their millions, not in vain,  
 For intellect hath power, to bind as with a chain.

Atkinson, James. 'City of Palaces'(1824). Quoted in Daniel E. White 'Imperial Spectacles, Imperial Publics: Panoramas in and of Calcutta.' *Wordsworth Circle*, 41. 2 (2010): pp. 71-81. Consequently, 'amidst a sea of pagans' it is intellect that can 'bind as with a chain.' According to Atkinson, the city of palaces that is, pagan Colonial Calcutta is defined by its desire to become the London of Bengal. Unlike Toru's vision of a city bereft of human presences, Atkinson's Calcutta is a compact city with a common aspiration and teeming with life. The definition of this microcosm of the larger imperial power is bound in the rhetoric of approximation and imitation of the superior imperial power, Britain. As a microcosm, 'loose, yet compact', nineteenth-century Kolkata, poses not merely a spatial lag but a temporal lag. The 'microcosm' being of an imitative nature, is separated from the 'megapolis' by an interval.

<sup>65</sup> Knippling, Alpana Sharma. "'Sharp Contrasts of all Colours": The Legacy of Toru Dutt.' *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*. New York: Garland Publishing, 2000: pp. 209-230.

<sup>66</sup> 'Near Hastings.' *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan*; p. 127.

<sup>67</sup> 'France, 1870.' *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan*; p. 129.

<sup>68</sup> Although Toru was a shadow participant in the teeming life of colonial Calcutta, she shared the common aspirational character of the city. Alpana Sharma uses Homi Bhabha's concept of the colonial modern's temporal caesura to illustrate the possibility of an in-between space. She contends that Toru used this lag effectively to show the possibility of an in-between existence which has been seriously undermined while reading her. Sharma quotes the following lines from Homi Bhabha to highlight the possibility of a redeeming epochal space that constitutes the contemporary: '[t]he new or the contemporary appear through the splitting of modernity as event and enunciation, the epochal and the everyday. Modernity as a sign of the present emerges in that process of splitting, that lag, that gives the practice of everyday life is the consistency of being contemporary.' Sharma, Alpana. 'In-Between Modernity, Toru Dutt (1856-1877) from a Postcolonial Perspective.' *Women's Experience of Modernity, 1875-1945*. Eds. Ann L. Ardis and Leslie W. Lewis. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003:97-110; p. 98.

Toru Dutt introduces a new axis of engagement— gender. As a native Christian she is unable to completely participate in the European modern enterprise or the Hindu male intelligentsia’s engagement with the same. As a woman she is troubled not only by these twin negations but by her social ostracization due to her Western education. Consequently she is unable to participate in any defined narrative tradition (of the order of Hindu, female, European, etc.). I argue that by astutely using mythology she not only partakes in an established master-narrative tradition but also explicates the means of active participation of marginal entities in the same.

### *Poetry of temporalities*

With its allegiance to ‘Indian’ subjects, *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan* (1882) was successful in proving Dutt’s ties with her Indian roots.<sup>69</sup> The key text of our discussion consists of a myriad of subjects ranging from the Rāmāyaṇ to the Visnu Purāṇ like Sita, Savitri, Lakshman, Jogadhaya Uma, The Royal Ascetic and the Hind, etc. Unlike her other fellow converts who were keen to order the sanskritic heritage in terms of the Vedic and the non-Vedic,<sup>70</sup> Dutt’s choice of subjects and their treatment demonstrates her desire to resort to a diffused classicism. It is interesting to note that Edmund Gosse in an attempt to accord her a reified status as a poet concedes a Vedic lineage to her poetry.<sup>71</sup> Turning to the pages of the ‘past’ in an age where the ‘mythic’ and the ‘modern’ collaborate to create ‘historical’ continuity is a political choice.<sup>72</sup> Toru’s religious affiliations were very clear and are evident even in the miscellaneous poems in the collection which often

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<sup>69</sup> K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar comments: ‘[n]o room now for artificiality or stimulated hot house efforescence: now Toru has her roots in her own land, and she agreeably responds to the heart-beats of the antique racial tradition. As children, she and her brother and sister had heard stories of the Hindu epics and Puranas, stories of mystery, miracle, and local tradition from the lips of her own mother. [...] they really seemed to answer to a profound inner need for links with the living past of India, and she cared not if Christian or sceptic cavilled at her.’ Iyengar, K. R. ‘Toru Dutt.’ *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1984 (1962): pp. 63-64.

<sup>70</sup> Brahmabandhab Upadhyay and Krishna Mohan Banerjea searching for indigenous references to Christianity, would for example, turn to Advaita Vedanta to look for common sources of Hinduism and Christianity. Refer to the Chapters on Krishna Mohan Banerjea and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay.

<sup>71</sup> ‘No modern Oriental has given us so strange an insight into the conscience of the Asiatic as is presented in the stories of “Prehlad” and of “Savitri”, or so quaint a piece of religious fancy as the ballad of “Jogadhya Uma”. The poetess seems in these verses to be chanting to herself those songs of her mother’s race to which she always turned with tears of pleasure. They breathe a Vedic solemnity and simplicity of temper, and are singularly devoid of that littleness and frivolity which seem, if we may judge by a slight experience, to be the bane of modern India. As to the merely technical character of these poems, it may be suggested that in spite of much in them that is rough and inchoate, they show that Toru was advancing in her mastery of English verse.’ Gosse, Edmund. ‘Introduction.’ *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan*; p. xxvi.

<sup>72</sup> For a detailed discussion of the same, one might turn to Kaviraj, Sudipta. *The Unhappy Consciousness, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995: pp. 35-47.

mentions the benevolent Christian God. Therefore, Toru Dutt's invoking of the 'classics' raises questions about the key relationships between religion (specifically Christian) and 'narrative time' with mythology as its broker.

I argue that Toru Dutt's unique subjective position necessitates a formulation of narrative time that is facilitated when expected forms of textual frames are either removed or rendered redundant. Dutt effectively appropriates Romantic poetry to experiment with different narrative frames as possible entry points into a heterogeneous master-narrative tradition of Hindu-mythology. In the process she accords equal space to marginal narrators (lower-castes, women and children) as well as differential narrative traditions such as: Western interpretive (supported by the generic formulations of Romantic), linguistic (situated at the crossroads of English, Sanskrit and Bengali), mnemonic, terrine, textual (both in its Indian Brahmanic forms as well as in their Orientalist revivals). The entry points into the enshrined space of Hindu mythology are dispersed thereby generating eager intellectual assent for several valid interpretations.

There is an apparent incongruity in the text. It is supposedly a book about the legends and ballads of Hindustan but deals with anything from Hindu mythology to miscellaneous poems of experience. The title dilutes most of the grandiloquence that one might associate with mythological pinning. It offers a humble beginning in the form of legends. It doesn't claim a grand lineage to the Sanskrit texts that most of the plots are derived from. Instead, the word 'legend' itself lends a quasi-historic character to the text. It is amorphous in character without allegiance to a particular text and is likely to have survived through oral modes of storytelling. At once, it places the text in a living tradition, accessible to one and all. At the other level it might also allude to a popular tradition of writing, which blended history with mythology and mostly wrote about the heroic exploits.<sup>73</sup> Most authors of the nineteenth century took inspiration from James Tod's two

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<sup>73</sup> Indira Chowdhury Sengupta demonstrates how the Bengali intelligentsia in the Nineteenth century heavily relied on the concept of a masculine Aryan Race and drew upon legends to counter the charges of 'effeminacy.' But this expectedly equates the Aryan with the Hindu: 'Outstanding contemporary figures from other communities were thus accepted provided they demonstrated virtues that were deemed Hindu or broadly Aryan. The Aryan heritage of Suresh Biswas was emphasized while his conversion to Christianity was glossed over. This was specifically a Bengali Response.' Chowdhury Sengupta, Indira. 'The Effeminate and the masculine: Nationalism and the concept of race in colonial Bengal.' Ed. Peter Robb. *The Concept of Race in South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995: pp. 282-301; p. 288.

volumes on the legends of Rajasthan.<sup>74</sup> Most importantly, it seems to have located itself in a fluid temporal scale, where the 'past' is misty but is mutable and accessible in the present.

In according legitimacy to a largely mnemonic tradition (legends), Toru dismisses the necessity of direct authorial veracity. The balladic form, a definite allegiance to Romantic poetry of the age, itself takes us to a common form which in a way presents itself as a contradiction to the grand mythic scheme. Unlike Madhushudhan Dutt, her much acclaimed contemporary, who maintained references from Western classics as Homer, Dante, Virgil, Milton, in his magnum opus *Meghnād'badh Kābya* (The Poem of the Killing of Meghnad), Toru selects the humble form of the ballads.<sup>75</sup>

Mythology, a signifier of the cultural subconscious, does not appear in the literary cloak of legends and ballads as a mere sign of overdose of Romantic poetry.<sup>76</sup> Romantic poetry, albeit in vogue in the nineteenth century,<sup>77</sup> did not come

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<sup>74</sup> In the Indian writing in English tradition, most influential were Henry Derozio and Madhusudan Dutt. Tod, James. *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India. Vols 1 & 2.* London: Smith and Elder (1829, 1832); p. 288

<sup>75</sup> In the context of what entails the definition of Victorian literature Joseph Bristow highlights that the ballads, epics and lyrics were the three most popular poetic genres of the age. 'The adjective "Victorian" proves so naturalized, if not calcified, in literary history that the suggestion that we might benefit from exploring its derivation (how it arose, what it designated, and how it became too familiar) may at first appear unnecessary. Surely, we might say, we take for granted the years that the word is supposed to bookend—Her Majesty's reign, with some tweaking with the beginning, which oftentimes means that scholars tend to push the period back to the Great Reform Bill of 1832. But if "Victorian" is supposed to possess anything more than an arbitrary periodizing function, then it becomes immediately clear that the epithet is unlikely to tell us much about poetic genres, prosody, or the cultural influence that ballads, epics, and lyrics—to name but three of a veritable multiplicity of forms—enjoyed during the monarch's much-protracted heyday.' Bristow, Joseph. 'Whether "Victorian" Poetry: A Genre and Its Period.' *Victorian Poetry* 42. 1 (2004): pp. 81-109.

<sup>76</sup> However, Meena Alexander in the context of Romanticism in Sarojini Naidu's poetry squarely blames the English education system: 'Romanticism imposed by colonial British education allies Naidu's "*Pardanashin*" and "*Suttee*" with Wordsworth's *Ruined Cottage*, where Margaret, abandoned by Robert, can only wait within the decay of domestic walls or roam abroad in madness, and with Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott*'. Alexander, Meena. 'Sarojini Naidu: Romanticism and Resistance.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20. 43 (1985): pp. WS68- WS71.

It has been suggested that the Romantic Movement in Europe, in particular Britain, was closely related to the capitalism and imperialism and in turn imposed certain universalist notions of literature. Makdisi, Saree. *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Cultural Modernity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

<sup>77</sup> Under a broad stroke M.K. Naik, dismisses the earliest generation of Indian writing in English as Indo-Romanticists, as bad imitators of their European counterparts. Prognosis of this kind leads us to the entangled history of Romantic poetry, which on one hand gave space to the unheard voices and on the other hand was filled with the foreboding of cultural imperialism. Wordsworth's 'The Excursion' (1814) reads:

So the wide waters, open to the power,  
The will, the instincts and the appointed needs,  
Of Britain, do invite her to cast off  
Her swarms, and in succession send them forth;

to Toru merely as a given of the education system.<sup>78</sup> As is evident from her letters to Miss Martin, and from her biographical accounts, Toru studied poetry at Cambridge and was particularly fascinated by French Romantic poets. The *French ballade* might have been an added source of influence. The decision to project the collection as a constellation of ballads therefore heightens the complexity. It also brings to a sharp focus the difference in the choice of subjects in terms of balladic or Romantic poetry. Jerome Mc Gann's seminal text *Romantic Ideology* (1983),<sup>79</sup> on the one hand raises questions about the essentially bourgeois character of the romantic movement, and on the other, directed criticism at looking at the content of romantic poetry. Even as one admits romantic poetry has heavily relied on myths and fantasies, it has also shied away from using living mythology. So Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* or Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan', to cite two famous examples, have drawn upon distant legends, separated by temporal-spatial parameters. Greek legends which were quite popular with the high romanticists and the later day decadent romanticism, avoided looking at living religious cultures. Toru's decision to incorporate 'living' mythology in the romantic and rustic form of the ballad is infinitely interesting as the entire act changes the perception of 'narrative time'. Not only does Toru relinquish the trappings of larger than life epic forms and settles for the more demotic ballad, she does it with the aplomb of an insider. By choosing to retell a narrative that is largely oral and vernacular in its sources she makes two vital points. First, with the vernacular and oral as parameters she ensures her legitimacy as a mediator (given her Christian religious identity and as a woman [women were traditionally barred from the study of written Brahmanic texts] a mere translation would have been deeply problematic). Secondly, she consciously dissociates herself from a legacy of textuality. Given the Orientalist fascination with the textual sources in Sanskrit relating to the ancient tradition of India, this shift to orality is significant.

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Bound to establish new communities  
 On every shore whose aspect favours hope  
 Of bold adventure. [...]

Quoted in Eds Fulford, Tim and Peter j. Kitson, *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire (1780-1830)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998: pp. 541-542.

<sup>78</sup> This mood is persistent probably after the most influential study by Gauri Vishwanathan who had tried to show how subterranean modes of control were exercised under the guise of 'liberal' English education. Vishwanathan, Gauri. 'The beginnings of English literary study in British India.' *Oxford Literary Review* 9 (1987): pp. 2-26.

<sup>79</sup> McGann, Jerome J. *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*. New York: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

With legends as the framework, Toru poses a quasi-historic form against the established textual sources of the Orientalist canon.

Hence, the poems do not come with extensive footnotes providing the details of the plot. The sources of the poems however remain largely eclectic drawing from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Sthala Purāṇas*. Epic narratives like the *Rāmāyaṇa*, or the *Mahābhārata* come with the grand cyclical concept of time, which is always already removed from the current temporal locus of the audience/reader. The ballad in sharp contrast speaks often of a particular incident without the general trappings of a larger magniloquent narrative. Displacing the traditional narrative receptacle with that of a borrowed form without narrative props creates a unique sense of 'time'. She retains the larger context even when she replaces it with new frames of reference. Therefore, she partakes in the master-narrativities of established traditions even while distancing herself from the dictates of the same.

The first poem, 'Savitri' is in octosyllabic verse of 12 lines each, with the popular alternating rhyme scheme of the ballads as *A B A B C D C D E F E F*. The plot is derived from the third book of the *Mahābhārata*, '*Āraṇyaka Parvan*' which Van Buitenen translates as 'The Book of the Forest'.<sup>80</sup> This section primarily consists of tertiary narratives from the very popular story of Nala, Agastya, Kartavirjya, to Savitri. Although, the narrative of Savitri has a definitive lineage leading up to the mighty *Mahābhārata*, it also has a commonplace idiomatic usage. In common parlance, Savitri and Sati are two ideal devoted wives.<sup>81</sup> Their narratives were part of the popular culture, both in performance and in art. This dual functionality takes away from the weight of a grand narrative and makes it earthly and accessible.

The narrative tells us about an extraordinary woman, who is literally at war with her destiny. Savitri marries the son of the blind king Dyumatsena, Satyavan, with the knowledge that she would lose her husband very soon. When Satyavan succumbs to destiny and Yama, the God of death comes to take him, Savitri decides to accompany him. Yama tries to discourage her, but in an extraordinary

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<sup>80</sup> Trans. J. A. B. Van Buitenen. *The Mahabharata*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1975: pp. 219-798.

<sup>81</sup> Walsh has shown for example how these women were used as role models in the nineteenth-century. Walsh, Judith E. "What women learned when men gave them advice: Rewriting patriarchy in late-nineteenth-century Bengal." *Journal of Asian Studies* (1997): 641-677; p.671.

demonstration of her oratory skills on *dharma*, she is able to startle Yama. The God of death ultimately grants her a number of boons, including the life of her husband.

Toru Dutt's 'Savitri' begins with the introduction of the main protagonist in terms of pedigree. Soon the narrative strikes a topical note:

In those far-off primeval days  
Fair India's daughters were not pent  
In closed zenanas.<sup>82</sup>

The opening lines place the poem in its immediate context, registers Dutt's discomfort with the customs of the present Hindu society. At another level, it immediately introduces the author to a 'temporal' duality, the 'primeval' in conversation with the 'present'. She quickly reminds us that the freedom Savitri enjoys was unusual: 'And so she wandered where she pleased/In boyish freedom'. Soon, Savitri commits her first heroic deed by pledging to marry Satyavan, discounting the foretelling of the imminent death of Satyavan by Narada Muni. As the narrative unfolds, Satyavan meets his end in the lap of his wife.

Like, Satyavan and Savitri, Dutt's Yama is humane. His entrance is not accompanied by any paean, nor do is he introduced as a God. He simply appears as the King, in charge of the kingdom of death who is an object of fear.

'Death in his palace holds his court,  
His messengers move to and fro  
[...]  
'O King, whom all men fear, — he lies  
Deep in the dark Medhya wood'.<sup>83</sup>

Dutt moves back and forth in time. The terms and the state in which Savitri appears are likely to be temporally located in the nineteenth century. The loss of her husband is belittled by the tenuous descriptions of the curse of widowhood, which is reminiscent of the debates on child marriage and widowhood in the nineteenth century (most notably Vidyasagar):

and think upon the dreadful curse  
of widowhood; the vigils, fasts  
and penances; no life is worse  
the hopeless life,—the while it lasts.  
Days follow days in one long round,  
monotonous blank and drear;  
less painful were it to be bound  
on some bleak rock, for aye to hear

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<sup>82</sup> *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan*; p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

without one chance of getting free  
the ocean's melancholy voice!

It is evident that Dutt has in her own subjective interpretation woven the debates about female emancipation around her into the fabric of her narrative. However, the most striking part of this poem remains the long drawn argument that Savitri has with Yama. The lever of the argument rests upon what Savitri calls 'Justice eternal'. The debate rages on the principles of 'Truth' and *dharma*. Here, the narrative frame of mythology provides an archetypal example of 'rational' debate preceding the advent of the colonial modern. Even while the narrative discredits the current Hindu societal structure and its functioning, it most vociferously champions pre-colonial rationality and also cleverly plays on the intellectual participation of women in ancient India. In effect, it counter-positions itself against the tide of its times, where rationality was seen as a lingering residue of post-enlightenment ethics. So the two narrative frames—of the mythological and the colonial rational meet—at an inter-face that questions notions of 'rationality' itself.

Therefore the concluding stanza in this light becomes even more compelling.

her name is named, when couples wed,  
and to the bride the parents say,  
be thou like her, in heart and head.<sup>84</sup>

Dutt decides to 'wed' the 'head' with the 'heart'. Savitri's success as a heroine in the 'present' comes not only from 'topical' concerns, but most importantly from her ability to couple a pre-colonial rationality with the 'historical now'. The collapse of frames also allows for Toru's Christian self to manifest itself and create an inter-textual narrative. In conceptualizing God, Toru turns to the Gospels of John and Matthew.

All praise to Him, whom praise we owe;  
My child shall wed the youth she loves.  
[...]  
Under the holiest dispensation, know  
That *God is Love*, and not to be adored  
By devotion born of stoic pride,  
Or with ascetic rites, or penance hard  
[...]  
Must he still labour with a loving soul  
*Who strives to enter through the narrow gate.*<sup>85</sup>

This constant inter-textual engagement with the gospels effectively robs the mythological content of the authority of the Hindu religion. If the first poem had

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>85</sup> While the second example is from Chandi Lokuge's introduction, the rest are mine.

introduced possibilities of inter-textual interactions and a resolute attempt of a Christian woman to partake in the contemporary debate on rationality, the second poem insists on re-examining narrative authority. The poem 'Lakshman', however, picks on a relatively popular scene from the *Rāmāyaṇ*, where a scared Sita sends Lakshman to look for her husband in the forest only to be trapped and kidnapped by Ravana. Our eponymous hero, contrary to the conventional expectations of the readers, is not in charge of the narrative. The poem concerns a heated exchange of words wherein Sita convinces Lakshmana to go in search of her husband. The poem begins in medias res, without the least attempt to introduce the readers to the particular scene.

'Hark, Lakshman! Hark, again that cry!  
It is,—it is my husband's voice'<sup>86</sup>

The narrative almost demands that the reader be acquainted with the plot and hence it is the subjective delineation of the story that will stand apart. The reader is not offered token biographies of the protagonists nor is he apprised of the events that precede the current episode. The narrative asserts the authority of Sita, albeit in a defeatist fashion; Sita as a result of her actions is ultimately kidnapped by Ravana. While retaining the plot, Dutt does not forget to highlight the possible sexual references. In common understanding Lakshmana was the pious ever submissive brother of Ram. Paeans are relentlessly sung about his dedication to Rama and Sita and his selfless devotion. Dutt's Sita among many other reasons questions Lakshmana's fidelity:

'He perishes, well—let him die!  
His wife henceforth shall be mine own!  
Can that thought deep embedded lie,  
Within thy heart's most secret zone!  
Search well and see! One brother takes  
His kingdom,—one would take his wife!  
A fair partition!—But it makes  
Me shudder, And abhor my life,'

She also accuses him of conspiring against her husband:

'art thou in secret league with those  
Who from his hope the kingdom rent?'<sup>87</sup>

Dutt differs consistently in her rendering from all her possible sources— Griffith, Valmiki and Richardson. Griffith, shifts his focus on the ensuing 'Rape of Sita',

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<sup>86</sup> *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan*; p. 46

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

which begins with a paraphrase quoted from Mrs. Speir and simply puts it as ‘Sita heard the cry, and entreated Lakshman to fly to his brother’s rescue.’<sup>88</sup> Federika Richardson’s Sita on the other hand gently plods Lakshman as a lovelorn Romantic heroine.<sup>89</sup> Her cousin Romesh Chunder Dutt would translate the same passage so as to assert the fidelity of Sita.<sup>90</sup> In her serious sexual accusations against Lakshman, Dutt faithfully follows Valmiki’s version.<sup>91</sup> However, Dutt’s chooses to edit the harshest of criticism that Valmiki’s Lakshman reserved for women.<sup>92</sup>

Even as the narrative follows the delineation of the events found in the Valmiki’s version, it insists on clever tools of de-centering. The title accords centrality to Lakshman, replacing the overwhelming presence of the hero Rama. Interestingly enough, it concentrates far more on the actions of Sita thereby displacing Lakshman, the eponymous hero. Multiple levels of de-centering allow narrative frames to be significantly altered and open various points of entry for the reader. This in turn plays on the participatory logic of the author, Toru Dutt, in the larger framework of Hindu mythology by highlighting the porous nature of the narrative culture that permits multiple points of entry. The verses promote the

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<sup>88</sup> Griffith, Ralph T.H. *Scenes from the Ramayan Etc.* London: Trubner and Co., 1868; p.115

<sup>89</sup> ‘Do I not know the voice of my Beloved?’ she asked, “Is there a Being in the three worlds who could deceive me— his Love? Lakshmana, art thou mad, —cowardly, — that thou sittest there unmoved when thy brother calls to thee? O Heavens! That I should have to urge thee thus! For pity’s sake, — for very shame’s sake, —begone!’ Richardson, Federika. *The Illiad of the East.* London and New York: Macmillan and Co, 1870; p.135.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Following like a faithful younger in this dread and lonesome land,  
Seekst thou the death of the elder to enforce his widow’s hand?  
False thy hope, as foul thy purpose! Sita is a faithful wife,  
Sita follows saintly Rama, true in death as true in life!’  
Dutt, Romesh Chunder, Ed. *Ramayana, the Epic of Rama, Prince of India.* London: J. M. Dent and Company, 1900; p. 82. However, this rendition seems to be common even in the popular modes of performative practice like the patuas; Pika Ghosh translates the rendition of Gunamani Patua of Dwaraka (Bankura district) collected by Gurusaday Dutt: “‘O Sita, my brother is invincible, there is no hero that can take him. ’/’I see your loyalty to your brother—Bharata took his/kingdom, you keep his wife.’” Ghosh, Pika. ‘A Bengali Ramayana Scroll in the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection: A Reappraisal of Content.’ *South Asian Studies*, 19. 1 (2003): pp. 157-167; p. 162. Dutt seems to be participating in the debates around representing Sita as a meek and submissive woman. Mandakranta Bose suggests that in Bengal, although least obvious but pervasive were the contradictions regarding the representation of Sita; competing accounts of Sita as meek and of one who not only knows her mind but speaks it’ were prevalent. Bose, Mandakranta. ‘The Portrayl of Sita in Two Bengali Ramayanas.’ Eds. Malashri Lal and Namita Gokhale. *In Search of Sita, Revisiting Mythology.* New Delhi: Penguin, 2009: pp. 141-146; p. 141.

<sup>91</sup> ‘It is nothing new, Lakṣmaṇa, for rivals to be so evil, cruel rivals like you always plotting in secret. You treacherously followed Rām to the forest, the two of you alone: You are either in the employ of Bharata or secretly plotting to get me.’ Pollock, Sheldon. Trans. *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, An Epic of Ancient India, Volume III Aranyaṇḍa.* New Delhi: Motilal Banarasi Dass Publishers, 2007; p. 178.

<sup>92</sup> ‘I dare not answer, Maithilī, for you are a deity in my eyes. And yet inappropriate words of reason met so harsh a reply from you. This is the nature of women the whole world over: Women care nothing for righteousness, they are flighty, sharp-tongued, and divisive.’ *Ibid*; p.178.

superior oratory skills of Sita, as she provides a long list of ‘rational’ arguments. This poem hopes to alter accepted notions of revered kinship of the trio of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, central to the narrative of *Rāmāyaṇa*.

‘Jogadhaya Uma’ in a radical departure from the earlier two poems, stands out in its attempt to connect mythology with a geographical location.<sup>93</sup> Devi Jogadhaya is a fairly localized cult, acclaimed as part of the *śakti-pīṭha* chain, situated in a village Khirogram in the Dist of Burdwan. Dutt makes an effort to localize this goddess at the very outset of the narrative:

The road ran straight, a red, red line,  
To khirogram, for cream renowned.<sup>94</sup>

The mythological goddess is assigned an identifiable location in Bengal and invoked by her more domesticated and affable name Uma (Durga is often invoked as Uma, as the one who visits her home [Bengal] once a year during the Durga Puja festivities). This territorial affiliation is in conjunction with the Christian convert’s desire to look for terrine spaces of cultural belonging (cf. Lal Behari Day). Yogeshwar Chowdhury<sup>95</sup> claims that the myth and stories around this goddess begins with Krittibas Ojha’s *Rāmāyaṇ*. He quotes a fellow scholar Jagatpati Sarkar who claims to have collected seventy two manuscripts since Kṛittibās that are dedicated to *yogadhyāya bandanā* (the celebratory invocation). This suggests that there was a significant lineage employed to popularize the cult of this deity. With ‘Jogadhaya Uma’, Dutt’s mythology moves out of the precincts of high religious literature into the realms of practiced localized religion and cults. With the following poem, however, Dutt is keen on acknowledging the importance of her textual source. As an epigraph to her poem, ‘The Royal Ascetic and the Hind’, she cites Book II Chapter XIII of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* as her source text. Unlike her preceding poems, this poem signals a return to a literary lineage, the desire to locate an authentic reference point. Although the poem by and large remains faithful to the story, of a hermit-king who rears a motherless hind like his own child, the last section of the poem carries overtly Christian moralistic judgement.

Thus far the pious chronicle, writ of the old  
By Brahman sage; but we, who happier live  
Under the holiest dispensation, know  
That God is Love, and not to be adored

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<sup>93</sup> Yogeśvar Caūdhuri in fact calls her a ‘*laukik debī*’ or local goddess of the *Raṛha* region of Bengal.

<sup>94</sup> *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan*; p. 54.

<sup>95</sup> Caudhuri, Yogeśvar. *Śāktapīṭh Khīragrām o Debī Yogadhyāyā*. Kalikātā: Pustak Bipāṇi, 2010.

By a devotion born of stole pride,  
Or with ascetic rites, or penance hard,  
But with a love, in character akin  
To His unselfish, all-including love  
And little therefore can we sympathize  
With what the Brahmin sage would fain imply.<sup>96</sup>

*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* in this poem is ultimately understood within a Christian framework while retaining the original plot. Dutt consciously manages to fuse two distinctive religio-textual traditions to highlight the possibility of a renewed participatory discourse.

‘The Legend of Dhruva’ trades the piety of Dhruva for the intimate relationship between two women: Suruchee and Uttama. The original narrative focuses on the resolute devotion of Dhruva towards Viṣṇu. But Toru introduces us to the pain of women who are ‘second wives’ and do not find favour with their husbands: ‘Why harboured such aspiration proud, Born from another woman’s womb and not from mine?’ This is attributed to the deeds that Dhruva’s mother must have committed in some other birth and hence Dhruva in this birth has to ‘Learn thy place!’ Focusing on interpersonal relationships, Dutt introduces the possibility of entering the textual-scape of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* through the lens of subjective integers. This accords an expressive function to the two female narrators (otherwise marginalized) of the poem that effectively dictates the course of the narrative.

‘Buttoo’ the next poem in the text, seems to be an interesting intervention by Toru Dutt in terms of nomenclature. Dutt intervenes in the ‘present’ on a very interesting note. She takes away the most fundamental marker of identity, a name, and accords greater value to the narrative itself. The mythology re-invents itself within an individuated literary lineage. The plot of this poem far exceeds Dhruva in terms of popularity. It is one of the central plots of the *Mahābhārata* that establishes the hero Arjuna, as the unequalled archer, albeit by ‘unfair’ means. Dronacharya, the Brahmin ace archer and guru to both the Pandavas and the Kauravas, picks Arjuna as his favourite pupil. He discovers that a lowly hunter’s son, Ekalavya, has for long revered him as his guru and has actually mastered the art better than Arjuna. Dronacharya demands his thumb as the due gurudakṣiṇā. This narrative has been ever popular as the quintessential tale of reverence and obedience of the

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<sup>96</sup> *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan*; p. 69.

'guru'. Dutt renames the Ekalavya as Buttoo. The new name relieves the narrative of its sanskritic lineage and in addition places the well known narrative in a new contextual frame. This titular intervention, allows Dutt the legitimacy to alter a revered literary and religious heritage. Dutt intentionally accords prominence to an otherwise marginalized character and subsequently grants him narrative authority thereby engaging mythology as a prophylactic agent. The lower-caste (dalit) political movement in post independence India has to a large extent changed the political rhetoric of India. It is interesting to note that Toru Dutt's hero, Ekalavya, has been successfully appropriated as one of the dalit icons in the current articulations of lower-caste identities in India.<sup>97</sup>

Dutt continues this strain of re-naming important mythological figures in the story of the obedient Shravana Kumara, who appears to the readers as 'Sindhu'. Shravana Kumara was a devoted son of blind parents. On a hunting trip Dasharatha, the father of Rama, had mistaken him for a wild boar and killed him. It is this death that brings the curse that will eventually drive Rama out of his legitimate kingdom.

The poem 'Sita', the last of the nine ballads written in the characteristic octosyllabic couplets, is perhaps the key to understanding the series of the nine ballads. It not only sets the narrative focus of the series, but also establishes the narrative frames of the text. Here, Dutt doesn't play with the name, but radically alters the image of Sita. Sita in this poem is not the mighty mythical king Ram's wife but an ordinary woman abandoned in the woods. In a pronounced departure, this poem doesn't even carry any direct reference in terms of plot to the *Rāmāyana*. It is for a reason that Sita is invoked from the past:

It is an old, old story and the lay  
Which has invoked Sita from the past  
Is by a mother sung... 'Tis hushed at last  
And melts the picture from their sight away,  
Yet they shall dream of it until the day!  
When shall those children by their mother's side  
Gather, ah me! As erst as eventitude?<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> For example, Deo, Veena, and Eleanor Zelliot. 'Dalit Literature-Twenty-Five Years of Protest or Progress?' *Journal of South Asian Literature* (1994): pp. 41-67. Narayan, Badri. 'Demarginalisation and History Dalit Re-Invention of the Past.' *South Asia Research* 28. 2 (2008): pp. 169-184. s

<sup>98</sup> *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan*; p. 123.

It introduces an understanding of time where the a-historical is invoked in the 'real' present not on successional terms but as contemporaries. The basis of this co-existence, however, is founded on relational terms where the subject in the poem is in charge of retaining the dream even when the picture fades away. Mirroring her own predicament, the poem firmly places the legitimacy of the narrative in the continuities of oral transference.<sup>99</sup>

Dutt's appropriation of Hindu mythology as part of her literary oeuvre comes with an understanding of her religious and gender identity. Hindu mythology as muse appear to her through a lineage that is often consciously literary. This makes the mythology in her writing not appear as a 'context'. So characters can change names, her poems can well end with sermonizing and her protagonists can imagine the problems of the nineteenth century. Toru cautiously plays on the themes of multiple entry points to the master-narrative framework of Hindu mythology which in turn lends itself to be appropriated to initiate new narrative traditions. To introduce the all subsuming nature of this master-narrative space, she abstains from providing any background to her poems. This ensures that the poems are read both within and without the contextual frames. Constant engagement with topical references and other textual frames (most pervasively Christianity and allusions to the Orientalist revivals) allow her to demonstrate the intertextual processes of Hindu mythology. By introducing contexts of orality and women in charge of mnemonic narrative traditions (which might run counter or be subversive to the dominant renditions), she effectively demonstrates the space that Hindu mythology accords to the marginal social players in the production and dissemination of narratives. Therefore, *The Legends and Ballads of Hindustan*, reveals the myriad entry points into the master-narrative of Hindu mythology, which makes it irresistible for the marginal social subjectivities to seek their own narrative traditions. Hence, Toru Dutt's poetry opens the debate on the Christian converts' entitlement to Hindu mythology in an era of fervent nationalism.

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<sup>99</sup> 'The new poetical collection in which I find such a loving homage to the France of 1870 is specially devoted to those ancient Indian legends which the learned young girl read in ancient Indian legends in the original Sanscrit [sic], but which from her cradle she had learnt to love in the song sung to her by her mother. "When I hear my mother in the evening, sing the old songs of our country"— she once wrote to me— "I weep almost always"'. Bader, Clarissa. 'A French Notice of Toru Dutt's Last Work.' *The Bengal Magazine*, Vol. X, pp. 396-401; p. 400.

## Chapter Two

### *Madhusudan Dutt and the Dilemma of the Early Bengali Theatre*

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I pray God, that the noble ambition of Milton to do something for his mother-tongue and his native land may animate all men of talent among us. If there be anyone among us anxious to leave a name behind him, and not pass away into oblivion like a brute, let him devote himself to his mother-tongue. That is his legitimate sphere—his proper element. European scholarship is good in as much as it renders us masters of the intellectual resources of the most civilized quarters of the globe; but when we speak to the world, let us speak in our own language. Let those who feel that they have springs of fresh thought in them, fly to their mother-tongue.<sup>1</sup>

Madhusudan Dutt. Letter to Gour Das Basak, 1865.

The discussion on the individual authors does not begin chronologically, although that might have been a useful organizational parameter. With overlapping lives of literary production it would, however, be very difficult to chronologically arrange the individual authors. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) flags the discussion on the individual male authors not merely for his towering stature as one of the foremost modern Bengali poets, but because his life and his works connect the two most important components of this dissertation: Christianity and Hindu mythology. Although most of his writings allude to various degrees of mythological content, this chapter turns to one of his lesser known works, a play *Sermista* (1859)<sup>2</sup>.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt's conversion to Christianity, marrying white women and his love for excesses in terms of forbidden meat and alcohol have been habitually read as eccentricities associated with romantic poets. In the same vein, his oeuvre has been treated as episodic and compartmentalized where his English writings have had very little if any influence on his Bengali writings. In keeping with the assessment of his character, his entry into theatre has also been read as a chance encounter rather than a serious poetic investment.

*Sermista* (1859), as a play has received little attention in terms of its literary prowess but has been largely celebrated as a historical milestone; the first Bengali

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<sup>1</sup> Dutt, Madhusudan. Letter to Gour Das Basak, 12 Rue des Chantiers, Versailles, France, 26th January, 1865. Ed. Kṣetra Gupta. *Madhusūdan Racanābali*. Kalikātā: Sāhitya Saṁsad, 1993; p. 599.

<sup>2</sup> It was a play which simultaneously appeared in two versions: *Śarmiṣṭhā* (Bengali) and *Sermista* (English).

drama ever written<sup>3</sup> which the author himself had translated into English. As a play it was conceived in two languages and produced for a mixed audience (both the British and the Bengali), this piece of authorial endeavour brings to focus the complex interplay of the aesthetics of performance and reception. Theatre was a cultural neophyte in the nineteenth-century Bengal, which modelled itself on its Western counterparts and successfully marketed itself as a form of entertainment suitable for the 'bhadralok' class.<sup>4</sup> This chapter seeks to read *Sermista* within the context of 'bhadralok' sensibility and situates itself in-between the charged literary spheres of the English and the Bengali in the nineteenth century colonial Bengal. To unravel the complexities of contending literary spheres of the aspirational bilingual colonial elite we shall enter the text through Hindu mythology.

The bilingual elite's various cultural affiliations are best understood in their desire to create similar tacit constituencies (in this case the upper caste/class theatre going Bengali). These constituencies would in turn affect the cultural production, dissemination and reception. I am aware of the pitfall of essentializing the bhadralok as an elite group in control of the cultural capital<sup>5</sup>, but would merely

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<sup>3</sup> However, it was not the first Bengali play. For the controversy regarding the first play in Bengali see Guha-Thakurta, P. *The Bengali Drama: Its Origin and Development*. Oxon: Routledge, 2000 (1930): pp. 53-55

<sup>4</sup> Theatre as a cerebral mode of entertainment cannot be generalized throughout the nineteenth century. By the latter half of the nineteenth century topical debates relating to prostitutes and court cases and other such seemingly low forms often overlapped. As Bidisha Ray highlights, "Lower-order" groups were not silent about Bengal's political or social events. Scandals from elite *bhadra* quarters often provided fodder for popular entertainment. The Elokeshi *Mahanta* adultery and murder scandal in the late nineteenth-century, for example, wove its way across major English and Bengali language dailies, through the cheap presses and artist workshops of Calcutta's Battalla to *Jatra* performances all over the city and rural Bengal, being examined in varying idioms wholly dependent on audiences. The fortunes of the *bhadralok* public theatre house, Bengal Theatre, were made on the proceeds of a single play *Mahanter Ei Kaaj!* (What Did the *Mahanta* [priest] Do!) by an unknown playwright after a series of failed classical dramas.' Ray, Bidisha. *Contesting Respectability: Sexuality and Corporeality and non-Bhadra Cultures in Colonial Bengal*, unpublished dissertation, Manchester University, 2008; p. 27. On the contrary, I consider the attempt on the part of the bhadralok to project theatre as a respectable form.

<sup>5</sup> Several studies have identified the emergence of the bhadralok as a post 1857 phenomenon where the colonial elite devised a strategy of foregrounding the cerebral capital of the Bengali intelligentsia. McGuire, John. *The Making of a Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadrakok in Calcutta, 1857-1885*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1983. Mukherjee, S. N. 'Bhadralok in Language and Literature: An Essay on the Understanding of Caste and Status.' *Bengal Past and Present* 181 (1976). Bagchi, Amiya Kumar. 'The Comfortable Fallacies of the "Bhadralok" Mind.' *Social Scientist* (1985): pp. 57-58. Bhattacharya, Tithi. *The Sentinels of Culture, Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, to name a few. On the other hand, Sumanta Banerjee and Anindita Ghosh have suggested that there was an equally vocal culture in the streets that ran parallel and often threatened the bhadralok discourse of respectability. Ghosh, Anindita; *Power in Print*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006. Banerjee, Sumanta. *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1989. Both these perceptions rely on boundaries that divide high and the low and exclude any manner of religious affiliations that can deeply problematize these constructions of cultural participation.

suggest that the marginal (here Christian) bhadrалoks distinguished between forms of reception to their advantage by cognizing the varied levels of reception. Dutt's group of recipients appear in at least five layers: the English colonial masters, the Western educated elite (part of the invited audience), the people outside the purview of the enclosed space of the theatre (as a large mass of the 'other'), the literate audience who would read the play when published but would not be allowed inside the premises of the theatre and the actors or the actresses acting in the play. These perceived spaces of reception constantly collide to generate multiple meanings which in turn allowed a Christian educated upper-caste convert to enter contested domains such as Hindu mythology. Dutt as the representative of this elite class prefers to operate within homogenous forms of experiences; represented by his choice of subjects and their treatment, and his intended audience. The chapter will further examine *Sermista's* position as the play in-between languages and its interaction with the poet's religious affiliation in the realm of the 'performative'. The first section investigates the critical reception of Dutt. By examining the history of the early Bengali theatre, the second section locates the layered nature of reception of theatre performance. The final section places bilinguality at the centre of the discussion to evaluate Dutt's formulation of the legitimacy of his narrative.

### *The Michael in Madhusudan Dutt*

Most schoolchildren in Bengal are introduced to the famous modernist poet, Michael Madhusudan Dutt with a dose of nostalgia and nationalist fervent in the form of a sonnet. Ironically, this is a poem that Michael wrote when he was in England<sup>6</sup> and is part of his collection of sonnets, written in pentameter in English and *payār* metre in Bengali, called the *caturdaś-padī* ('fourteen liner'). Poetry in the form of the Bengali sonnet features almost at the very end of his career as a poet. Although he is credited with introducing the sonnet form in Bengali, it is the content of the poem which makes them his most favoured work. *Baṅga bhāṣā* (The Bengali Language—the earlier version was called *Kabi-mātr̥bhāṣā* (The Poet's Mother Tongue), oozes of longing for the mother tongue.<sup>7</sup> The poet while residing in the far

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<sup>6</sup> There seems to be a controversy about the date of the poem. Amit Chaudhuri is of the opinion that it was written in 1860, well before Madhusudan left for England to study law in 1862. However, Dutt's biographers Jogeshchandra Basu and Amalendu Bose state that the sonnets were in fact written when Dutt was in Europe. Chaudhuri, Amit. 'Poles of Recovery: From Dutt to Chaudhuri.' *The Hindu*. Sunday, July 15, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> It is this longing for a linguistic nationalism that is often romanticized to draw an anti-colonial indigenized literary lineage. For a most recent attempt, see: Paranjape, Makarand R. 'Michael

away foreign lands is visited in his dreams by none other than the goddess of Bengali language herself. She instructs him to look for riches within Bengali rather than the wealth that lies with the foreigner.

Studded with invaluable gems  
Yet discarding them  
I roamed from land to land  
Greedy of wealth  
Like a merchant ship  
From port to port  
Then in dream one night  
The goddess appeared to tell me  
Your own language is full of wealth  
Why then have you turned yourself into a beggar?  
Why are you bereft of all the joy?<sup>8</sup>

Finally, after having written in English for a good number of years, Madhusudan declares his proclivity for the riches of his mother tongue with this poem. In the course of his poetic career, this poem is not only incongruous with his initial desires of becoming an English poet but comes almost as a counter-narrative to his earlier poems and essays written in English.<sup>9</sup> It is no wonder then that the literary historiographers and critics alike find relief in this collection of poems and often read them as the prodigal son's final homecoming.<sup>10</sup>

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Madhusudan Dutt: The Prodigal's Progress.' *Making India: Colonialism, National Culture, and the Afterlife of Indian English Authority*. Amsterdam: Springer, 2012: pp. 65-83.

<sup>8</sup> I have used Sajal Nag's translation here. Amalendu Bose translates the goddess's speech as "'You have, my child, a mass of jewels in your mother's lap; then why should you be in a beggar's garment? Go back home, you foolish child". —I obeyed this maternal command and presently found in my mother-tongue, a mine of gems.' Nag, Sajal. 'Modernity and Its Adversaries: Michael Madhusudan, Formation of the Hindu "Self" and the Politics of Othering in 19<sup>th</sup> Century India.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42. 5 (Feb. 2007): pp. 429-436, 432. Bose, Amalendu. *Michael Madhusudan Dutt*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1981; p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> Germane to this discussion is the view that he propounded in his powerful essay, 'The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu'(1854): '[i]t is the solemn Mission of the Anglo-Saxon to renovate, to regenerate, to Christianize the Hindu' and he also proclaims that he loves 'the language of the Anglo Saxons. My imaginations vision forth before me the language of the Anglo Saxon in all its radiant beauty; and I feel silenced and unabashed.' (p. 638). Quite in contrast to his later poems in his English verses in the oft quoted poem is seen sighing for the distant Albion's shores:

I sigh for the Albion's distant shore,  
Its valleys green, its mountains high;  
Tho' friends, relations I have none  
In that far clime, ye, Oh! I sigh  
To cross the vast Atlantic wave  
For Glory, or a nameless grave.  
Kidderpore 1841.  
(Datta 1993: 438).

<sup>10</sup> His earliest biographers Yogindranath Basu (1893) and Nagendranath Som (1921) take to creating an exceptionally gifted tragic hero who straddled two worlds (European and Bengali) only to realize that his dexterity and craft are best exhibited in his mother tongue. Rukmini Bhaya Nair quite contrary to the Madhusudan Dutt's altruistic proclamation of love for his mother tongue claims that 'Michael Madhusudan Dutt, majestic poet of the nineteenth-century Bengal Renaissance was initially encouraged by the acquaintance with this verse to produce hideously stilted sonnets and plays in

A rationale of the success of this collection of sonnets and its lasting impact on the literary memory of the Bengalis lies in the fact that these epiphanic poems were written by a proclaimed anglophile in England.<sup>11</sup> Located not in the distant colony but in the heart of the empire, this proclamation of loyalty towards the mother tongue gives him the added degree of credibility.<sup>12</sup> This also comes as response to a number of contemporary critics who were skeptical of his 'Indianness'.<sup>13</sup> His classmate at Hindu College, Rajnarain Basu had remarked that '[t]he national sentiment is least evident as compared to the other Bengalis. He has dressed his poetry in a Hindu garb, but "coat-pantaloon" were visible from beneath'.<sup>14</sup> Declaration of love for the mother tongue and the motherland, it seems, is finally capable of striking a balance between the 'Hindu garb' and the English attire.<sup>15</sup> For critics in the twenty first century, it is the 'trajectories and metaphors of exile and homecoming that define it' and 'repeat themselves in subsequent narratives of Indian modernity'.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, this narrative strikes a cord with colonial modernity and it is intuitively identified with the Janus-faced disposition of Dutt's existence where the European and the Bengali selves play their parts.<sup>17</sup>

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English. Ironically, Dutt began to compose in Bengali only after his writing was exposed to severe criticism in England (Lord Bethune's remark in 1849 that Dutt's poetic efforts were unlikely to bring him "either fame or food" illustrates the general tenor of his reception). Nair, Rukmini Bhaya. *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch, the Idea of Indifference*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002; p. 272.

<sup>11</sup> Some slanderers however claim that Dutt was in dire economic straits in Europe where he repeatedly wrote to Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar for money to support him and his family and that these poems are merely reflective of his pecuniary worries. (Murshid 2004: 161).

<sup>12</sup> Amalendu Bose notes, 'In most of these poems written abroad, we cannot fail to note a haunting nostalgia for his national heritage; his language, village temples, trees, plants, the Sanskrit language, the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, traditional oral tales, Valmiki.' Bose, Amalendu. *Michael Madhusudan Dutt*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1981; p. 74.

<sup>13</sup> Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay had initial reservations about his 'Indianness' and had criticized his most famous poem the *Megh'nād'badh kābya*. Raychaudhuri, Tapan. 'VI. Bengali Perceptions of the Raj in the Nineteenth Century.' *Itinerario*, 13. 1 (1989): pp. 87-94. For the critics the comforting nature of the final turn of the poet towards his mother tongue is complemented but could not be dissimulated by the paradoxical nature of his life. His first biographer, Yogendranāth Basu, notes that: 'At a ripe age he was not inhibited to write poetry in Bengali, but he was ashamed of writing letters in the same. On the day of the *pūjā*, the sight of the idol of the goddess would bring tears to his eyes, but at the same time he would be annoyed if someone addressed him as *bābu* rather than mister. On the day of the *koyagari pūrṇimā* and on the *Daśamī* he would be brimming with emotions but he was of the opinion that getting a traditional *Kabirāji* would tarnish his image. He was curious mix of *jātīya bhāb* ('national sentiment') and *sāhebiyānā* ('sahib-ness').' Dutt's life has been full of such contradictions and oddities.' Yogendranāth Basu: Māikel Madhusūdan Dattar jīban'carit. Kal'kāṭā: De'j, 2004 (1893). my translation.

<sup>14</sup> Basu, Rāj'nārāyaṇ. 'Bānlā bhāṣā o sāhitya biṣayak baktṛtā'; p. 35. quoted in (Basu 2004(1893): 26).

<sup>15</sup> Partha Chatterjee has argued that Bengali linguistic nationalism, culminating in the first partition of Bengal in 1905, agitated religious identities. 'On Religious and Linguistic Nationalisms: The Second Partition of Bengal.' Eds. Peter Van der Veer and Harmurt Lehmann. *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999: pp. 112-128.

<sup>16</sup> Chaudhuri, Amit. 'Poles of Recovery: From Dutt to Chaudhuri.' *The Hindu*. Sunday, July 15, 2001,

<sup>17</sup> Makarand Paranjape insists that twin conflicting ideological positions which define the oeuvre of Madhusudan 'were both made and unmade by colonialism'; Paranjape, Makarand R. 'Michael

Rosinka Chaudhuri however suggests that the euphoria concerning the reification of Madhusudan as the centrepiece of modernism of Bengal was suitably challenged along with the concept of the renaissance as an elitist preserve.<sup>18</sup>

Dutt's linguistic nationalism is contrasted with his rather interesting linguistic choices. After having failed to garner praise for his English poetry, Bengali would become the language of his literary endeavours.<sup>19</sup> Like some of his contemporaries, most notably Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Dutt almost always used English for his personal correspondence (crucially, even when deliberating on his Bengali literary works!). While this establishes Dutt as an elite anglophile *bhadralok*, it does not resolve the neat linguistic correspondence between English and Christianity.<sup>20</sup>

His transgressions play to the plot of the aberrant figure of the convert (cf. Part I chapter 1)<sup>21</sup>: alcoholism, and the penchant for everything English including his choice of white women as life partners.<sup>22</sup> Significantly, his excesses qualify as the textbook example of the ill-effects of conversion.<sup>23</sup>

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Madhusudan Dutt: The Prodigal's Progress.' *Making India: Colonialism, National Culture, and the Afterlife of Indian English Authority* (2012): pp. 65-83; p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> Chaudhuri contends that the marxist influence in literary criticism of the 1960s challenged the elitism of the Bengal renaissance thereby displacing the pride the post colonial Bengalis invested in Madhusudan Dutt. Chaudhuri, Rosinka. 'Michael Madhusudan Datta and the Marxist Understanding of the Real Renaissance in Bengal.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44. 4 (2009): pp. 61-70.

<sup>19</sup> Almost all his letters were written in English, only a few in Bengali. To Satyendranath Tagore he wrote in French and Italian and on the occasion of Dante's sixth birth centenary he wrote another letter in Italian to the king of Italy. See Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The Perishable Empire*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000; p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Utpal Dutt's famous portrayal of Madhusudan Dutt in the eponymous film directed by him in 1950, which later turned into a theatre production staged at Minerva theatre by Dutt himself, depicts the poet as a hopeless romantic gone overboard with his love for European poetry, customs and manners. As Himani Banerjee has pointed out, these understandings develop out of the middle class's identification with the *bhadralok* of the nineteenth century. Hence, '[n]o wonder, Utpal Dutt decided to focus on this fragmented colonial psyche by writing a play on Michael Madhusudan Dutt who was ambivalent enough to sway between "colonial" admiration and "anti-colonial" revolt.' Himani Banerjee. *The Mirror of Class: Essays on Bengali Theatre*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 2000; p. 297.

<sup>21</sup> In *A History of Indian Literature*, published by the Sahitya Academy, the Indian Academy of Letters, edited by the eminent literary critic Sisir Kumar Das, Dutt's predicament is read as an obsession: '[...] was so infatuated by everything English that he became literally obsessed by it. In 1843 he was even converted to Christianity (accepting the Christian name of Michael) and continued his studies at Bishop's College.' Ed. Sisir Kumar Das. *A History of Indian Literature, 1800-1900, Western Impact: Indian Response. Vol. VIII*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1994; p. 232.

<sup>22</sup> His marriages, personal life and their influence have been largely overlooked. Marrying two white women has been seen as the fulfilment of Madhusudan's desire to be European. Everts, R. Alain and Liu Jian. 'Michael Madhusudan Dutt's Second Wife.' *East and West*, 45. 1 (1995): pp. 389-394.

<sup>23</sup> In the foreword to the translation of the latest and most comprehensive biography of Madhusudan thus far in 2003, William Radice also expresses the desire to focus on the tragic sentiment of Dutt. In commenting upon the slips inevitable during the process of translation he notes, 'he has gone for readability and vividness in English, for Dutt's personality, for the colourfulness as well as the tragedy of his life, rather than the literary analysis and meticulous footnoting that characterize the Bengali text. But nothing in the broad thrust of Dr Murshid's interpretation of Dutt's career—and in the very real

In the event, his effective canonization brings us back to some of the key questions of the dissertation: How does his canonization as the father of modern Bengali poetry override the disconnect between nationalism and Christianity? Is his brand of nationalism then inimical to his avowed Christianess? These are complex questions and are open to arguments at several levels. However, I shall limit myself to his unique strategies of dissent and appropriations. One obvious example would be his unabashed appropriation of symbols of Hindu nationalist bhadrakalokdom with stakes in linguistic constituencies, as we have seen with his invoking the mother goddess for inspiration.<sup>24</sup> However, as I would suggest his Christian affiliations have to be read within his rhetoric of Christian piety.

In tandem with the readings of the Christian convert as aberration, his religious choice has not found much critical purchase as a cognitive spiritual act.<sup>25</sup> Some accounts suggest that to avoid getting married to a woman chosen by his parents he converted to Christianity.<sup>26</sup> However another popular lore about his conversion states that it was his desire to land in the Albion's shores<sup>27</sup> that prompted him to convert.<sup>28</sup> On the contrary, Madhusudan positions his conversion very critically in the discourse of religious dissent of the day.<sup>29</sup>

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personal sympathy he brings to his book—has been lost.' Ghulam Murshid. Trans. Gopa Majumdar. *Lured by Hope, A Biography of Michael Madhusudan Dutt*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003; p. xi.

<sup>24</sup> Krishna Mohan Banerjea had raised serious doubts about his actual reasons for conversion. He was 'impressed with the belief that his desire of becoming a Christian, was, scarcely, greater than his desire of a voyage to England.' (Basu 2004(1893): 94). However, it is interesting to note that his contemporaries harped on the same. For example, Nobo Kissen Ghose's 'In Memorium, Michael Madhusudan Dutt' begins:

Mourn, poor Bangla, mourn, thy hapless state!  
 Thy swan, thy warbler's snatched by ruthless fate!  
 Oh, snatched in prime of life, thy darling child,  
 Datta who sang in magic numbers wild  
 Great Meghnath— Indra's haughty conquering foe,  
 Hurl'd by brave Lakshman to the shades below!

Ghose, Nobo Kissen. 'In Memorium, Michael Madhusudan Dutt'. Ed. Theodore Douglas Dunn. *The Bengali Book of English Verse*. Bombay: Longman, Green and Company, 1918; p. 49.

<sup>25</sup> S.K. Das for example notes that '[h]e accepted Christianity in a fit of passion and never practised it seriously.' Das, Sisir Kumar. 'Michael Madhusudan Dutta and the Sonnet in Bengal.' *Mahfil* 3. 4 (1966): pp. 102-105; p. 102.

<sup>26</sup> Murshid, Ghulam, and Gopa Majumdar. *Lured by Hope: A Biography of Michael Madhusudan Dutt*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Refers to the mythical foundation of Britain by Poseidon's son Albion. This ancient name of Britain after its founder was popularized by the Romantic poet William Blake in his collection of poems, *The Songs of Experience* (1793).

<sup>28</sup> Amaresh Datta calls Dutt a spoilt child whose '[...] intense desire to "cross the Vast Atlantic wave/For glory or nameless wave "prompted him to embrace Christianity which caused great sensation in Calcutta and eventually changed the course of his life.' Datta, Amaresh. 'Michael Madhusudan Dutt.' *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1988; p. 899.

<sup>29</sup> As Ghulam Murshid's research shows, during his stay at the Bishop's College in one of his letters to the Bishop of Madras, Madhusudan expresses his desire of becoming a missionary. *Life and Letters of Michael Madhusudan Dutt*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004: pp. 12-13.

On the day of his conversion, the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1843, Dutt wrote 'The Hymn':

Long sunk in Superstition's night,  
By sin and Satan driven  
I saw not, cared not for the light  
That leads the blind to Heaven

I sat in darkness, Reason's eye  
Was shut, was closed in me,  
I hasten'd to eternity  
O'er Error's dreadful sea:

But now, at length thy grace, O Lord  
Bid all around me shine  
I drink thy sweet, thy precious word,  
I kneel before thy shrine  
I've broken affection's tenderest ties  
For my blest Savior's sake  
All—all I love beneath the skies,  
Lord: I for thee forsake.<sup>30</sup>

Dutt unequivocally exhibits his faith in Christianity and dedicates his life to the Lord while rejecting the religion of 'sin and Satan'. It is interesting to note that Dutt adopts the rebellious rhetoric of socio-religious dissent (cf. part I chapter 1) as he decides to end the long night of 'superstition' to recover 'reason'. Having broken 'affection's tenderest ties' (reference to social ostracization) and despite efforts by his father to purify him and his eventual penury he did not abandon his new found faith. Radice also points out that in fact in his very last days, he wrote a sonnet for his godson Krishtadas Saha in 1872.<sup>31</sup> However, his appropriation comes with self-reflexivity. In one of his letters seeking critical opinion from Bhoodeb Mukherjee,

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Bose, Sujit. *Michael, His English Literature*. Calcutta: Northern Book Centre, 2007; p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> After-Life (*Paralok*)

Into the dawn sun's radiant sea of light  
The star of morning sinks her smiling fire;  
And flowers there are whose swelling buds desire,  
And greet with blooming love, approaching Night;  
And eager are the streams that rush to reach  
Joyous Nirvana at the Ocean's feet—  
Likewise mortality receives the sweet  
Jewel of immortal life (the scriptures teach)  
If we have faith. Ah, Faith to what false gain  
Does man forget you, choose the path of sin?  
What lures prevail on him to sever  
Your golden boat, to let the windswept main  
Of the world drag her down? Willing to win  
Two paltry days of life, to die forever.

Trans. William Radice. *Michael Madhusudan Dutt, The Poem of the Killing of Meghnād, Megh'nād'badh Kābya*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2010; p. li.

Dutt writes: 'By Doorga— I am mad with vexation. If you have any Christian charity, (tho' a Heathen rascal) tell me something about it.'<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, Gibson argues that Madhusudan's foray into Christianity, in particular the use of his Christian name Michael, has to do with his conscious decision of forging a literary connect with Milton.<sup>33</sup> In keeping with Gibson's argument, I would like to suggest that Madhusudan's rhetoric was positioned carefully to secure a literary lineage within the larger rubric of dissent.

Equating rationality with Western modernity and Christianity is a more processual operation that we have seen recurring with most first generation converts to Christianity in the nineteenth century. Christian ideology and its appropriation come with a deep understanding of class, which, in the nineteenth century, also corresponds to 'culture' and 'taste'. While often the contradictory impulses of Dutt's life have been difficult to navigate, it is but certain that Dutt's understanding of religion as a 'jolly Christian youth' is ensconced in the 'Reason's eye'. His foray into theatre is informed by all these ideological underpinnings and most importantly his understanding of literary value in relation to questions of literary reception.

### *Bengali stage and the theatre of respectability.*

Madhusudan is widely believed to have contributed significantly to the birth of the modern Bengali theatre.<sup>34</sup> Dutt's entry in the world of theatre was bemired in the changing perceptions of bhadralokdom and to understand the constructions of the same, it is important to take a detour into the history of modern Bengali theatre and its audience. The advent of colonial educations and its associated cultural practices were fast changing the performative spaces of colonial Bengal.<sup>35</sup> Subsequently, the changing equations of performance were closely related to the coming into being of the bhadralok class. 'The term "bhadralok"', notes Tithi Bhattacharya, signifies 'a whole world of culture, morality and practices [...] In their own perception this was a middle class (madhyashreni, madhyabitta) bhadralok world which situated itself below the aristocracy but 'above the lesser folk' engaged

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<sup>32</sup> (Basu 2004(1893): 127).

<sup>33</sup> (Gibson 2011:168).

<sup>34</sup> Dusan Zbavitel draws from several sources to convincingly argue that Madhusudan Dutt's foray into the Bengali theatre contributed significantly to the birth of the modern Indian theatre. Zbavitel, Dušan, and Jan Gonda. *Bengali literature*. Vol. 9. Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1976; p. 234.

<sup>35</sup> For a detailed discussion on the changing notions of the popular in colonial Calcutta see Banerjee, Sumanta. *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1989.

in manual labour and distinct from the lower castes and Muslims.” The ‘bhadralok’ class came into existence in the nineteenth century and held education as their key index of defining their society.<sup>36</sup> This was no ordinary tutelage at the traditional learning centres run by the Brahmins but the education system that came with the British. Most importantly, ‘what distinguished them from both was education of a particular kind, so much so that in commonsensical terms the pronouncements about education became the sole criterion for defining the “bhadralok”’.<sup>37</sup> The *bhadralok* class maintained their superior identity by defining them in opposition to the *choṭalok*. The sole virtue of the bhadralok’s sophisticated cultural practices ordered perceptions about popular sources of entertainment.

A report on *ākḥ'ṛāi gān* published in the newspaper *Candrikā* on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 1832, positions sophisticated bhadralok entertainment against its other lowly variants:

While the news of the staging of the English translated version of the *Uttar rām'carit yātrā* at the residence of Sri Prasanna Kumar Tagore has been duly reported by the said newspaper, the reportage of the bulbul fight at the residence of Sri Babu Ashutosh Deb on the third of month *Māgh* has been wilfully omitted. Whatever be the reason, if the newspaper decides to publish the report of the contest of *ākḥ'ṛāi gān* held on the 9<sup>th</sup> of *Māgh* night at the residence of Sri Babu Rammohan Mullick of Mechuabajar, between Sri Megha Chand Basu of Baghbajar and Sri Kashinath Mukhopadhyay of Jorashanko, then please be so kind as to relate the results of the same.<sup>38</sup>

This sarcastic report is a reminder of the changing perceptions of literary taste in nineteenth-century Bengal where forms of consumption were not merely equated with money but with other registers, most importantly education.<sup>39</sup> The popular forms of entertainment that included; *yātrā*,<sup>40</sup> *kabigān*,<sup>41</sup> *nāc* (nautch), *Kheur*,<sup>42</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Poromesh Acharya discusses how the colonial education system created an educated class of ‘bhadraloks’ who in turn constantly influenced the tenets of the system to the effect that the education system became a prerogative for the ‘bhadralok’ class. Acharya, Poromesh. ‘Development of Modern Language Text-books and the Social Context in Nineteenth-century Bengal.’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21. 7 (1986): pp. 245-251.

<sup>37</sup> Bhattacharya, Tithi. ‘In the Name of Culture.’ *South Asia Research*, 22. 2 (2001): pp. 161-187, 162. For further reference on the bhadralok class and its dependence of ‘culture’ see S. N. Mukerjee. ‘Class, Caste and Politics in Calcutta, 1815-38.’ E. Leach and S. N. Mukherjee, Eds. *Elites in South Asia*. Cambridge, 1970: pp. 33-76. These are only two suggestive examples of a considerable body of writings on bhadralok.

<sup>38</sup> My translation. ‘Ākh'ṛā Samgrām'biṣayak’. *Candrikā*. 16 Magh 1238 (28 January 1832) Ed. Brajendranāth Bandyopādhyāy. *Śaṁbād Patre Sekāler Kathā*. Kalikātā: Baṅgīyā Sāhitya Pariṣad, 1994.

<sup>39</sup> For example, Bhattacharya, Tithi. *The Sentinels of Culture, Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005. Acharya, Poromesh. ‘Education: politics and social structure.’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20. 42 (1985): pp. 1785-1789.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Jatra (or Yatra, “journey”): Best-known form of travelling Bengali theatre. In older times, procession at a religious festival where a community of devotees danced and sang in several voices, perhaps while

*kathak* dance, *pācālī*<sup>43</sup>, etc. were viewed as entertainment suitable for the effeminate babus.<sup>44</sup> For the rural folk, it was often the *gājens* and *pāiles* who provided the necessary amusements.<sup>45</sup> The babu class was associated with opulence, often

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carrying idols, was such a specialised “journey”. The earliest mentions of performance approximating Jatra come in the sixteenth century, when biographers of the saint Chaitanya drew attention to the association of Vaishnava devotion with the medium of song and dance, not confined to *namsankirtan* (chanting God’s name), to popularise a priestless adoration based on bhakti. The Jatra easily became the most popular performing art and an integral part of village life in greater Bengal (including Bihar, Orissa and Assam). Gradually, myths with pronounced human interest like *Harishchandra* and *Nala-Damayanti* (“Nala and Damayanti”) joined the purely rural Krishna, Rama and Manasa Jatras, to be secularised further with the addition of *Vidya-Sundar* (“Vidya and Sundar”, 1752) by Bharatchandra (1712–60), court poet of Raja Krishnachandra of Nabadwip, Nadia district. Although *Vidya-Sundar* (or *Annada mangal*, “Propitiation of Annada”) belonged to the medieval Mangal-kavya (propitiatory verse) tradition, its valorisation of romance and sexuality sought only an ultimate sanctification through the adoration of Annada. Its success coincided with Jatra’s spatial shift to the newly growing city of Calcutta for easy accessibility, turning professional under the guidance of owner-managers who booked actors for the “season”, from Durga Puja in autumn to the start of the next monsoon. The nouveau riche in Calcutta, too, formed amateur Jatra groups mainly for *Vidya-Sundar* shows which revelled in the *khemta*, a light dance accompanied by loud gestures and swinging steps, and in extensive wordplay, riddles, and sexual innuendoes of which Gopal Ure was the best-known exponent. [...] After the 1920s Jatra went through major changes, the most important being its institutional settlement in the metropolis.’ Cited from Ed. Ananda Lal. *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004: pp. 171–72.

<sup>41</sup> ‘During the latter half of the eighteenth century, both Mangalkabya and Vaishnava poetry of the medieval ages lost their vitality and ultimately declined and in their places was born a new form of secular lyrics. [...] The city of Calcutta had begun to grow and it was necessary to cater to the taste of the new urban population of Calcutta and its suburbs. The songs mainly secularised the divine love of Radha and Krishna preached by the Vaishnava devotee poets of the medieval ages. They had little or no literary value in comparison with the Vaishnava lyrics. What they offered were amusement and excitement mostly created by high sounding words and artificial altercations. [...] The performance was, in fact, a kind of verbal combat between two parties each consisting of half a dozen singers, men and women, headed by one reputed *kabiwala*. The *kabiwala* improvised songs in the form of questions and answers or attacks and counter-attacks. Being a duet, such performances came to be known as “kibir larai”(poets’ fighting).’ Cited from *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*, Vol. 3, 1906.

<sup>42</sup> ‘On the serious sections of the Radha–Krishna narrative, the *kobis* used to treat the theme in an effusive, sentimental manner, more conscious of the conventional requirements like alliterations and the rhythmical framework. But through the *kheud*, they expressed in a rollicking style the “naughty” thoughts that lurked behind the serious gestures of the divine pair—often openly erotic or suggesting the fun of love in secrecy [...] The themes of the *kheud* were borrowed not only from the legends of Radha and Krishna but also from other mythological sources like those of Durga and Shiva.’ Cited from Banerjee, Sumanta, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*. Calcutta: Seagull, 1998: pp. 97–98.

<sup>43</sup> ‘*Panchali* (literally “five-edged debate”): A living Bengali tradition in the form of anecdotal narratives, extolling divinities in the classical Hindu pantheon as well as the more popular folk deities worshipped by different communities. It is usually recited in a sing-song manner with accompanying celebratory invocatory rituals, mainly in women’s quarters its texts circulating in printed chapbooks used by devotees. [...] It came into its own with Dasarathi Roy (1806–56), a singer–poet who used the semi-classical *tappa* style, conveyed a mix of literary flavour, religious feelings and social concern, demystified and humanised the Hindu deities by exposing their vulnerability, and drew them into contemporary space through recourse to topical allusions and earthy character types like Krishna’s gatekeeper (speaking the language of Calcutta’s Bhojpuri guards). In the hands of his successors *Panchali* came closer to *Kabigan* before Rev. James Long removed it beyond the culture of the *bhadralok* (gentry) by describing it as “filthy and polluting”. For a while sung exclusively by women performers, it almost vanished at the close of the nineteenth century, to resurface later and survive marginally as part of subaltern culture.’ Cited from *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*: pp. 331–32.

<sup>44</sup> Banerjee, Sumanta. ‘The Beshya and the Babu: Prostitute and Her Clientele in 19th Century Bengal.’ *Economic and Political Weekly* (1993): 2461–2472.

<sup>45</sup> Page, W. Sutton. ‘Bengali Ballads.’ *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 4. 1 (1926): pp. 89–96.

beyond their means, which lacked the cultivated sense of culture.<sup>46</sup> In contrast the 'bhadralok' class was not necessarily a moneyed group instead they were an assemblage of educated people who shared a common cultivated 'taste'.<sup>47</sup> The traditional methods of viewing performances while sitting on all three sides were discarded in favour of the Western proscenium stage.<sup>48</sup>

It is interesting that the Bengali indigenous form of the *yātrā* might have played little or no role in the development of the modern Bengali theatre.<sup>49</sup> In fact it has also been argued that the Bengali theatre was an 'edifice' that was built 'on the ashes of people's culture'.<sup>50</sup> Ram Narayan Tarkaratna, himself a revered Sanskrit pundit, in the introduction to his translation of *Ratnābalī* speaks of *yātrā* in contemptuous terms and suggests that one should look for inspiration either in Western or Sanskrit models.<sup>51</sup> Proscenium theatre, a cultural neophyte in the nineteenth century, took to defining itself as a form best produced and consumed by the genteel or the 'bhadralok' class.<sup>52</sup> The relationship between theatre practices and

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<sup>46</sup> For a detailed discussion on the figure of the Babu refer to Chowdhury-Sengupta, Indira. 'The Effeminate and the Masculine: Nationalism and the Concept of Race in Bengal.' Ed. Peter Robb. *Concept of Race in South-Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997: pp. 282-303.

<sup>47</sup> Hans Harder is of the opinion that such distinctions are not as easy: babu and bhadralok cannot be taken apart, they are two sides of one coin/class. Harder, Hans. 'The Modern Babu and the Metropolis, Reassessing Early Bengali Narrative Prose (1821-1862).' Eds. Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia. *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004: pp. 358-401; p. 358.

<sup>48</sup> Rakesh H. Solomon observes that the modern Indian theatre was a 'formation under the complex and mutually-influencing pressures of an encroaching culture of empire, a renascent indigenous culture, imperial censorship policy, and nativist and nationalist resistance.' Solomon, Rakesh, H. 'Culture, Imperialism, and Nationalist Resistance: Performance in Colonial India.' *Theatre Journal*, 46 (1994): pp. 323-347.

<sup>49</sup> One of the earliest critics of the Bengali Theatre, Brajendranath Banerjee, contended that the *yātrā* had no role to play in the development of the early Bengali theatre. 'As a matter of fact, the Bengali drama did not grow out of the Bengali *yatra*, nor did the demand for a new kind of theatre come from the class which, as a rule, patronized *yatras*.' Banerjee, Brajendra Nath. *Bengali Stage (1795-1873)*. Calcutta: Ranjan Publishing House, 1943; p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> Kundu, Manujendra. 'Bengali Theatre: An Edifice on the Ashes of People's Culture.' *Social Scientist*, 38. 3 (2010): pp. 55-73.

<sup>51</sup> De, Sushil Kumar. *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century*; p. 643.

<sup>52</sup> Kiranmoy Raha believes that both the *yatra* and the English theatre contributed to the birth of the theatre in Bengal. He points to the fact that there were other hues to the debate as well. To quote: 'On the other hand, Amulya Charan Vidyabhusan, another authority on the subject, upholds the opposite view that only *jatra* can claim parentage to Bengali theatre, a view with which again not many are likely to agree. [...] for *jatra* over the years changed considerably and some scholars have even demarcated two periods marked by a distinct change in form and content. Responding to socio-economic changes, *jatra*, according to them, underwent a major transformation in the mid-nineteenth century.' Raha, Kiranmoy. *Bengali Theatre*. New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1978; p. 3.

the culture enters troubled waters by the end of the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the Dramatic Performance Act of 1876 (which banned obscenity).<sup>53</sup>

Since the earliest theatre productions were restricted to the homes of the genteel and the public theatres were not too cheap (as compared to the *yātrā* or the *kabigān* performances which were often held in the open) the nineteenth century theatre audiences largely came from the 'bhadralok' class. There grew a direct relationship between theatre and a reified sense of culture that came with the colonial education system.<sup>54</sup>

R.L. Richardson was the most popular professor after Henry Louis Vivian Derozio who came to teach literature at the Hindu College. Rajnarain Basu in his autobiography, reminiscing about his Hindu College days in the 1840s, notes that the principal of Hindu College, Captain R.L. Richardson would 'urge his students to learn how to articulate the Shakespeare plays they were reading by observing how it was done on the stage.' Going a step further, Richardson regularly asked them: "'Are you going to the theatre tonight?'"<sup>55</sup> In keeping with the notion of equivalence often drawn between rationality and Western education, it was believed that the 'amusement in vogue in the native society' would aid in the 'rapid spread of a rational taste among our countrymen'.<sup>56</sup> The fact that theatre was a part

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<sup>53</sup> Manujendra Kundu observes that the rhetoric of morality was intertwined with the perceptions of theatre and respectability, which made it possible for them to have supported the act of 1876. 'They had a reason to favour the law: this was the eradication of what, in their view, were expressions of obscenity and immorality. From contemporary reports it was apparent that all sections of Bengali society had an inclination towards indecency of expression; obscenity was a feature of the social intercourse of the rich and the poor, educated elites and illiterates alike.' Kundu, Manujendra. 'The Dramatic Performances Act of 1876: Reactions of the Bengali Establishment to Its Introduction.' *History and Sociology of South Asia* 7. 1 (2013): pp. 79-93.

<sup>54</sup> The segregation of spaces of performance was a relatively late development as the early European theatre in Calcutta saw a different admixture of audience. 'In the context of the 1780s, the power relation between colonizer and colonized had not developed explicitly into the configuration of oppressor/oppressed: When Sheridan's School for Scandal was performed in Calcutta, its audience was homogeneous-consisting of those who resided in the 'White' Town, the 'Black' Town was almost entirely segregated.' Choudhury, Mita. 'Sheridan, Garrick, and a Colonial Gesture: "The School for Scandal" on the Calcutta Stage.' *Theatre Journal*, 46. 3, Colonial/Postcolonial Theatre (1994): pp. 303-321.

<sup>55</sup> Rāj'nārāyaṇ Basu, *Ātmacarit* reprinted in *Ātmakathā*, Ed. Nareś Candra Jānā. Kalkātā: Ananyā Prakāśan, 1981. Quoted in Bose, Tirthankar. 'Shaking the Scene: English Education and Bengali Theatre.' Eds. Krishna Sen and Tapati Guha, *Colonial and Postcolonial Perspectives, Context, Text and Intertext*. Kolkata: Dasgupta and Co., 2007: pp. 135-143; p. 139.

<sup>56</sup> 'Theatricals.' *The Hindoo Patriot*. 28 April 1859; p. 9.

of the educated comprador elite was a detail that was stressed through the colonial education machinery.<sup>57</sup>

The entry of the theatre in the colonial Calcutta owes its lineage to the demand for entertainment by the European settlers. Proscenium theatre was largely the prerogative of the English in the eighteenth century. The British in fact had built a playhouse after the fort and armoury as early as 1753 which was lost in the battle with Siraj-ud-daula. Theatre was a crucial part of the cultural matrix of the British in Bengal right from the inception of the colonial rule and was seen as a form that defined 'English taste'.<sup>58</sup> The Britons' love for the stage prompted them to build the Calcutta Theatre in 1776 at the cost of a princely sum of one lakh rupees.

The Bengali gentry was interested in the promotion of the English theatre in Calcutta. One of the last European theatres in Calcutta, Sans Souci, which began in a book-sellers godown in a court-house in 1839, sought donations for building a playhouse. Among the donors were a large number of Indians and it was said that the Dwarkanath Tagore's contribution was comparable to Lord Auckland's, the then Governor-General of Calcutta.<sup>59</sup> The Bengali theatre had to wait for nearly forty years after that for its first production. A Russian violinist named Gerasim Stephanovich Lebedeff with the help of his translator Golak Nath Das, translated two plays. In 1753, in a theatre with a makeshift stage in 'Domotollah' (that is, Dharmatalla, Central Calcutta) built by Lebedeff with Bengali players, one of the translated plays, *Kālpanik sambadal* ('the disguise') was staged.

One may very much like to consider this as a stray and isolated event which was not followed up by anyone, even not shown any interest by the 'Bengalee' gentry for a Bengali play. [...] For one thing, there was no Bengali dramatic literature at that time and, no one appeared as a standard bearer.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Jyotsna Singh points out that there was a fine line that separated secular education and religion in colonial India. Singh, Jyotsna. *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues, Discoveries of India in the Language of Colonialism*. London: Routledge, 1996: pp. 101-125.

<sup>58</sup> Richard Schechner in the foreword to *The Colonial Staged*, talks about the propensity of the British in India to replicate 'London Theatre.' Chatterjee, Sudipto. *The Colonial Staged, Theatre in Colonial Calcutta*. New York, London, Calcutta: Seagull, 2007; p. xii.

<sup>59</sup> Raha, Kiranmoy. 'Old Calcutta's English Theatres.' Ed. Utpal K. Banerjee. *Bengali Theatre 200 Years*. New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India: pp. 49-53; p. 51.

<sup>60</sup> Roy, Kumar. "'Nabanna" and Mainstream Theatre.' Ed. Utpal K. Banerjee. *Bengali Theatre 200 Years*. New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India: pp. 54-62; p. 57.

There seems to be ebb after the initial Bengali productions by Lebedeff and it is only in the mid-nineteenth century that the middle class(es), bhadrakalok would take a keen interest in producing plays. Unlike Lebedeff's experiment the theatrical production would now be limited to a select few and would take place within the confines of the dwellings of the crème of the Bengali society. *Bidyā sundar* was the first significant play performed after Lebedeff on the stage built by Nabin Chandra Bose at his grand house at Shyambazar in 1832. It was only with *Nil'darpaṇ* (1859) that Bengali plays came to be a regular feature in the cultural scene of colonial Calcutta. Under the patronage of the rich and the famous plays began to attract private audiences until the establishment of the Public Theatre in 1872.

It is likely that the Western education system had a key role to play in the selection of subjects of the plays that were performed. Samik Bandyopadhyay suggests that 'the Victorian bogey of obscenity and the valorisation of a Sanskrit literary culture' 'meticulously sanitized and purged' the modern Bengali theatre of its sensuality.<sup>61</sup> Elizabethan theatre was often one of the role models, with Shakespeare emerging as a favourite.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, translations from Sanskrit into Bengali became the mainstay of Bengali theatre.<sup>63</sup> In keeping with the satirical spirits of the times, there were farces on topical issues that challenged tradition. In fact, Dutt himself was to write two farces: *Ekei ki bale sabhyatā* (Is this civilization?) (1860) and *Buṛo śāliker ghāre rō* (New Feathers on an Old Bird) (1860). The topics of all these plays ranged from attacking the caste system, widow remarriages to multiple marriages of the upper caste Kulins. In the nineteenth century scheme of

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<sup>61</sup> Bandyopadhyay, Samik. 'Bengali Theatre: The End of Colonial Tradition?' *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, 12 (1996): pp. 53-57, 50.

<sup>62</sup> Shakespeare seems to have been one of the most favoured playwrights as Bengali authors frequently translated his works. C.C. Gupta's *Kīrtibilās* (1852) was based on *Hamlet*, Harachandra Ghosh's *Bhānumaticittabilās* (1852) was a re-working of *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet* was adapted as *Cārumukhacittaharā* (1863) and perhaps the most famous of the lot was Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay's *The Tempest* as *Nālinī Basanta* (1868). Tapati Gupta reads this free translation of *The Tempest* as 'a colonial grand narrative subverted and appropriated in order to enrich Bengali literature.' Gupta, Tapati. 'Shakespeare Re-configured: Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay's Bangla Transcreations.' *Anukriti*, 2. 1 (2005): pp. 169.

<sup>63</sup> Nanda Kumar Ray's translation of the *Abhijñāna-Śakuntalā* (1857), Ram Narayan Tarkaratna's *Beṇī-Saṃhār*, *Bikram'barsī*, *Mālatī Mādhav*, were frequently staged. In fact, the first production of Prasanna Coomar Tagore's Hindu Theatre was a selection from *Julius Caesar* and H.H. Wilson's translation of Bhavabhūti's *Uttarāmacarita*. Jatindramohan and Sourinmohan Tagore of Pāthuriyāghātā had their own private theatre where they produced a translation of Kalidasa's *Mālavikāgnimitra* in 1859. These spates of translations were followed by polemic political treatises which went by the generic suffix *darpaṇ* or the mirror. *Nil'darpaṇ* (1859) on the plight of the indigo planters by Dinabandhu Mitra was followed Mir Mosharraf Hossein's *Jamīdār darpaṇ* (1873), *Cā-kar-darpaṇ* (1875) and *Jel-darpaṇ* (1876) by Dakshinaranjan Chattopadhyay.

things, Bengali theatre as a continuous tradition started with Mitra's polemic play *Nildarpan* in 1858-9. With this the bhadralok's taste for culture was forever altered.

Madhusudan's intervention in this new form was seen by many as a largely impulsive decision.<sup>64</sup> In 1858, barely a year after the 'Sepoy Mutiny', the Rajas of Paikpara (better known as the Belgachia theatre) had decided to stage a play. There were no significant Bengali plays available and hence it was decided that the Bengali translation of *Ratnābalī* would be staged. The Rajas were interested in inviting the sahebs for the occasion and a translation of the same was required in English. Gour Das Basak, the closest friend and confidant of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, suggested his name which was received with a lot of suspicion. A Bengali Christian youth who had just returned from Madras could surely not be trusted with such an important job. The day before Dutt was scheduled to translate, he had come to witness the rehearsal for the play. Dutt could not believe that the Rajas were wasting such a lot of money on such a substandard play. Gour Das lamented that there weren't enough plays in Bengali fit to be staged. Dutt staked a claim that very moment that he was going to write a play in Bengali. With the help of some Sanskrit and Bengali books he was able to draft his first play, *Śarmiṣṭhā*.<sup>65</sup>

Apart from the small poems that he had written in Bengali in his student years at the Hindu College, this was Dutt's first attempt at writing a full length work in Bengali. Moreover, it was Madhusudan's crucial entry into the Bengali literary arena proper. The run-up described above lends to a reading of Dutt's writing of the play as a spontaneous act with no significant bearing on his personal journey. Read in context, however, Dutt's foray into theatre in his literary voyage seems like a conscious decision. Unlike other established literary forms, theatre as an emerging form carried the potential of a lot of tinkering from within, both in form and content. Secondly and perhaps more significantly, Dutt was very sure of his audience.<sup>66</sup> Unlike other printed literature of the day, which could be read and consumed by a larger cross-section of the Bengali society, staging his first Bengali

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<sup>64</sup> While they were confident about his English translation, Raja Pratap Chandra, Raja Ishwar Chandra, Raja Jyotindra Mohan and his friend Gour Das were all skeptical about Dutt's foray into the Bengali theatre. (Basu 2004(1893): 161).

<sup>65</sup> Das, Sisir Kumar. *Michael*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 1994, pp. 1-2.

<sup>66</sup> Pradip Kumar Dutta argues that after 1857, the culture of Bengali literature was changing where the primary commitment came from a 'colonial middle-class that was turning to English as the first language.' Dutta, Pradip Kumar. 'Bangla Sahitya and the Vicissitudes of Bengali Identity in the Latter Half of the Nineteenth Century.' Ed. Sambuddha Sen. *Mastering Western Texts: Essays on Literature and Society*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003: pp. 220-240; p. 228.

play within the confines of the theatre of the Rajas of pāthuriyāghātā meant that his audience were more or less product of the same Western education system as him.<sup>67</sup> Madhusudan throughout his literary career would court the critical opinion of his own ilk like Rajnarain Basu, Jotindra Mohan Tagore, Issur Chunder Bose, Bhoodeb Mukherjee, Rajendralal Mitra, etc.<sup>68</sup>

However, it needs to be pointed out that Dutt's 'English' education was at variance with most of his contemporaries at the Hindu College. Unlike the university education in Europe, the Western education offered in India did not teach the classical languages which he was to master at Bishop's college.<sup>69</sup> Use of Greek and Latin hence has to be read with caution and often as modes of subversion as we see most notably with the poets Manmohan Ghose and the Dutt Family. He chose a form that heavily relied on classical principles for structure and as a diversion for the elite class it carried the optimum potential for adapting to Western literary forms.<sup>70</sup> Ironically, this was the same play that Girish Chandra Ghosh in 1867 performed with his *yātrā* troupe with his friends Nagendra Banerjee, Dharamdas Sur and Radhamadhab Kar to prove the efficacy of bringing a European form to a *yātrā* audience.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> However, it should be noted that Dutt heavily criticized the excesses of the bhadralok class. Cases in point are his two farces; *Ekei ki bale sabhyatā* (Is this civilization?) (1860) and *Buro śāliker ghāre rō* (New Feathers on an Old Bird) (1860).

<sup>68</sup> Foretelling the rise of the western educated elite, Dutt would write a poem, 'Written at the Hindu College, by a Native Student', in its anticipation: Oh! How my heart exulteth while I see/ These future flow'rs to deck my country's brow/ Thus kindly nurtured in this nursery! (Basu 2004(1893): 84).

<sup>69</sup> As a young student Dutt is said to have taken very dearly to the classics of Europe, and he began to compose poetry in English, his idols being Byron, Milton, Tasso, Dante, Virgil and Homer. Brenda Deen Schildgen observes that Dutt's love for Dante was not merely part of his Europhilia. It was part of the Bengali intelligentsia's self conscious attempt to draw parallels with the Italian Renaissance. 'The interest in Dante as a model for national poetry shows that the Indian writers conjured an image of their Italian precursor to parallel their own cultural and political aspirations. Many saw Dante as a model to follow: a poet who gave birth to a new poetry and a revived (or new) language in which to express it; a political figure whose literary activity was his means to uphold a moral vision of political life in which justice was the core; and an ethical and religious visionary who strove to restore Christianity to its pristine origins.' Schildgen, Brenda Deen. 'Dante and the Bengal Renaissance.' Eds. Aida Audeh and Nick Havely. *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012: pp. 323-352; p. 326.

<sup>70</sup> His decision might also have benefited from the Orientalist scholars privileging Sanskrit drama 'over all other genres of sub continental literary enquiry.' Dharwarkar, Aparna Bhargava. *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory and Urban Performance in India since 1947*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005; p. 129.

<sup>71</sup> 'This at once marks off Girish from the usual practioners of yatra of his time. Girish did not follow the usual repertoire of religious subjects of Lord Krishna's adventures, or the cheap love-themes such as Vidyasundar. He chose Michael's tragedy which was structured on the European-model but chose it to bring it to the arena of a Yatra audience. Already Girish's theatrical ideals seemed to have taken shape; he wanted an amalgam of theatre and Yatra, all his life he sought to master the technique of theatre: its five act drama structure, its refined human conflict, its sophisticated suspense and catharsis,

Madhusudan was conscious of his English speaking audience who could read the English translation and presumably relate to the Bengali production on stage and the bilingual audience who would discern the differences between the English and the Bengali texts. Dutt's staging the play for a select audience 'others' a large section of the populace, who were outside the physical dimensions of the theatre of the rajas. But on the other hand Madhusudan was keen to publish the play thereby including the textual participation of the Bengali literate audience (part of the performative 'other'). As a result, it allowed a textual interpretative authority to a literate audience even while depriving them of a performative participation. Nevertheless this equation is complicated by the most interesting category in this schema: the actors and actresses of the theatre. They belong to the grey area where the bhadralok and the rest come tantalizingly close even to include the courtesans. Some plays encouraged the participation of even the rajas while others involved professional actors and actresses who came from dubious social backgrounds. Madhusudan was one of the first playwrights to have advocated the inclusion of women actors in theatrical productions.<sup>72</sup> While women of the Tagore family acted in their own productions, prostitutes like Binodini Dasi were famous theatre actresses by the end of the century.<sup>73</sup> Interestingly enough, it is at the physical space of the theatre that all these diversified constituencies come together. Therefore, the receptions are carefully sequestered to both allow and disallow certain categories of meanings to co-exist independently. These interactions between these receptive groups, as I shall discuss in the following section, allows the Christian poet to partake in the effective use of Hindu mythology.

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but he wanted to infuse it with whatever was lively and powerful in the traditional yatra. Above all he wanted to free the theatre from the whims of a bourgeois audience; he wanted the public in his theatre, a public he knew so well and could tell unerringly what pleased it and what did not.' Dutt, Utpal. *Girish Chandra Ghosh*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1992; p. 11.

<sup>72</sup> Raha, Kiranmoy. *Bengali Theater*. New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1978; p. 27. According to Sengupta, *Sermista* was influenced by Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and recruited four actresses. In sharp contrast to their social stature, these actresses would play 'respectable' characters on stage, thus leading twin lives. Sengupta, Debjani. 'Playing the Canon: Shakespeare and the Bengali Actress in Nineteenth-Century Calcutta.' Ed. Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomue. *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation and Performance*. New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing, 2005: pp. 242-259; p. 247.

<sup>73</sup> Singh, Lata. 'Making of "Modern" Theatre and Actresses' Question: Negotiation and Contestation.' *Indian Historical Review* 35. 2 (2008): pp. 3-26. Chatterjee, Partha. 'An Equal Right to the City: Contests over Cultural Space in Calcutta.' *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 18. 2 (2006): pp. 166-184. Banerjee, Sumanta. 'The "Beshya" and the "Babu": Prostitute and Her Clientele in 19th Century Bengal.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28-45 (1993): pp. 2461-2472. It is interesting to note that Madhusudan was instrumental in getting women to act on stage. Roy, Madhumita and Debmalya Das. 'Actresses on Bengali Stage— Nati Binodini and Moyna: the Present Re-imagines the Past.' *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*. Vol. 3. 4 (2011): pp. 514-529.

### *Forging a new genealogy: Śarmisthā and the Bengali theatre*

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1859, a few days after his book was published, Madhusudan wrote to Gour Das Basak,

this book is destined to occupy a prominent place in the literature of the country, it will not be condemned on its head, twenty years hence, everyone is learning Bengali [...] This Sharmistha has put me at the head of all Bengali writers. People talk of its poetry with rapture.

Madhusudan is an unusually self-conscious poet, and in the same letter he talks about how he 'stepped out of the path of the dramatist, for that of mere poetry'. With his idol Milton, Madhusudan was convinced of the reified temperament of poetry and hence, unsure of his dramatic prowess he stresses on the poetic quality of his play. Madhusudan was very careful in selecting his audience for the performance which was incidentally a coterie of an opportunist class, capable of appreciating his rapturous poetry. In January 1859, immediately before the publication of his play, he wrote to Gour Dass Basak:

I am aware, my dear fellow, that there will be in all likelihood, something of a foreign air about my drama; but if the language be not ungrammatical, the characters well maintained, what care you if there be a foreign air about the thing? [...] I am writing for that portion of my countrymen who think as I think, whose minds have been more or less imbued with Western ideas and modes of thinking; and it is my intention to throw off the fetters forged by us by a servile admiration for everything Sanskrit.<sup>74</sup>

In contrast to his next play, *Padmābatī*<sup>75</sup> published in the same year, *Śarmisthā's* plot is not from a Greek classic but from the first part of the epic *Mahābhārata*.<sup>76</sup> The 'foreign air' that he talks about is mainly in the structure of the play which spans like an Elizabethan drama with clearly etched out acts and scenes, in its props and settings, and also the overarching role of 'fate'(more a character of the Greek classical drama).

The plot of *Sermista* is taken from the *Ādiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. It is titled the disagreement between Devayani and Sermista. The original plot begins with

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<sup>74</sup> Murshid, Ghulam. *The Heart of a Rebel Poet: The Letters of Madhusudan Dutt*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004; p. 33.

<sup>75</sup> The plot's origin lies in Greek mythology and reminds the reader of Tennyson's *Oenone* and the eighteenth century play *Judgement of Paris* by James Beattie.

<sup>76</sup> Riddiford observes that 'Indians received an education in English rather than English education.' Indians were less likely to be trained in Greek in Latin. Therefore, be it the Dutts of Rambagan, Madhusudan or the poetry of Manmohan Ghose, the incorporation of Greek and Latin was to make a larger point about subverting the western knowledge system. For a discussion of the same on Dutt see Riddiford, Alexander. *Madly after the Muses: Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt and his Reception of the Graeco-Roman Classics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Indra, the king of the Gods, in his form as the wind, exchanging the clothes of few women who were taking a bath. Sermista, the daughter of the Asura king Br̥sparva, Devayani, the daughter of Sukracharya, the powerful Brahmin advisor to the Asura king, inadvertently exchanged clothes. Devayani was furious and Sermista was quick to remind her of her status as her subordinate. This ensued in a physical fight and Devayani was cast into a coup. Finally, King Yayati saves her and agrees to marry her. Devayani is furious and seeks revenge and Sukracharya pleads to the King for justice. As a punitive measure Devayani demanded that Sermista accompanies her to Yayati's abode as a servant along with a thousand other Asura women. Most importantly, Sermista would never be allowed to take Yayati for her husband. Devayani was soon expecting her first child and Sermista was sad and furious. She decided to convince the king to take her as his wife according to Vedic customs. The king agrees and Sermista would eventually give birth to three sons and Devayani to two. When Devayani comes to know of the truth, she approaches her father for justice. Sukracharya curses Yayati with senility. Yayati tries to defend himself and Sukracharya pronounces that he can transfer this curse on to one of his five sons and whoever agrees to do so would be blessed with a long life, successors and an illustrious life. Only the youngest Puru, the son of Sermista, decides to take on the senility of his father for a thousand years and goes on to become one of the most celebrated emperors of his times.

If the plot is from Hindu mythology and the structure is borrowed from the West, what kind of literary continuity or discontinuity is Dutt looking at? Like his inspirational figures (such as Milton and Dante), he wanted to become a poet, but makes theatre as a stepping stone. The coterie that was targeted with his play subscribed to a kind of cultivated cultural urbanity which ironically dissolved the possibility of branding Madhusudan as an outsider. As we have observed earlier, his conversion to Christianity and his insistence on English as the primary language had already made him an outsider in the Hindu Bengali circles.<sup>77</sup> His conversion to Christianity was a much talked about affair as he was kept in Fort William for the fear that he could be forcibly taken back by his family. His avowed disregard for traditions coupled with his belligerent fidelity to Christianity had made him a 'relational other' in the eyes of the Bengali elite.

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<sup>77</sup> If we are to believe Bankim Chatterjee, the Bengali intelligentsia was unsure of the Dutt's proficiency in Bengali. In fact Dutt himself would send his manuscript of *Sermista* to be checked for 'grammatical blunders' by Ram Narayan Tarkaratna. *Jiban'carit*: pp. 230-232.

The charge against Madhusudan largely has been that he often borrowed too much from the West. His affinity towards Greek and Latin classics in this regard is carefully highlighted.<sup>78</sup> But it can also be argued that Madhusudan was in fact responding to all the Orientalist studies about symbiotic philologies and deemed the marriage of Indian classics with their Western counterparts as long desired and natural.<sup>79</sup> The Indo-Western conflict that is often a bone of contention in other emerging literary forms like the novel, satires, poetry, etc. are to a large extent also informed by the philological research and practices in the nineteenth century. Several well-known Orientalists were working and publishing on the common origins of Sanskrit, Greek and Latin; the languages deemed as classical.<sup>80</sup> As we have observed in Part I Chapter three, the relationship between Hindu revivalism and modernity was interlinked with the concept of schizophrenic colonial time. Dutt's selection of plot and subsequent departures from it are very significant in this regard. If the references to the Greek and Latin classics with liberal dozes of Elizabethan drama were to be the mainstay of his theatrical compositions, his choice of plot (habitually with significant departures from the original) were to draw from indigenous literary traditions. Therefore, to fathom the complete creative potential of the text, the ideal reader/audience had to be necessarily well versed in literary idioms of the West (in particular English) and the East (Bengali).

It is well documented that Madhusudan had his first lessons of the epic from his mother and other female relatives, most probably under the auspices of Hindu ceremonial practices. The popular culture of the period, prior to the advent of theatre, largely depended on mythology to provide them with plots. The Bengali literary tradition which has a continuous history since the fourteenth century, in the

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<sup>78</sup> William Radice notes, 'Madhusudan is thought of as a learned poet, *bahu-pāṭhī* as opposed to the *svabhāb kabi* (natural poet) Rabindranath. Undoubtedly he had a tremendous appetite for languages, grappling with Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and Italian epic poetry in original. He learnt French very well: contemporaries attest that he and Henrietta often spoke French to each other in their house in Calcutta after five years in Europe. With regard to his some other linguistic claims (Tamil, Telegu when he was in Madras, German when he was in Europe) one feels a little skeptical.' Radice, William. 'Milton and Madhusudan.' Eds G. R. Taneja and Vinod Sena. *Literature East and West: Essays Presented to R. K. Dasgupta*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1995: pp. 177-194, 178.

<sup>79</sup> It was prominently heralded by William Jones as the study of comparative philology which set to discover a common proto language, connecting India with Europe.

<sup>80</sup> As Buddhadeva Bose argues, 'Sanskrit is a distant cousin of Greek and Latin, and most modern Indian languages stand in exactly the same relationship to Sanskrit as those of modern Europe to Latin and Greek. It is axiomatic that the characteristics of a literature are to a large extent determined by the nature of language in which it is written. Since the Indo-European languages—however removed in space and time—essentially belong to one family and to this day have recognizable similarities in grammatical technique, it should not surprise us if the literatures written in them reveal some kind of affinity even when produced in mutual isolation.' Bose, Buddhadev. 'Modern Bengali Literature: A Study in Indo-Western Relations.' *Comparative Literature Studies*, 1. 1 (1964): pp. 47-53, 48.

medieval times had songs and lyrical poems, long narratives and short verses.<sup>81</sup> Although there were poems which were paeans to great and mighty kings it to a certain extent consisted of retellings of the Sanskrit texts in Bengali which linked 'Bengali literature with the ancient Sanskrit tradition'.<sup>82</sup> Aware of the differences in reception between his English and his Bengali audience, he chose disparate frames to aid in comprehensions and interpretations. Although Dutt was very sure of his English audience, for the Bengali play, he was concerned that the language would be 'a little too high for such audiences' who would be expected to patronize it.<sup>83</sup>

The Bengali play begins with a song supposed to be sung in the *rāginī Khāmbāj* and *tāl Madhyamān*. Interesting enough while the other romantic songs are translated, the opening song is absent in the English translation of the play.

*mari hāj, kothā se sukher samāj,  
ye samāj deśamāj nātyaras sabiśeṣ chilo rasamāj.  
śunago bhārata-bhūmi, kata nidrā yābe tumi,  
ār nidrā ucit nā hāj.  
uṭha tyaja ghum'ghor, haïlo haïlo bhor,  
din'kar prācīte udāj  
kothā bālmīki byās, kothā taba kālidās,  
kothā bhababhūti mahoday.  
alīk kunāṭya-raṅge, maje lok rāṛhe baṅge,  
nirakhīyā prāṅe nahi saṅ.  
sudhāras anādare, biṣ-bārī pān kare,  
tāhe hāj tanu-manakhāj  
madhu bale yāgo māgo, bibhūsthāne ei māgo,  
surase prabr̥tta haïk taba tanaṅ nīścaṅ.*<sup>84</sup>

With the song quoted above it is clear that Dutt is trying to invoke a tradition of classical writing while dismissing the popular forms that were available in the nineteenth century. It is the highest form of mythology, the epic and the 'golden age' dramatists, Bhavabhuti and Kalidasa that Dutt chooses for his inspiration. Dutt accepts continuity with the earlier Sanskrit tradition when he invokes Valmiki and

<sup>81</sup> It goes with the caveat that Caryāpadas approx. 11<sup>th</sup> century and Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan 14<sup>th</sup> century but the Caryāpadas are in Eastern Apabhramsha and are also claimed by other vernacular literatures.

<sup>82</sup> Van Meter, Rachel R. 'Innovation and Tradition in Nineteenth-century Bengali Literature.' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 88. 2 (1968): pp. 352-358, 353.

<sup>83</sup> (Basu 2004(1893): 173).

<sup>84</sup> Paraphrased, the song laments about the lost glory of the tradition of the plays across India. It urges Mother India to wake up from her slumber as it is high time and the sun is on the horizon and the dawn of a new era is at hand. Madhududan then shifts to the present day where the amusements of the people have become crass which he cannot stand and hence he invokes the lineage of Sanskrit masters of the epics, Valmiki and Vyasa and the dramatists of the golden Gupta age, Kalidasa and Bhababhuti. In Dutt's contemporary age people are drinking poison which is adversely affecting both their minds and their body. Dutt takes up the challenging task of waking up Mother India and entertaining her with his play which will invigorate both the mind and the body. (Dutt *Sarmiṣṭhā* 1993: p. 68). s

Vyasa, mythological authors of these epics, and the famous dramatist of the later years Bhavabhuti. Dutt's imagined relational discontinuity comes with his contemporary age where people indulge in tasteless amusements.<sup>85</sup> This perceived discontinuity urges him to look for structures outside the current canon while still maintaining a temperamental connect with the lost 'golden age' and it is forged through the translations of the canon in Bengali.<sup>86</sup> With the re-working of the myths, he is interested in creating a parallel tradition which rests on a common understanding and hence he writes for his fellow countrymen who think like he does. As is evident from the song quoted above, he dismisses the possibility of simultaneous existence of the current forms of amusement with drama.<sup>87</sup> Even in his disavowal of the audience of the popular entertainment the repeated occurrence of the songs attests their presence. Therefore the neat segregation of spaces is consciously invaded, even when ridiculed, by popular genres. A subterranean presence of other forms encourages the possibility of contending genres to co-exist, even when advocating simultaneity.

Mythology and drama in Dutt's conception invoke a winning concoction that can awaken even the somnambulant goddess. But importantly Dutt is trying to create a common ground of understanding by appealing to the cultural

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<sup>85</sup> As Rimli Bhattacharya outlines: 'Let us consider another set of examples, this time from the repertoire of the most "Westernized" of the early dramatists, Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Shormistha*, written in 1858 and staged the following year at a private Belgachia Theatre had six songs. The 13 year old boy cast in the heroine's role was chosen by Michael's patron particularly for his melodious voice. Dutt's *Padmavati* (1860), staged only in 1865, had eight songs though all were meant to be sung in the background. The most interesting illustration is from his farce *Ekei ki Bole Sabhyata?* where the intertextuality requires some explication. Dutt's patrons, the Paikpara rajas had been persuaded not to stage it for the fear of offending certain groups; the farce was finally produced by Shovabazar Amateur Theatrical society. A song and dance sequence by Nat and Nati, not present in the original play was added by the latter and performed to great applause. The other song (present in Michael's play) is for the two dancers who are asked to perform in the midst of the Jnanatarangini Sabha. Dutt chose a song which would instantly tell the audience about the real agenda of the society of the knowledge seekers.' Bhattacharya, Rimli. 'The Nautee in the Second City of the Empire.' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 40 (2003): pp. 191-235; p. 210.

<sup>86</sup> Dutt's famous tribute to Kashiram Das, the creator of the Bengali *Mahābhārata*, reads: 'As the Jahnabi was (entwined) in the matted locks of Candracur, so the divine sage Dvaipayana poured forth the essence of the *Bharata*, and held it in the lake of Sanskrit. Restless Bengal wept with thirst. As the vrati Bhagiratha (most blessed tapasa in this world, treasure of the human race!) worshipping the Ganges with austerities, accomplished the release of the Sagaracian, (and) bringing the Mother, purified the three world; so you digging the channel of language have brought the streams of the Bharata-essence to assuage the thirst of Gaur with that pure water. The land of Gaur will never be able to pay this debt. The words of the Mahabharata are like nectar,—O kash! In the company of chief poets, you are worthy.' "'Kāśirām Dās", *Caturdaśpadī kabitābālī* 1866.' Quoted in Rachel R. Van Meter. 'Innovation and Tradition in Nineteenth-century Bengali Literature.' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 88. 2 (1968): pp. 352-358; p. 355.

<sup>87</sup> It is interesting to note that during Madhusudan's lifetime, by second half of the nineteenth century, topical farces often based on scandals would become the normative. For example, see Sarkar, Tanika. 'Talking about Scandals: Religion, Law and Love in Late Nineteenth-century Bengal.' *Studies in History* 13. 1 (1997): pp. 63-95.

subconscious albeit separated by a few centuries. Like a prophetic Romantic poet, he claims that it is an enlightened soul like him who can selectively appropriate classicism in the nineteenth century which is struggling to understand its own rich heritage. Hence, he is constantly talking about a common thinking process. What kind of thinking is he talking about here?<sup>88</sup>

The review by the *Hindoo Patriot* of his play soon after it was staged at the Belgachia Theatre, does not call it a mythological play. Judging by the earlier review (referred in the later article) of *Ratnavali* where the reviewer constantly bemoans the substandard acting skills of the players, positing them against their famous English counterparts like Mrs Siddon (who essayed the role of Lady Macbeth), and adding frequent asides which compare Polonius of Hamlet with Yoggundrian, *Sermista* is looked upon not as mythological piece from the depths of time but a 'socio-comic' drama.<sup>89</sup> It seems that Dutt had indeed understood the pulse of his fellow 'thinkers's to be able to produce a play that creates literary continuities even when it severs its tie with the present. In the cloak of a Romantic drama, Dutt raises several topical issues like the role of the woman in choosing her partner, the stratification of the society in terms of caste, etc.

We have already discussed the contradictions that abound in M.S. Dutt's life and the way he has been represented during his times and after. In these representations he has been projected as an 'outsider' and an anomaly who can be co-opted into the mainstream literary lineage once he has subscribed to a greater religion: that of Bengali nationalism. Dutt in his peculiar way has tried to draw parallel literary lineages within the Bengali literary framework; which while excluding popular cultural practices shuns 'borrowed clothes' and creates its own heroes. As Amit Chaudhuri has noted,

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<sup>88</sup> It is interesting to note that Dutt had similar concerns about the appropriate 'Taste' of the audience to gauge his 'Genius' as the opening lines of his translation of *Ratnavali* shows:

I tremble as I tread the hallow'd ground,  
Can I, with feeble hand, with feebler tongue,  
Strike the sweet lyre and raise the voice of song?  
Lo! As a dwarf I stand, With lift-up eyes,  
Longing to pluck the moon adown the skies!  
But e'en keen Ridicule, forgets to sneer,  
When heavenly Genius, graceful Taste are near:  
As a suppliant to them I fly—  
(Datta 1993: 870).

<sup>89</sup> 'Belgachia Theatre.' *Hindoo Patriot* 10 September 1859. Ed. Benoy Ghose. *Selections From English Periodicals of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal V*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 1980: pp. 135.

[i]n his personal and creative life, we see, again, the related impulse towards, on the one hand, the disowning of tradition, and its recovery as a creative constituent of the secular self on the other. Crucially, however, he translates the public acts of disowning and recovery that, so far, marked the spheres of religious debate and social reform, into the personal sphere of art. In a sense, almost, he suddenly, and unprecedentedly, gifts the Bengali a relationship between identity, rebellion, creativity, and the subconscious.<sup>90</sup>

His giving up of tradition and accepting what Chaudhuri calls a 'secular self' creates multiplicities of reference frames in terms of religion, language and genres. Added to this dimension is the fact that this play was simultaneously written in both Bengali and English. This is a most curious case of bilinguality (another example is that of K.M. Banerjea's *Encyclopaedia Bengalensis* which shall be discussed in the concluding remarks) where the author invites bilingual readers to participate in the reading of play through varying frames; thereby toying with the duality of perception. In keeping with Madhusudan's idea of re-inventing a tradition, the simultaneous translation disrupts the easy equation between translation and an original text, in turn dislodging the authorial anxiety over using source texts. This will be reflected in his creative attempts to review mythological tellings of a plot, as we shall discover in the course of the discussion.

Madhusudan had the experience of translating *Ratnābālī* (*Ratnavali*) and *Nil'Darpan* before venturing into the translation of *Śarmiṣṭha* (*Sermista*). Dutt's intention is transparent; he is appealing not only to a Bengali literate audience but far beyond it. He expects the language of the performance to be intelligible to the colonial masters, who were invited by the Rajas to witness the staging of the play. To play to the tradition of the English gallery, Dutt introduces key intertextual references. For example, Princess Sermista talks about her woes:

Have I not myself wantonly woo'd calamity to darken my path?  
Have I not like bedlamite mixed worm-wood and gall with the hoined  
draught Destiny gave me to drink? How cans't thou curse Destiny? How  
cans't thou call her cruel?<sup>91</sup>

Chatterjee points out that this speech bears direct references to the Elizabethan English drama, 'wantonly woo'd' and 'worm-wood' are reminders of Hamlet's madness as is the obvious reference to the infamous eighteenth-century mental

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<sup>90</sup> Chaudhuri, Amit. 'The Moor's Legacy: A Jolly Christian Youth in Bengal Takes on Rama and his Rabble.' *The Telegraph*. October 26, 2003; p. 11.

<sup>91</sup> (Datta 1993: 707).

asylum of St. Mary of Bethlehem, referred as 'bedlamite'.<sup>92</sup> Quite in tune with his earlier English poetry, Dutt's translation also carries notes of uneven frames of reference. Some aim at classical equivalence like the Asuras become 'the Titans of Hindu Mythology', Vishwakarma, 'the Vulcan of Hindu Mythology' or the Minister Sucracharya[sic] becomes 'the arch-priest of the Asuras or Titans'. However, Dutt often reserves the comparisons to the few who are well versed in the classics: 'Propago Contemtrix Superum' is quoted without any obvious marker of its origin in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The flora and fauna often appear in their latinized scientific names: Anus Casarca and vallisneria.<sup>93</sup> These varied frames—the contemporary scientific with the classical—bring his contemporary ideas of the classical to the fore.

Even when he speaks of the mother awakening from her slumber why is there the need to be understood in English? This tension highlights the central dilemma of the Bengali theatre in the nineteenth century: pitching of the space and the audience of the theatre. As Dutt's act of translation of one of the earliest of the staged Bengali drama demonstrates, it lay somewhere in-between languages as the bilingual intelligentsia wished to garner a wider audience. Does it always therefore speak in translation? The dilemma of the early Bengali theatre is a unique predicament of the colonized where the language and its reception are caught in a charged ideological net. This aspect radically changes the receptive dimensions of the play and its position within the precincts of an emerging bilingual intelligentsia. Power relations between the colonizer's tongue and the mother tongue, made language choices a political affair. As Partha Chatterjee has remarked,

The bilingual intelligentsia came to think of its own language as belonging to that of the inner domain of cultural identity from which the colonial intruder had to be kept out. Language therefore became a zone over which the nation first had to declare its sovereignty and then had to transform in order to make it adequate for the modern world.<sup>94</sup>

This choice is further complicated by the question of translation. What defines the relationship between the translator and the translated? Tejaswini

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<sup>92</sup> Chatterjee, Sudipto. 'Mise-en- (colonial) scène, The Theatre of the Bengal Renaissance.' Ed. J. Ellen Gainor. *Imperialism and Theatre*. London: Routledge, 1995; p. 34. Interestingly enough, such overt references are absent in Dutt's Bengali version where the eponymous heroine speaks in modern Bengali and just feasts on sweets mixed with poison: 'āmi āpan doṣei durdaśāy patita haṣechi, āmi āpani miṣṭānner sahit biṣ miśrita ka're bhakṣaṇ karechi, tār anyer doṣ ki?' (Datta 1993: 209).

<sup>93</sup> (Datta 1993: 743-44).

<sup>94</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories*. Oxford: New Delhi, 1997; p. 7.

Niranjana suggests that colonial subjects already lived 'in translation', imaged and re-imaged by colonial ways of seeing.

In creating coherent and transparent texts and subjects, translation participates—across a range of discourses—in the *fixing* of colonized cultures, making them seem static and un-changing rather than historically constructed. Translation functions as a transparent presentation of something that already exists, although the 'original' is actually brought into being through translation. Paradoxically, translation also provides a place in 'history' for the colonized. The Hegelian conception of history that translation helps bring into being endorses a teleological, hierarchical model of civilizations based on the 'coming to consciousness' of 'spirit', an event for which the non-Western cultures are unsuited or unprepared.<sup>95</sup>

In a loose sense, Dutt specifically establishes the contested relationship between a 'fixed' culture (in terms of choosing a plot from the *Mahābhārata*)<sup>96</sup> and re-inventing it to position it vis-à-vis the 'coming of consciousness'. This is best established in the use of Hindu mythology that is always already mediated (as it was constantly worked upon and also survives in the oral cultural practices). Madhusudan's desire to establish a 'National Theatre'—with a repertoire of 'classical dramas'—in its content finds both the 'nation' and its 'classic' in Hindu mythology.<sup>97</sup> In that sense, *Sermista* not only introduces an understanding of parallel literary genealogies but most importantly initiates an understanding of cultural homogeneity.

In the previous section we have already discussed the increasing presence of the Western education system which has engendered 'similar modes of thinking'.<sup>98</sup> While cultural heterogeneity remained as the subterranean level certain homogeneities were superimposed on it.<sup>99</sup> At one level, Madhusudan responds to

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<sup>95</sup> Niranjana, Tejaswini. *Siting Translation, History Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*. Berkely, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1992; p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> It can be argued that it was only by the end of the nineteenth century when religious texts acquired some kind of fixity. See for example, Panikkar, K. N. *Colonialism, Culture and Resistance*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007 and *The Bengal Renaissance: Identity and Creativity from Rammohan Roy to Rabindranath Tagore*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007.

<sup>97</sup> 'As a Scribbler, I am of course proud to think that you like my Farces, but to tell you the candid truth, I half regret having published these two things. You know that as yet we have not established a National Theatre, I mean we have not as yet got a body of sound, classical dramas to regulate the national taste, and therefore we ought not to have Farces.' (Basu 2004(1893): 216).

<sup>98</sup> Parna Sengupta notes that the missionaries (in extension Christianity) had a significant role to play in terms of the content of the school books, which lent itself heavily to issues of morality. Sengupta, Parna. *Pedagogy for Religion: Missionary Education and the Fashioning of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011; p. 41.

<sup>99</sup> Most common among these homogeneities was 'revivalism.' Aravadan Srinivas observes: 'Various Romantic interpretations of pantheistic monism and mysticism would also help propel the abstract philosophy of Advaita Vedanta into the position of prime representative of the construct of 'Hinduism'

this homogenization by performing in the frame of the 'bhadrakalok' class and at the other level he is keen at looking for a common genealogy that would come to define Bengali literature.<sup>100</sup> In this, he looks for the participation of an audience (albeit in defence) outside the precincts of the coterie. This layered homogeneity makes it possible for a Christian poet to dabble with the Hindu religious text, the religion he has long abandoned. Therefore, even when he traces his literary pedigree to the Sanskrit tradition of Valmiki and Vyasa he dismisses their blind followers in the sanskritists of the day.<sup>101</sup> These levels of engagement and disengagement allow Madhusudan to partake in a larger tradition of Bengali literature as he continuously contends with its elements.

For the drama, Madhusudan had introduced several characters, like Madhava the *vidūṣaka*, the three attendants of the women, Shukracharya's disciple Kapila, Bakasura and another demon. Other than introducing new characters, Dutt's play makes a crucial departure. Unlike the epic's rendition of the story, Dutt takes clear sides and makes the daughter of the Asura king, Sermista as the protagonist of his play. It is not by chance but by design that the Asura princess in the play is more humane than the daughter of the Brahmin. Even when the play sticks to the moral codes in the *Mahābhārata*, the inversion of the moral universe is pronounced. Dutt had already introduced such reversals in his long English poem, *The Captive Ladie* (1849) and in his most famous epic poem *Meghnād'badh kābya* will perfect the same. Even when Yayati sighs 'Alas! 'twas in an evil hour that I set foot in the accursed land of the Asura"<sup>102</sup> he can never forget the beauty that he found in the Asura land. Significantly, Dutt chooses to name Yayati as the King of India in the English version of the play.

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as a new religious definition. The extended result of this operation was the prosthetic limb of the Bengal Renaissance that would twitch in response to a long-distance Romantically inspired language, generating the reformatory religious vocabularies that would later be variously named "neo-Hinduism", "semitized Hinduism", "universal Hinduism", and "syndicated Hinduism". Srinivas, Aravadan. 'The Logic of Late Romanticism.' *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102. 1 (2003): pp. 179-214; p. 182.

<sup>100</sup> Dutt's letter to Keshob Chandra Gangooly [sic] expressly states his desire to partake in the construction of what he calls 'national drama': 'Should we ever have a national Drama, and that Drama a future historian to commemorate its rise and progress, may be associate my humble name with yours!' (Datta 1993: 83).

<sup>101</sup> Dutt for instance would dismiss Ram Narayan Tarkaratna's interventions in terms of the plot and structure of the play. 'Ram Narayan's "version", as you justly call it, disappoints me. I have once made up my mind to reject his aid. I shall either stand by fall by myself. I did not wish Ram Narayan to recast my sentences— most assuredly not. I only requested him to correct grammatical blunders, if any. You know that a man's style is the reflection of his mind, and I am afraid there is but little congeniality between our friend and my poorself. However, I shall adopt some of his corrections.' (Basu 2004 (1893): 161).

<sup>102</sup> (Datta 1993: 715).

In an attempt to undermine the haughty behaviour of Sermista, the play does not provide enough reasons as to the fight between the protagonist and Devayani. It is reported through the conversation of the two Asuras. The dignified departure of Sermista contrasted with the heartlessness of Sukracharya immediately strikes a chord of empathy with the audience. Bakrasura says:

‘Ah, my brave comrade, when the royal maiden came to the audience-chamber, her countenance beamed like the autumnal moon; but when she heard the cruel words of the sage, she grew pale as does the autumnal Moon when dark-browed clouds come rushing on to veil its splendour! O great God! What strange destiny is hers!’<sup>x</sup>

Dutt’s Sermista is quite unlike the character that we find in the *Mahābhārata*. She makes the drama come around as a romantic play.<sup>103</sup> For the sake of the romantic element in the play, Dutt does away with the most important clause in the agreement between Sukracharya and the Asura king that Sermista will never be allowed to marry the king Yayati. Quite unlike the telling of the epic, the King is actually besotted by Sermista. Yayati’s first encounter with Sermista is introduced to the audience with all the right omens like the throbbing of the right arm which indicates reaping of a worthy fruit. Dismissing the expectations that the audience might have of an Asura princess, Dutt gives her the status of a romantic heroine.

Yayati: Her mellifluous strain no longer floats on the hush’d air — the leaf hidden kokila has ceased (Seeing Sermista). But soft! Do I see before me some heavenly nymph that hath descended from her very haunts to wander in the solitude of this noontide bow’r, or is it some daughter of Earth with the unfading light of Heav’n in her eyes, the radiant glory of Heav’n on her virgin brow? Hush! Methinks she speaks. I must conceal me behind this tree and listen to the enchanting melody of her voice.<sup>104</sup>

While Sermista remains the ‘sweet heroine’, Śarmiṣṭhā often finds herself as *pāpiṣṭilā* (sinner) given to the fallen measures of the womanly race. Sermista is also often spared the caustic accusation that women remain the root of all trouble.<sup>105</sup> Mirroring the status of women within and without the theatre, Dutt’s Śarmiṣṭhā along with the Asuras speak the lowly tongue in sharp contrast to the sanskritised Bengali of the noble men folk.

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<sup>103</sup> In Dutt’s letter to Keshob Chandra Gangooly [sic] written shortly before the publication of *Kṛṣṇakumārī*, he compares the dramatic culture of Europe and India: ‘we Asiatics are of a more romantic turn of mind than our European neighbours. Look at the splendid Shakespearean Drama. If you leave out the *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet* and perhaps one or two more, what play would deserve the name of *Romantic*? In the great European Drama you have the stern realities of life, lofty passion, and heroism of sentiment. With us it is all softness, all romance’. (Datta 1993: 90)

<sup>104</sup> (Datta 1993: 725).

<sup>105</sup> Strijāti sarbbatrai bibāder mūl! (Datta 1980:205-206). Absent in the English version (Datta 1980: 704)

The conflicts between the world of the Asuras and the world of men are ruefully dissolved. The Asuras in Dutt's world inhabit the same plane as the humans and are not asinine and war-loving people constantly threatening the Gods. Instead when Sermista's cousin, Bakasura visits her, Yayati praises him and welcomes him with open arms as an equal:

Serm. Prince Vakasura, my lord, is my most honoured cousin.

King. I've heard of him a hundred times, sweetest, and fame speaks goldenly of his valour. 'twere a foul shame he should depart this city without the rites of hospitality due to so distinguished a guest. Pray thee, let us go and welcome him with such poor cheer as we may command.<sup>106</sup>

Dutt's hero Yayati is willing to treat the Asuras as equals which is in sharp contrast to the figure of the *vidūṣaka* or the narrator (a common feature of the Sanskrit play, where the narrator provides commentaries).

Vid. True! Most true! The women that dwell around this garden, are the daughters of the Asuras and Enchantresses, and I've heard say that by their vile sorceries; they often turn men into—goats! Mercy! If the manly beauty of our sovereign hath tempted one of these weirds to practice her vile arts upon him, then?<sup>107</sup>

The high point in the drama is the chance discovery of Devayani of the existence of the three sons of Sermista. It is at this point that the moral dilemma of Yayati becomes apparent. Rather than his worries about placating his bereaved wife, he is afraid of the wrath of Sukracharya. Yayati says 'O, how can I escape destruction, Thou know'st the immortal God themselves dread the anger of the Sage, the most irascible and implacable of Rishis! (Sighs) Alas 'twas an evil hour when I met the daughter of the King of Asuras'.<sup>108</sup> Sukracharya emerges as the central negative character in the play, who constantly changes the course of the life of the lovers, propelled by the anxieties of his daughter. Devayani's constant reminder that she is the daughter of the venerated Brahmin brings her in sharp contrast to Sermista, who being the daughter of the king of the Asuras had silently accepted her fate and joined the train of slaves. In quite a departure for a Hindu wife, Devayani compares her husband and Sermista with the lowly Chandalas'. The Vile Chandalini alone is a meet companion for the vile chandala! The sweet-voiced Kokila disdains to dwell together with the croaking raven! Will the lioness deign to

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<sup>106</sup> (Datta 1993: 727).

<sup>107</sup> (Datta 1993: 727).

<sup>108</sup> (Datta 1993: 728).

look at the jackal? Aawy, I tell thee away! Touch me not! What I care for thy crown, thy sceptre, thy throne! Know'st thou not that I'm the daughter of the illustrious Sage, whom the gods and men unite to reverence—the sage Sukracharya?<sup>109</sup> And it is Devayani who asks her father to curse the king with decrepitude.

Yayati stands to lose his youth and health if he does not relegate it to one of his sons. All his sons refuse except the youngest Puru and the play ends with a chorus blessing the King and wishing them a very happy life. The vidūṣaka or the commentator in the play introduces the key moral dilemmas in the play. This allows Dutt to construct a fallible and a mortal hero. Yayati faced with the curse is not ready to give up either his health or his youth and without any afterthought or remorse hands down a thousand years of senile life to his youngest son by Sermista. The Viduṣaka makes a snide remark 'Ha! Ha! I must have something out of these news-loving citizens. The Jack-fruit tastes doubly sweet when eaten at another's expense'. Dutt has overturned all expectations with this play: by making the tolerant asura Princess as the heroine, a fallible pleasure-loving king as the hero, the Rishi as the curse-mouthing terrifying figure and his daughter as a haughty, caste-conscious woman. The resolution of the play is a fitting closure to his homage to the nature of the Asura princess. Sukracharya, Sermista's adversary in the play who brings about all misfortune in her life says, 'And now, most noble Yayati may your majesty be happy, and may the banner of Sermista's glory ever continue to float on the gale of Fame'.<sup>110</sup> By dismissing all the anticipations from the play (given that the plot was most likely familiar to the Indian audience) the audience might have instinctively harboured, Dutt is successful in plotting systemic imperatives against each other.

The most striking feature of the play remains the reported nature of the actions. Apart from the romantic scenes in the play between the King and his two wives Devayani and Sermista, all the important actions in the play are reported by the people who do not take part in the actions themselves, and then these reportages are commented upon by the Vidhushaka. In keeping with the understanding of mythology as always already mediated, the key perspectives come from people who are not directly involved. For example, Puru's decision to take the curse upon himself is a testimony that we get from two unnamed citizens! The play in a sense is a play of (in) actions. Umpired knowledge of the actions and then interpretation is a

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<sup>109</sup> (Datta 1993: 731).

<sup>110</sup> (Datta 1993: 742).

clever technique that Dutt employs to recover mythology. The play begins in media res, when the Asuras report the quarrel between Devayani and Sermista, while dismissing it as squabbles of women. There are no props given to the audience or to the reader to enter the play, it is as if the audience is already a part of the action of the play. This technique appeals to the common received knowledge about the *Mahābhārata* which then the author seeks to dismantle.

*Sermista* plays cleverly on multiple registers. While looking at the 'Grand mythology' of the Hindus, it is given to understand that mythology is always mediated knowledge and lies in a cultural homogenous subconscious from where it can be successfully summoned. Even while avoiding Hindu iconographic overtones, Dutt manages in the play to create orders of understanding. While from the lowly citizen to the palace guard of the Asuras get to participate and report on the important events of the lives spanning the world of the Gods, kings and Rishis, the real audience of the play is limited to the 'bhadrak' few. This creates a complex and layered perception of understanding. Dutt as the Christian outsider and a 'bhadrak' insider is able to simultaneously create worlds of similar perceptions, playing on the receptive indexes, which overlap in the frames of the play. Both in terms of the structural organization of the play (including the two linguistic versions) and in terms of the departure from the original plot, Dutt highlights the differences in the access and participation of literary knowledges. The narrative authority of the Christian convert over the complex sources of Hindu mythology emerges from these spheres of collision thereby ensuring the narrative legitimacy of the Christian convert in the cultural economy of nineteenth-century Bengal. Therefore, in the altered frames and significant omissions, mythology and Christianity correspond to the overlapping spaces of receptive communities. In the following chapter, we explore the larger dynamic of the relationship between Christianity and performance in relation to the conversion of Reverend Krishna Mohan Banerjea.

## Chapter Three

### Conversion as Performance: Krishna Mohan Banerjea's *The Persecuted*

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This dissertation has tried to argue that Christian conversion in colonial Bengal was much more than an individual spiritual endeavour. For most upper caste novitiates, conversion to Christianity was part of the process of registering socio-political dissent. In the clamour for religio-social reform, at least in the first half of the nineteenth century, iconoclasm was a mode of delineating dissent.<sup>1</sup> Christianity in the nineteenth century as the oppositional other had emerged as a public discourse in colonial Bengal and this facilitated the functionality of conversion as disruption. Krishna Mohan Banerjea's little known play, *The Persecuted*, serves as the centre of the discussion in this chapter. A verbose play without much promise as a dramatic text and written immediately prior to the conversion of Banerjea (1813-1885), it presents the context for investigating the relationship between Christianity as a public religion and performativity of conversion in early nineteenth-century Bengal. This chapter in particular deals with the Christian convert's enunciation of his conversion as exception.

#### *Conversion and the public*

The Portuguese missionaries had been in Bengal since the sixteenth century and had already been converting Indians to Christianity; most famous amongst them was Dom Antonio.<sup>2</sup> As the Portuguese were on their proselytizing mission in Bengal, their counterparts in Britain sought people from the 'Bay of Bengala' and convert them, only to send them back to their own country to spread the word. The earliest recorded example is of 1614 when an 'Indian youth was transported to England, taught English and Latin, and in December 1616, in a busy commercial district of East London, was baptized with the name Peter Pope'.<sup>3</sup> The East India

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<sup>1</sup> I use iconoclasm in the loose sense of the word and not in its precise meanings in terms of the art movements since antiquity. For the entire corpus of iconoclasm in the history of art in the West see Besancon, Alain. Trans. Jane Marie Todd. *The Forbidden Image, An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*. London: University of Chicago Press, 2000. In particular, iconoclasm is associated with the ban on images in the Byzantine Empire in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. See, 'Iconoclasm.' *New Catholic Encyclopaedia Vol. VII*, Michigan: W. B Erdmans Publishing Company, 2001: pp. 327-329.

<sup>2</sup> The Portuguese like other colonial powers came as traders in the fifteenth century only to reinvent themselves as colonizing powers by the end of the sixteenth century. A. Campos, Joseph Joachim. *The History of the Portuguese in Bengal*, New Delhi: Janaki Prakashan, 1979. The British for a long time denied overt proselytizing measures while the Portuguese often combined missionary enthusiasm with governance.

<sup>3</sup> The dissimilarities in the proselytizing policies of the Anglophone world and the Portuguese (earliest European settlers in Bengal) lay not only in the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism, but

company declared its investment in the youth's conversion as a sound venture since "in the space of a yeare" after the boy's arrival he had learned to "speake, to reade and write the English and Latin Tongues and hand, both Roman and Secretary", and that his immersion to Christianity had reached a level that called for his public baptism, as "the first fruites of India"<sup>4</sup>. Nonetheless, these conversions did not make a significant impact in the psyche of the urban Bengalis. It might be argued that printing proper did not reach Bengal until the late eighteenth century and hence gauging public opinion retrospectively is a daunting task.<sup>5</sup>

However, it was the first half of the nineteenth century that Calcutta woke up to the 'horrors' of the '*kaliyuga*' as upper-caste men began converting to Christianity. The pioneers were the Derozians<sup>6</sup> who 'startled the whole of Calcutta society by embracing Christianity'.<sup>7</sup> Conversions in colonial Calcutta since then were as much about the spiritual quest for the individual as a performance<sup>8</sup> for the public.<sup>9</sup>

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also in their approach towards the natives. While the Portuguese were keen to intermarry and cohabit with the natives, their Anglophone counterparts were wary of any such intimate interactions. See: Weitbrecht, J. J. *Protestant Missions in Bengal*. London: John F. Shaw, 1844. Cox, Jeffrey. *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700*. New York: Routledge, 2008. The East India Company was wary of engaging directly in the matters of religious interest as they held missionary initiatives responsible for the decline of Portuguese presence in India. Rowan Strong in this regard remarks, '[t]he London-based directors of the company remained nervously mindful of the precedent of the decline of Portuguese power in India, which they attributed to that nation adopting a policy of European enculturation and support for Catholic missions. They did not wish to lose their opportunities for profit in such a manner, so throughout the eighteenth century the company's governing court of directors was the most anti-missionary force in the affairs of the British in India.' Strong, Rowan. *Anglicanism and the British Empire 1700-1850*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000; p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Habib, Imtiaz. 'Indians in Shakespeare's England as "first Fruitess of India": Colonial Effacement and Postcolonial Re-inscription.' *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 36. 1 (2006): pp. 1-19, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Chakraborti, Samarjit. *The Bengali Press 1818-1868: A Study in the Growth of Public Opinion*. Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1976.

<sup>6</sup> They were also called the 'Young Bengal' and comprised of young students (mostly of the young poet- professor, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio) who had taken to 'rational thought.'

<sup>7</sup> Sen, Amit. *Notes on The Bengal Renaissance*. Bombay: Peoples Publishing House, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> I primarily understand the concept of performance 'as a mode of communication, a way of speaking, the essence of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for display of communicative skill, highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content.' Bauman, Richard. *Story, Performance and Event, Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Sandria Freitag in her study of the public performance notes that Christianity in Benares was marked by a 'public debate': 'Perhaps the most influential was the form of the public debate that emerged around the advent of the Western missionaries. Evolving from informal confrontations—often staged on the street corners, pitching those who preached the gospel against the local defenders of South Asian sects and belief systems—these became highly ritualized, well-publicized performances by charismatic spokesmen for each religious tradition (Christian, Hindu [usually Arya Samaji], Muslim).' Freitag, Sandra. 'Performance and Patronage.' Ed. Sandra Freitag. *Culture and Power in Benaras, Community, Performance and Environment 1800-1980*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989: pp. 25-33, 27.

The various missionary newspapers of the day in Britain, the United States of America and Calcutta were publishing reports of successful conversions of the heathen natives and Hindus in particular.<sup>10</sup> But it was particularly the conversion of Krishna Mohan Banerjea that captured the imagination of the early nineteenth century Calcutta. It had seized the attention of the public: '[w]hat man, woman, or child, in Calcutta, had not heard the name, and some of the doings of Krishna Mohan Banerjea! Hence his baptism, in particular, became the theme of conversation and discussion with every group that met on the street or in the bazaar; in every snug coterie reposing under the shade from the mid-day sun; in every school, and in every family circle'.<sup>11</sup> As an upper-caste (Kulin Brahmin, Brahmins at the top of the caste hierarchy) Hindu college educated convert, Banerjea was the prototype of the elite upper-class intelligentsia of colonial Calcutta. Therefore, Krishna Mohan Banerjea's conversion consolidated the public opinion of Calcutta on various lines of the public sphere and entered quarters that were hitherto untouched.<sup>12</sup> While the missionaries and their supporters rejoiced, the conservative Hindu intelligentsia was clearly alarmed.

To understand the effects of conversion in the public life of colonial Calcutta, it is important to dwell on the nature of the colonial public. It has been often argued that the public sphere in India has been a product of the nineteenth century and that it produced a relationship of mutual dependence between the enlightened individual and the 'public' with print medium as the broker.<sup>13</sup> To ask Francesca Orsini's question here, 'what do we mean by the public' in the context of nineteenth-century colonial India? To extend the argument we might also add: if the public sphere' is defined by the discursive practices that lead to a 'common good'(Habermasian) then what is the role of the public sphere in framing the normative practices of the society and in turn according centrality to deviations? <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Notable among them were from The London Missionary Society's *The Chronicle*, *The Missionary Intelligencer*, *The Church of England Magazine*, and in Calcutta, *The Christian Observer*, *The Calcutta Gazette*, etc.

<sup>11</sup> (Śib'nāth Śāstrī 2009 (1904): 39).

<sup>12</sup> Krishna Mohan had converted in 1832. C. A. Bayly in the context of colonial India suggests that it was in fact the 1830s in India when the notion of the public sphere came into being. Bayly, Christopher A. 'Ram Mohan Roy and the Advent of Constitutional Liberalism in India, 1800–30.' *Modern Intellectual History*, 4. 01 (2007): pp. 25–41.

<sup>13</sup> Rajagopal, Arvind. 'The Public Sphere in India: Structure and Transformation.' *The Indian Public Sphere: Readings in Media History*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009: pp. 1-30.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Van der Veer contends that although the colonial government intended to project the public sphere of colonial India to be secular it was actually fiercely inflected by religious forces: 'Religion produces the secular as much as vice versa, but this interaction can be understood only in the context

Orsini has outlined, in the context of Hindi and in relation to the ideas of Habermas,<sup>15</sup> that in the Indian context the public might denote: '(a) a normative attitude that interprets public in terms of *jati* or community.' By normative she meant 'an understanding of the public and of public institutions as spaces where one set of values is circulated that should constitute the norm for all.' '(b) a critical attitude that views and uses the public as a space where norms and consensus are questioned in the name of reason or of particular interests and subjects'.<sup>16</sup> Shashi Ratnaker Singh is of the opinion that unlike the assumed democratic space of the 'public sphere' the one in India historically had shunned 'people's participation'. It had worked for a select few, who had been instrumental in shaping the public opinion.<sup>17</sup> Amir Ali taking cue from Sandria Freitag explains, the evolution of the 'public sphere' as the result of 'representational modes of governance' on the part of the British. Freitag also claims that the 'public sphere' that was born in India was a result of the response of the nationalist movement against the colonial rule and most importantly the majoritarian impulses were to gain from this enterprise.<sup>18</sup> The public sphere(s) in colonial India was a result of a complex phenomenon of interactions often between the colonial elite intelligentsia and the colonial knowledge networks. With print gaining centrality as an intellectual broker, the various public spheres informed cultural practices and encouraged community consensus. Banerjea's conversion played to the tune of the variegated sources of collective opinion which were dictated by community boundaries (defined by religion, caste and class). It must be insisted that the public and the public sphere are not identical concepts. While the public sphere is premised upon a rational

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of the emergence of nationalism in the nineteenth century. In India religious neutrality of the colonial state left the public sphere open for missionary activities of Christian organizations. A great number of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh organizations emerged to resist the Christian missionary project. This dialectic of aggressive missionization and Hindu resistance contributed to the formation of a public sphere in British India in the nineteenth century that was not at all secular.' Van der Veer, Peter. 'Religion in South Asia.' *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31 (2002): pp. 173-187; p. 178.

<sup>15</sup> Habermas conceptualized a more or less homogenous public sphere which has since been challenged. To quote, 'a realm of our social life in which some-thing approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body [...].' I read Habermas's articulation of the formation of the European public sphere more on the lines of an idealization rather than normative. Habermas, Jürgen. 'The Public Sphere.' Ed. Nash, Kate. *Readings in Contemporary Political Sociology*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000: pp. 288-294; p. 289.

<sup>16</sup> Orsini, Francesca. 'What Did They Mean by "Public"? Language, Literature and the Politics of Nationalism.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34. 7 (1999): pp. 409-416, 410.

<sup>17</sup> Singh, Shashi Ratnaker. 'People and the Public Sphere in India.' *Social Change*, 39. 2 (2009): pp. 270-280, 278.

<sup>18</sup> Ali, Amir. 'Evolution of the Public Sphere in India.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36. 26 (2001): pp. 2419-2425, 2420.

intercourse, the populace is often outside its purview as a riotous heterogeneous mass. The upper caste converts as members of the privileged few insisted on addressing the public sphere as representative of the larger populace.

To quote Neeladri Bhattacharya, '[t]he public sphere is not just a space where private individuals appear as public, transcending their individuality and autonomy to acknowledge their commonality, reflecting and debating issues of public concern. It is also a space where communities are forced to come together—overcoming their insularity and exclusivity and recognizing the need to connect—to reconstitute themselves as public'.<sup>19</sup> It is this public space of the forcible coming together in which high-caste conversions sought to place themselves. High-caste converts asserted their caste identity to legitimize a rupture with the community as a public thereby according legitimacy to their act of conversion as 'difference'.<sup>20</sup> As an exemplary act of defiance and changing of allegiances it brought together variedly allied ideological forces like the conservative Hindus, the reformist Hindus, the colonial administrative machinery and the missionary enterprises.

Coming together of the majoritarian response in Bengal (in this case the Hindu intelligentsia) was also divided on the lines of language and a complex bilingual 'public sphere', which had emerged by the nineteenth century with the wide spread availability of Western education.<sup>21</sup> A large number of publications in English also allowed the British and the American public to partake in the 'public sphere' of Calcutta. They were soon debating the improvement of the natives along

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<sup>19</sup> Neeladri Bhattacharya suggests that '[t]he emergence of the public sphere allowed communities to transform community issues into public debates and inner community issues into public battles and forming in that very process specific community publics.' Bhattacharya, Neeladri. 'Notes towards a conception of the Colonial Public.' *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship: Dialogues and Perceptions* (2005): pp. 130-56; p. 140.

<sup>20</sup> Homi Bhabha insists that it was '[t]he colonial authority (most notably James Mill) who had introduced the concept of public debate as a form of desired civility in India. But the native intelligentsia used it effectively to generate a subversive "third space": The native refusal to unify the authoritarian, colonialist address within the terms of civil engagement gives the subject of colonial authority—father and oppressor—another turn. This ambivalent "and," always less than one and double, traces the times and spaces between civil address and colonial articulation. The authoritarian demand can now only be justified if it is contained in the language of paranoia.'; p. 79. Subsequently, '[i]t is an anxiety which will not abate because the empty third space, the other space of symbolic representation, at once bar and bearer of difference, is closed to the paranoid position of power. In the colonial discourse, that space of the other is always occupied by an iddefixe: despot, heathen, barbarian, chaos, violence. If these symbols are always the same, their ambivalent repetition makes them the signs of a much deeper crisis of authority that emerges in the lawless writing of the colonial scene.' Bhabha, Homi K. 'Sly Civility.' *October*, 34 (1985): pp. 71-80; p. 80.

<sup>21</sup> The institutionalization of Western education also brought with itself a hierarchy of languages with the English being accorded a premium. See for example, Naregal, Veena. 'Language and Power in Pre-Colonial Western India: Textual Hierarchies, Literate Audiences and Colonial Philology.' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 37. 3 (2000): pp. 259-294.

the lines of good Christian education. Owing to the complex power relations in a colonial state deeply divided by anomalies of education, language, religion, caste and class, there was possibly no one 'public sphere' but rather often overlapping spheres. This was felt perhaps the most in the context of the question of missionary enterprises in India. While there was a divided public opinion in Britain about the efficacy of missionary enterprises, the Indians saw it as an infringement on their personal life which they had regarded as sacrosanct. With the religious propaganda, for once the public and the private were merged.<sup>22</sup> Considering Krishna Mohan Banerjea's conversion as a case in point, it is possible to observe the constant conversation between these spheres and consequently see how the figure of the individual appears as a key component in such interactions.

The larger Hindu public in Calcutta were already inflamed by the rising missionary presence in Bengal since the dawn of the nineteenth century. Particularly, '[b]etween the years 1801 and 1805 several instances of native conversions to Christianity occurred, followed by severe persecution which the converts were called to suffer from their idolatrous countrymen. (Subsequent to the Vellore mutiny) [...] This event so alarmed the Bengal council that orders were issued for the discontinuance, for a time at least of all missionary exertions'.<sup>23</sup> This anxiety of the by and large conservative Hindu high-caste populace in Calcutta was heightened by the fact that several missionaries had set up schools to meet the rising demand of English education in India.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> It would be interesting to note that Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted the Bengali intelligentsia's eagerness to preserve the sanctity of the domestic space in response to the diminutive public role that the colonized had to play. So, the private was a space that would have to be preserved against the onslaught of colonialism. Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 'The Difference: Deferral of (A) Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal.' *History Workshop*, 36, Colonial and Post-Colonial History (1993): pp. 1-34.

<sup>23</sup> 'Obituary. Rev. W. Carey, D. D.' *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Vol. 157. May 1835; p. 549.

<sup>24</sup> The concept of an English education in Nineteenth-century Bengal or for that matter India is an ambiguous term which has been interpreted often as Macaulay's legacy by Saidian theorists like Gauri Vishwanathan. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989. Sumit Sarkar's argument in this regard is germane to the discussion: 'The focus upon what, quite often somewhat vaguely, is commonly termed "English" seduction—in praise or blame, as principal agency of 'awakening' or instrument of colonial hegemony producing 'derivative' (may be at best 'hybrid') discourses—has become unhelpful in several unrelated ways. The ferment brought about by sudden contact with a culture both rich and apparently irresistible in technology and power must not of course be underestimated. But eulogists and critics alike have often somewhat simplified and exaggerated its significance and reach. The tone of much Christian missionary propaganda should be sufficient reminder that the influence of nineteenth century West cannot be equated with "rationalism" or "post-Enlightenment modernity" in any total sense.' Sarkar, Sumit. 'Christian Conversions, Hindutva, and Secularism.' Sarkar, Sumit. 'Middle-class Consciousness and Patriotic Literature in South Asia.' Eds. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray. *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005: pp. 252-268; p. 254.

In this tense atmosphere where the missionaries were not a welcome presence in the Hindu public perception, the much publicized conversion of Krishna Mohan became the prototypical example of a deterrent. This instance of conversion was replicated in various forms of prohibitive ridicule and appeared as a common trope in the literary productions of the day. But some celebrated him as well, Dinabandhu Mitra for example, in his poem '*Surādhanī kābya*' talks about the purity of Krishna Mohan and his dedication to the cause of the nation. Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay in *Hutom Pyāncār Gān* proclaims him as the fountain of Greek, Latin and Hebrew and as an exemplary character unlike the good-for-nothing lot of the native converts.<sup>25</sup>

Krishna Mohan was a Kulin Brahmin directly influenced by the Scottish missionary Alexander Duff and a member of the Young Bengal group.<sup>26</sup> Their revolutionary ideas largely came from their education at the Hindu college which heavily relied on the enlightenment rationalists and positivists for sustenance.<sup>27</sup>

Members of the group were believed to have been atheists or soon to be converted Christians who had lost faith in their own religion and celebrated eating meat and bread prepared by non-Hindus. Most of their activism was represented by tokenistic ruptures that sought to shock the largely conservative Hindu populace of Colonial Bengal. Social revolution envisioned by the members of Young Bengal came as a challenge to counter the cohesive forces of Brahmanic Hinduism which were arguably simultaneously being formulated.<sup>28</sup> Derozio's notion of rational thinking came at a time in Colonial Calcutta when, under the influence of colonial knowledge, a cohesive idea of Hinduism (with a premium on textuality) as a Brahmanic and regimented religion was beginning to manifest. I am not suggesting

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Bhattācārya, Debīpada. *Rebhārend Lāl Bihārī De o candramukhīr upākhyān*. Kalikātā: Paścim Bāmlā Ekāḍemi, 2001; p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> This group was part of an elite movement that originated at the Hindu college. Young students at the Hindu college under the tutelage of their young teacher Henry Louis Vivian Derozio had begun to denounce conservative Hinduism.

<sup>27</sup> The relationship of the Young Bengal movement with rationalism is not unitary as has been aptly demonstrated by Sumit Sarkar. They often allied reason with religious undertones and recognized David Hare as one of their major influences. It is difficult therefore to locate the excesses of Young Bengal as merely a triumph of reason over Hindu conservative religious practices. Sarkar, Sumit. *A Critique of Colonial India. Calcutta: Papyrus, 1985; p. 89.*

<sup>28</sup> For example: Sugirtharajah, Sharada. *Imagining Hinduism: A Postcolonial Perspective*. London: Routledge, 2003; Pollock, Sheldon. 'Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power beyond the Raj.' *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*. Eds. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993: pp. 76-133. Oddie, Geoffrey A. 'Constructing Hinduism: The Impact of the Protestant Missionary Movement on Hindu Self-Understanding.' *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500*. Ed. Robert Eric Frykenberg. Grand Rapids/Richmond: Eerdmans/Curzon, 2003: pp. 155-82.

that one homogenous narrative of Hinduism had emerged in the nineteenth century but merely pointing to prominence of certain identifiable Hindu symbolisms.<sup>29</sup> This was placed against the vedantic revivalism of the Brahma Samaj (established in 1828) and preceded by the Goudiya samaj of the Hindu conservative camp (among them were Radhakanta Deb, Ram Kamal Sen and Bhabani Charan Bandopadhyay).<sup>30</sup> As social revolutionaries functioning in the role of the exceptional or the 'rebel', they were defined in turn by the role of Western modernity as a break with this novel emerging Hindu identity.<sup>31</sup>

Robert Eric Frykenberg contends that Hinduism as a religion came to be construed an all-encompassing 'public religion' in the nineteenth century—'following the logic of a metaphor', 'Hinduism' and 'Indian nationalism' are 'twins, off spring born out of the same eclectic process which produced the imperial system of the East India Company'.<sup>32</sup> With Madras Presidency as his point of reference, he enumerates the clauses of the *Regulation VII of 1817* which was closely modelled on the Bengal *Regulation XIX of 1810*. This new regulation ensured that the control of the temples and other strictly ritualistic or ceremonial domains were now controlled by the Company.<sup>33</sup> Actions such as these helped organize a Hindu legal identity which was also accompanied by the birth of the Indian Christian legal subject.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Pennington argues that Hinduism began to take shape exactly during the period (1830-31) that K.M. Banerjea had written the play and eventually converted. Pennington, Brian K. "Constructing colonial dharma: a chronicle of emergent Hinduism, 1830-1831." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69.3 (2001): 577-604.

<sup>30</sup> Sen Gupta, Kanti Prasanna. *The Christian Missionaries in Bengal, 1793-1833*. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, p. 176.

<sup>31</sup> However, the codified iconographic aspect of Hinduism will emerge only later with the printed images of gods and goddesses. For the promulgation of the printed images of Gods and Goddesses see: Mitter, Partha. 'Mechanical reproduction and the world of the colonial artist.' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 36. 1-2 (2002): pp. 1-32.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Eric Frykenberg. 'The Construction of Hinduism as a "Public" Religion.' Eds. Keith E. Yandell and John H. Paul. *Religion and Public Culture, Encounters and Identity in Modern South India*. Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000: pp. 3-26. Christopher Pinney believes that chromolithography contributed in a large measure to the concretization of religious imagery. Pinney, Christopher. 'The Nation (Un)Pictured? Chromolithography and "Popular" Politics in India, 1878-1995.' *Critical Inquiry*, 23. 4 (1997): pp. 834-867.

<sup>33</sup> Embree discusses the problematic of the popularity of evangelical Christianity in the 'secular governance' of India in the nineteenth century. Most popular areas of conflict that she deliberates upon are the abolition of sati and the control over the religious spaces of worship. Embree, Ainslie T. 'Religion in Public Space: Two Centuries of a Problem in Governance in Modern India.' *India Review* 1. 1 (2002): pp. 52-76.

<sup>34</sup> 'Debates concerning the place of the Christians within British India were dominated by a single image, that of the beleaguered convert, who on the account of his or her apostasy from Hinduism was seen as degraded (*patita*), cut off from family and caste and denied inheritance and other familial rights. What could courts do to ameliorate so called "civil disabilities" of converts? In addressing this question, missionaries, judges and politicians all contributed about an official knowledge about conversion and an Indian Christian community. Through the eyes of the law, Christian identity came

Therefore, in the public domain certain normative notions of religious identities were increasingly made available against which the religious dissent (rebellion) was constituted.<sup>35</sup>

Derozio was trying to create models of 'exception' through his rationalist teachings at the university. In his poem, 'To the Pupils of the Hindu College' he compares the enlightening of the minds of his students to the opening of petals of young flowers and claims that this early knowledge has immense revolutionary potential:

That stretch (like young birds in soft summer hours)  
Their wings their strength. O how the winds  
Of circumstances and freshening April showers  
Of early knowledge and unnumbered kinds  
Of new perceptions shed their influence,  
And how you worship truth's omnipotence!  
What joyance rains upon me when I see  
Fame in the mirror of futurity,  
Weavings the chaplets you have yet to gain,  
Ah then I have not lived in vain.<sup>36</sup>

Outside the precincts of the college the Young Bengal group were widely perceived as social exceptions. Shoshee Chunder Dutt contends that the term was veiled in a delightful vagueness and 'people have found themselves quite at a loss to decide whether the epithet was expressive of opprobrium or praise'.<sup>37</sup> Shanti S.

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to be defined as antithetical to caste identity. "Native Christians" along with their native European co-religionists, belonged to an abstract Christian community whose laws were modelled upon English common law.' This was best exhibited when the law of inheritance for the Christian converts was instituted in 1831.' Mallampalli, Chandra. *Christians and Public Life in Colonial South India, 1863-1947*. London: Routledge, 2004; p. 7. Nandini Chatterjee contends that the Indian Christians were not passive participants but were rather enthused about their distinct religio-legal identity. Chatterjee, Nandini. 'Religious change, Social Conflict and Legal Competition: the Emergence of Christian Personal law in Colonial India.' *Modern Asian Studies*, 44. 06 (2010): pp. 1147-1195. Krishna Mohan Banerjea directly participated in the debate on the legal status of the Christian converts in India in 1853. He was responding to a series of measures (that began with William Bentinck in 1832) relating to the ownership of ancestral property and the status of familial relationships of new Hindu converts to Christianity. Banerjea, K. M. *Remarks on the Speech of the Earl of Ellenborough: in the House of Lords, on the Bengal Petition against the Act XXI of 1850, of the Government of India*. Calcutta: R. C. Lepage and Co, 1853.

<sup>35</sup> For instance, it has been argued that one of the most powerful symbols of Hinduism that emerged in the nineteenth century was the centrality accorded to the 'cow.' Both the concepts of defilement and purification came to woven around the figure of the 'cow.' See for example, Groves, Matthew. 'Law, Religion and Public Order in Colonial India: Contextualising the 1887 Allahabad High Court Case on "Sacred" Cows'. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 33. 1 (2010): pp. 87-121, Jones, Reece. 'Sacred cows and thumping drums: Claiming territory as "zones of tradition" in British India.' *Area*, 39. 1 (2007): pp. 55-65.

<sup>36</sup> Derozio, Henry Louis Vivian. 'To the Pupils of the Hindu College.' Ed. V. K. Gokak. *The Golden Treasury of Indo Anglian Poetry 1828-1965*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1970; p. 53.

<sup>37</sup> However, he is quick to distinguish between two kinds of young Bengals: 'Young Bengal itself a division, is subdivided within itself; and those subdivisions stand almost as apart from each other as the aggregate whole docs from the old orthodox school. Young Bengal, liberal and magnanimous, is

Tangri is of the opinion that 'if the prime mover of the 19th century social revolutions in England and some other Western countries was technology, in India, as in some other underdeveloped countries, it was education. A small number of intellectuals—administrators, educators, writers, religious reformers and other opinion makers—bore the major responsibility for a great social transformation. The close of the century ended this era of elite revolutions in India.'<sup>38</sup>

Creating a perception about themselves as the exceptions often came with performative and tokenistic gestures like taking to alcohol and beef which were in turn dependent on the inviolability of Hindu ritualistic practices. Their cosmetic engagement with the revolutionary liberalism is best exemplified in the comment that appeared in the *Oriental Magazine* in 1843: 'cutting their way through ham and beef, and wading to liberalism through tumblers of beer'.<sup>39</sup> However, their 'adolescent character' was met with serious reactions from the Calcutta society in the 1830s.<sup>40</sup> Sacrilegious acts of eating beef and ham not merely elicited theological violence but also ensured social censure and irreparable ruptures in societal relations.

Rosinka Chaudhuri provides some key examples:

The youth of this generation led hitherto unthinkable attacks on the conventions of traditional Hinduism; examples include Rasik Krishna Mullick's open denial of the sanctity of the Ganges and Ramgopal Ghoses's refusal to undergo the ritual of penance. K.M. Banerjee, one of the earliest converts to Christianity among the members of Young Bengal, had declared in 1830 that Pope and Dryden were to be held in higher esteem than the Hindu shastras. Peary Chand Mitra comments on these young men's penchant for 'ridiculing the Hindu religion,' citing instances when, 'they were required to utter mantras or prayers, but instead repeated lines from the *Illiad*. There were some who flung the Brahminical thread instead of putting it on'.<sup>41</sup>

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quite a distinct body from Young Bengal, insolent and profligate; Young Bengal hard-reading, has no affinity with Young Bengal hard-drinking.' Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. 'Young Bengal This is for you.' *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*. Calcutta: F. Carbery, 1854: pp. 192-197, 193.

<sup>38</sup> Tangri, Shanti S. 'Intellectuals and Society in Nineteenth-Century India.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 3. 4 (1961): pp. 368-394; p. 368.

<sup>39</sup> *Oriental Magazine*. Vol. I no. 10 October 1843. Reprinted in E. W. Madge. *Henry Derozio: the Eurasian Poet and Reformer*. Ed. Subir Raychoudhuri. Calcutta, 1967; p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> Rosinka Chaudhuri is of the opinion that 'Derozio's students signified the emergence of a class, composed entirely of those who had received an organized public instruction in the English language that could be defined for the first time as an intelligentsia in the Western sense of the term. The ardour of Young Bengal for the ideological freedoms preached through an English education acquired a striking seriousness in the Calcutta society of the 1830s.' Chaudhuri, Rosinka. 'Young India: A Bengal Eclogue.' Ed. Touraj Atabaki. *Modernity and Its Agencies, Young Movements in the History of the South*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2010: pp. 87-112; p. 90.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

In openly embracing taboo customs there was a conscious effort at 'performance' where the 'public' were an essential element. Defiance in the form of breaking age-old taboos was a very self-conscious act which could only be successful if the larger conservative public participated in the act as much as the performers themselves.<sup>42</sup> Key to this performance was the reaction that it elicited among the traditional Hindu upper caste public of abject disbelief and horror.<sup>43</sup> This symbiotic relationship of the performers and the public gaze ensured that deviance and performances was intricately linked in the revolutionary-scape of nineteenth-century Bengal.

But the most interesting feature of this public sphere and its opposition, which can be imagined as a communal space where communities emerge from their insulation, comes from its social composition. In nineteenth-century Bengal, the composition of the Hindu public-sphere was largely privileged, upper-caste and urban men who shared a common participatory language (which came largely from a liberal Western education).<sup>44</sup> Ironically the language of defiance was ensconced in the very language of conservatism. The elite's necessity to rally textual evidence as a Brahmanic codified practice (discussed in Part I chapter 3) simultaneously created a vocabulary of defiance. By furthering a cohesive opinion it in turn dictated elements of defiance as is evident in the discourses of Brahma Samaj. Excessive insistence on religious idols therefore furthered discourses on iconoclasm.

In according great importance to the performance of an upper-caste conversion, the public sphere in effect protected its own interest. Accommodating this performance is an allowance that can be made only for a stakeholder in the

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<sup>42</sup> John Paul in the context of Southern India, contends that much of this performance manifested itself in the legal tangles of inheritance, conjugal relationships, etc., that conversion invited. Paul, John. 'The Drama of Conversion in the Courts of South India: Challenges to Aggressive Missionary Enterprise and Changing Judicial Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century.' Eds. Keith E. Yandell and John J. Paul. *Religion and Public Culture, Encounters and Identity in Modern South India*. Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000: pp. 100-129. Jesse Palsetia reports of similar circumstances in the Bombay Presidency in the nineteenth century. Palsetia, Jesse S. 'Parsi and Hindu Traditional and Non-traditional Responses to Christian Conversion in Bombay, 1839-45.' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74. 3 (2006): pp. 615-645.

<sup>43</sup> The missionaries however did not see much merit in such performative acts and instead highlighted its hypocrisy. 'Young Bengal is full of European ideas when abroad, but quite a Bengali when at home. He eats mutton chop and drinks champagne when he keeps out—within the walls of the zenana he kneels before the image of stone which is the family idol.' Storrow, Rev. Edward. 'Of Hindu Female Society.' *The Eastern Lily Gathered: A Memoir of Bala Shoondoree Tagore, With Observations on the Position and Prospects of Hindu Female Society*. London: John Snow, 1856, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition; p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> Counter ref. Bayly, C. A. *Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

same community; in effect ensuring an endogamous relationship where a small group of performers continues to play for the same public sphere.

Much has been made about representing India as a spectacle, be it in the colonial fairs or in terms of governance in India, but the English educated intelligentsia offering themselves as spectacles for their own community (in this case a Hindu conservative one) is rare.<sup>45</sup> I shall argue in the course of this chapter that K.M. Banerjea's conversion was a self-consciously scripted spectacle (best demonstrated in *The Persecuted*). This argument begs an immediate question: for whom was this spectacle staged? Was it indeed the missionaries and the Hindu intelligentsia who were the major players? Can this scripted spectacle be simply read as a mediated practice?

In Michel Foucault's observation, the spectacle, as he discusses in *Discipline and Punish*, is a mode of governance which is set to incite fear in the minds of the spectators and acts as deterrent. Guy Debord illustrates this interrelationship between governance and spectacle as modernity's desire to present itself 'as an immense accumulation of spectacles' which blurs the difference between the real and the unreal. To quote him:

Reality considered partially unfolds, in its own general unity, as a pseudo-world apart, an object of mere contemplation. This specialization of images of the world is completed in the world of the autonomous image, where the liar has lied to himself. The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living.<sup>46</sup>

Inhabiting the realm of the unreal, where the image of the spectacle is continuously produced presents the possibilities of containing dissent in the context of the nineteenth century. When the act of conversion (which we have discussed declares extreme dissent) announces itself as a spectacular event, it falsely recognizes itself as an autonomous act, thereby succumbing to the trap of containment of dissent. The performance of conversion (an extreme form of socio-religious aberration according to the conservative Hindus) vents socio-religious

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<sup>45</sup> Burris, John P. *Exhibiting Religion, Colonialism and Spectacle at International Expositions 1851-1893*. University of Virginia Press, 2001. Johnson, Allan. 'The Savage City: Locating Colonial Modernity.' *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 25. 4 (2003): pp. 315-332. Jyotsna G. Singh for example says that while the British in the seventeenth and eighteenth century experimented with various forms of looking at the Indians 'by the mid nineteenth century, it seems, Britain had fixed and normalized its "discovery/discoveries" of India by defining the land as "an unchanging text" of a primitive and static Hinduism—one which continually reaffirmed the British Raj as a necessary and moral civilizing order.' Singh, Jyotsna G. *Discoveries' of India in the language of Colonialism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996; p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Detroit: Black and Red, 1983; p. 2.

dissent within the framework of a controlled indulgence on the part of the public. Therefore, the aesthetics of 'horror' as a response necessitates conversion as a performance designating it as the high point of rebellion. The performativity of conversion as an excess serves well as a pressure cooker effect and ensures that the public sphere continues to be governed by a privileged upper-caste gentry.

Understanding spectacle as a mode of identification and denial, alienation and protest, opens a window through which the performative acts of Young Bengal can be read. Quite unlike the punitive performances that Foucault takes as a point of departure, the Young Bengal movement concentrated on publicly breaking the taboos that were central to the foundations of a Hindu culture (if there existed any such homogeneity) in Bengal.<sup>47</sup>

Equating social reform with breaking taboos establishes an interesting relationship with the public, where these acts are often not meant to be directly participatory. If for Foucault punishment as an everyday institution was that which 'compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes in short normalizes', then for the young Bengal group, the intention was quite the opposite; to incite disruption. Breaking of taboos executed both the actions of a non-participatory practice (where only a select few armed with a superior knowledge were performing the act) and a larger vicarious consumption of a spectacle by a conservative Hindu populace.

An officer with the Bengal civil service Henry Meredith Parker, one of the foremost British poets writing from India, had written a long prose poem in the form of a dialogue between two evidently confused Westernized young men with 'muslin robes and frizzled hair' and 'Irish linen shorts'. This lampoon is highly inter-textual and refers to the French revolution as a counter-foil to the movement by the members of Young Bengal. The comparisons sought in the course of the poem focuses on the imitative aspect of the group and takes defiance to a ridiculous level by associating all positive aspects of the West to eating meat:

Down with Kings, Laws, and Creeds then, and in chief  
With any creed prohibiting roast beef.  
Roast beef! To what do these pale English owe,

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<sup>47</sup> However, it needs to be mentioned that not all dissenting Hindu converts to Christianity, unequivocally accepted the excesses of Young Bengal. Madhusudan Dutt for example, would expose them to his caustic humour in his farce, *Ekei ki bale Sabhyatā?* [Is This What You Call Civilization? (1860).

(or rather, yellow English) that the blow  
Of British arms is strong, their heads are thick,  
And, therefore, fitted for the frequent lick?  
Whence their Rail Roads, which ecstatic joy  
Inspired in Maha Raj Ram Mohun Roy!  
Whence came their wealth, their power; whence Charles Fox?  
All, all originated, SAM, in ox.<sup>48</sup>

Iconoclastic images are superimposed against some changes in lifestyle that the English had introduced. Prohibitive religious practices that interestingly culminate into one symbolic action of the eating of beef which seems to be the only deciding factor that separates the meek Indians from the 'British arms are strong, their heads are thick'. In one stroke of a brush the reformist Raja Ram Mohan Roy is equated with the scientific progress in the form of the Rail Roads wherein entire legal and political machinery could be sacrificed for 'roast beef'. This very evocative stanza sums up the intent of the poem, combining the scientific progress that Western modernity is supposed to have gifted India and social reform and frames both in one symbolic order of futile iconoclasm. Defying accepted social and religious norms publicly, a marker for Young Bengal, is taken to the level of the ridiculous. Such is the effect of breaking taboos that a larger language of political and social reform is bartered for 'SAM the OX'.

The tipping point as suggested in the poem is the desire for the Young Bengal activists to take to a Western lifestyle. The Young Bengal in introducing their newspaper *Parthenon* in 1830 accepts this charge: 'Hindu by birth, yet European by education and all its concomitants, they need some organ for the communication of their sentiments, some tablet where they may register their thoughts'.<sup>49</sup> It is the 'Western educations and their concomitants' that prompt them to 'reform Hinduism' in the light of their European counterparts.<sup>50</sup> Krishna Mohan Banerjea in the newspaper had commented upon a Reformation based aesthetics of reform in

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<sup>48</sup> Parker, Henry Meredith. 'Young India: A Bengal Eclogue.' Ed. Maire ni Fhlathuin. *The Poetry of British India Volume –I 1780-1833*. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011: pp. 267-268; p. 267.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Ramachandra Ghosha. *Biographical Sketch of the Rev. K. M. Banerjea L. L. D, C. I. E. Missionary Scholar and Patriot*. Calcutta: Samya Press, 1893; p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> The Young Bengal group was also consciously promoting them as the figurative heads of a movement against superstition. Madhab Chandra Mullick wrote: 'These men knowing the extent of influence which error has for ages exercised over the minds of their countrymen are endeavouring to every proper means they can discover to free the rising generation of India from the shackles of superstition. Whatever may be the qualifications that are requisite in a person to accomplish so vast, so worthy and so glorious an object and whatever may be the ground I might have to lay pretensions to such qualities, I do certainly reckon myself among those who pursue that object.' (The India Gazette, Correspondence, October 1831) Quoted in Chittabrata Palit. 'The Young Bengal: A Self Estimate.' *Renascent Bengal (1817-1857)*. Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1972: pp. 65-74.

Bengal: 'Does not history testify that Luther, alone and unsupported, blew a blast. Which shook the mansions of error and prejudice? Did not Knox, opposed as he was by bigots and fanatics, carry the cause of reformation into Scotland? Blessed are we that we are to reform the Hindu nation. We have blown the trumpet; we have attacked Hinduism, and will persevere in attacking it until we finally seal our triumph'.<sup>51</sup> Using images of warfare such as 'blew a blast', 'blow a trumpet' the axis of the agitation lies in combative demonstrative action. Banerjea seeks to establish a historical continuum with Europe, the continent of his academic empowerment, by invoking the history of a completely different political and social context, the Reformation. Inspiration for performative acts of defiance clearly comes from an understanding of political action in the West with history bearing testimony. Apart from the ire of the Hindu conservative lobby, the long term agenda of the Young Bengal movement is not quite clear.

While one might assume this phenomenon to be Bengal centric, Mansura Haidar points out that the Young Bengal movement was a part of a larger nineteenth century global phenomenon of young movements which particularly belonged to the eastern part of the world. Marker of these movements was their reliance on the ideas that they 'borrowed' from the West and '[a]lmost the entire Asia had experienced a similar kind of reawakening, a rising sense of religious and cultural identity—a sense of renaissance'.<sup>52</sup> This considerable engagement was principally due to the same textual culture that these youths were exposed to. In this regard the influence on Krishna Mohan Banerjea before his conversion was fairly diverse.

He was a student of Derozio, David Hare and later Alexander Duff, the Scottish missionary who ran The General Assembly's institution. While Derozio advocated free thinking and a rationalist approach, Hare was against proselytization and promoted liberal education but Duff was clearly keen on 'quality conversions'. In fact, Lord Bishop of Oxford had outlined the source of best possible converts:

Before I left Calcutta, I had made a list of all the converts to Christianity from the educated classes, and I found, that at that time, the majority of this class of converts, whose character, and cultivation, and strength of mind,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> Haidar Mansura. 'The Origin, Genesis and Regional Chain Reaction.' Ed. Touraj Atabaki. *Modernity and its Agencies, Young Movements in the History of the South Asia*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2010: pp. 31-54.

offer the best assistance to Christianity, were from the Hindoo college. I think many persons mistake the way in which the conversion of India will be brought about. I believe it will take place, at last, wholesale, just as our ancestors were converted. The country will have Christian instruction infused into it every way, by direct missionary instruction, and indirectly through books of various kinds, through the public papers, through conversation with Europeans, and in all conceivable ways in which knowledge is communicated, and then, at last, when society is completely saturated with Christian knowledge, and public opinion has taken a decided turn in that way, they will come over by thousands.<sup>53</sup>

However, it is difficult to believe that the parvenu intelligentsia's 'basic tragedy' lay 'in their pathetic eagerness to affiliate themselves with the latest bourgeois liberalism'.<sup>54</sup> Sarkar's comment about the multifarious influence of the Young Bengal is a key point in this respect, most importantly, the Christian missionaries.

The various after-effects of conversions, chief among them, the desire to find economic gains along with conversion, was worrying the Christian missionaries and their advocates.

These new Christians, having lost their caste by embracing Christianity, and finding themselves destitute, presented a memorial to Dr. Middleton, the Bishop of Calcutta, explaining to him, that when the Missionaries induced them to become Christians, they had promised to supply them with the means of existence. The missionaries alleged, in their justification, that they had been compelled to act in this manner, because these wretches, after their conversion to Christianity, had become so vicious, and especially so intemperate, that they feared lest the sight of the daily and scandalous excesses committed by them should pervert the whole of their pagan workmen.<sup>55</sup>

The Christian missionaries and the public sphere at large in Britain and the United States were rejoicing at the possibility of an 'authentic' conversion which would make an impression on the 'public mind'. These were dictated by a definitive vision of the ideal convert as a Western educated organic intellectual and a socio-

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<sup>53</sup> 'Debate on the Grants in Aid.' *Macphail's Edinburgh Ecclesiastical Journal and Literary Review*, 1857: pp. 329-334, 331.

<sup>54</sup> Sumit Sarkar continues: 'In the continent of its birth, bourgeois liberalism in the nineteenth century was, within limits, definitely a progressive and even revolutionary force, but its finest ideals and categories had a tendency to turn into their opposites whenever attempts to apply them in the colonial content were made by foreign administrators (even when subjectively honest or benevolent) or indigenous intellectuals.' Sarkar, Sumit. 'The Complexities of Young Bengal.' Sarkar, Sumit. *A Critique of Colonial India*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 2000: pp. 45-46.

<sup>55</sup> *The Telescope*, Vol. 1-2, 1824; p. 86.

religious rebel.<sup>56</sup> Such was the euphoria about the conversion of Indians to Christianity that there were also some false reports about conversions.<sup>57</sup>

The Hindus in Calcutta were visibly at unease at the missionary efforts to preach Christianity. It seems to have alarmed even the Brahmos as Ram Mohan Roy had remarked:

During the last twenty years, a body of English gentlemen, who are called missionaries, have been publicly endeavouring in several ways to convert Hindoos and Mussalmans of this country to Christianity. The first way is that of publishing and distributing among the natives various books, large and small, reviling both religions, and abusing the gods and saints of the former. The second way is that of standing in front of the doors of the natives, or in the public roads, to preach the excellence of their religion, and debasedness of that of others. The third way is, that if any natives of low origin become Christians from the desire of gain, or from any other motives, these gentlemen employ and maintain them as a necessary encouragement to others to follow their example.<sup>58</sup>

Converting a high-caste Hindu was seen also to be contributive and indicative of the change of society at large.<sup>59</sup> If the highest castes converted, there

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<sup>56</sup> Therefore it was indeed a triumph that needed to be celebrated in order to make an 'impression on the public mind' and declare the legitimacy of the missionary enterprise in India. 'There are many instances of conversion, but, occurring singly, they do not make much impression, on the public mind; hence some persons, who have been long in India, maintain that no conversions take place. The little that has been done in India has, indeed, demonstratively proved the insufficiency of mere human efforts to convert a nation. Every one may see, in the history of missions in India, that it is not by might not by power, but by the Spirit, that she must be turned to God; and though men of the world can gather from this nothing but despondency. Christians are warranted to expect that this is only a preparation for the demonstration of the power of God, that thus the glory may be secured to himself. And they can hail every convert to Christianity as an earnest of what is to come—the first fruits of an abundant harvest soon to be gathered in—the few drops before the shower which is soon to descend.' Drew, W. H. 'Arrival of Missionaries Outward.' *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, Vol. 11. Feb. 1833; p. 83.

<sup>57</sup> One such case was the misconception that Raja Ram Mohan Roy had in fact converted. One magazine in Philadelphia dedicated to the missionary endeavours in India had reported: 'Information was some time since received, of the conversion to Christianity of a Bramun at Calcutta, by the name of Ram mohon Roy. This person is both learned and intelligent, and has adopted sentiments somewhat differing from those inculcated by the missionaries. He has published two appeals addressed to the Christian Public in defence of its principles, and has been joined by Mr. Adam, one of the Baptist missionaries at Calcutta [...]. 'Religious Controversy in India between the Bramuns and Missionaries.' *The Philadelphia Universalist Magazine and Christian Messenger*. Vol. 2. 1832; p. 7. It was a popular trope in the magazines in Britain as well. *The Mirror* for instance had reported: 'They are recommended to the reader's notice by the interesting circumstances of their subject have been the first Hindu, on any consequence, who not only became converted from Brahmanism to Christian faith, but wrote in support of Jesus Christ.' 'Raja Rammohun Roy.' *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction*. October 12, 1883: pp. 225-229; p. 225.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Sarkar, Benoy Kumar. *The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology: Introduction to Hindu Positivism*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, 1937; p. 619.

<sup>59</sup> Although the euphoria concerning the conversion of K. M. Banerjea was largely unparalleled, Brahmin conversions to Christianity continued to elicit a lot of attention even in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Most notable is the conversion of the militant nationalist Kailas Chunder Banerjee. In an article published as the obituary for Kailas Chunder Banerjea his caste identity receives the utmost attention. 'Kailas Chunder Banerjea was born of Brahmun [sic] parents about the year 1826 at palasi, a village in the district of Burdwan. Son of a priest, Kailas himself was a priest and I remember seeing him sometimes, enter into a temple of Siva, with a very white knot of the sacred thread-

was bound to be a trickling effect. Robert Di Nobili had already proposed this idea in Southern India where he sought to convert only the upper-castes and particularly the Brahmins in the hope that the effects would percolate. And hence as Alexander Duff had suggested: '[...] These baptisms, though small in number, were in quality of inestimable value. As regards the individual soul and eternity, every genuine baptism is precious as every other. But as regards the influences exerted on society, there may be the utmost possible difference in degrees of value. The baptisms now recorded did produce an impression on the public mind, both native and European, which, in intensity of interest vastly exceeded what, might be expected from their numerical count'.<sup>60</sup>

Judith Butler taking on from Lacanian psychoanalysis and phenomenology recommends that social reality is created 'through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic sign'.<sup>61</sup> These speech-acts or the illocutionary power of speech creates a manner of conventions which we perceive as reality. In the context of gender she relates how the gendered corporeal self has to consistently 'perform' one's identity:

The act that one does, that act that one performs, is in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again.<sup>62</sup>

Extending the argument forwarded in relation to understanding gender to other social realities like religion as performative acts, explains the potential efficacy of constructing conversion as iconoclasm.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, understanding the conversion of K.M. Banerjea in the context of constantly reproducing speech-acts, as a rehearsed script, puts the scheme into perspective. Conversion 'actualizes and reproduces'

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discharge his priestly functions before the God, and take away with him the sacred rice, plantains and other offerings. His father—and I remember the old man well... oftener, however discharged the sacerdotal functions. [...] As I had good reasons to believe in the sincerity of the couple, I baptized the Brahman and the Brahmani in the name of the Father and the son and of the Holy Ghost.' 'The Late Kali Chunder Banerjea.' *The Bengal Magazine*. 1881; p. 209.

<sup>60</sup> Duff, Alexander (1840); p. 679.

<sup>61</sup> Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 1997; p. 270. Also see Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272. Also see Butler, Judith. 'Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler.' *Radical Philosophy: A Journal of Socialists and Feminist Philosophy*, 67 (1994): pp. 32-39.

<sup>63</sup> It must be remembered that iconoclasm was not particular to Christian conversion but was part of the nineteenth century vocabulary of dissent. For a study on the patterns of Hindu iconoclasm in nineteenth century India see, Salmond, Noel A. *Hindu Iconoclasts, Rammohun Roy, Dayananda Saraswati and Nineteenth Century Polemics Against Idolatry*. Calcutta: Sampark, 2006.

religion in the public sphere often in the form of speech acts and in the process it retains its authority on spontaneity.

The result of the conflicting public spheres was evident also in the body politic of the convert himself. As reportedly quoted by Alexander Duff, Krishna Mohan himself was conscious of scripting a spectacle and very sure of his intended audience as the educated upper caste Hindus.<sup>64</sup> He was indeed sentient of the space that was to be chosen to announce his entry into the new religious disposition. Alexander Duff quotes Krishna Mohan:

Of this his sentiments respecting the proper place for administering the ordinance of baptism, offered a simple and beautiful illustration'. Some, said he, 'urge me to go to your church and be baptized there; but I cannot agree to it. My own desire is that, that place which has been the scene of my public confession of it. If I go to the church, my native acquaintances will not go, because their doing so would seem to their friends as making themselves one with the Christians. But they will come to your lecture Room, as they have been accustomed to do. And my fervent wish is, that those—who know me as an idolater, an atheist, a deist, and unbeliever, and may have been strengthened in their own unbelief by my arguments—may now be the witnesses of my public recantation of all error, and public embracing of the truth, the whole truth, as revealed in the Bible. And who can tell, but the sight and the example may be blessed by God to the awakening of some of my poor countrymen'.<sup>65</sup>

Krishna Mohan proclaims that his conversion is not a personal act limited to him as an individual but is a larger political statement that demands a 'public confession'. Owing to the extreme reactions of both the group of conversion enthusiasts and the conservative Hindu intelligentsia he had taken cognisance of the fact that he was a 'rebel'. His heroic deed was however, contingent upon him playing his part in the public. So the public spheres, of both the conservative and the liberal, the east and the west, the English and the Bengali, in this case is instrumental in granting him the credibility of a 'rebel'. At this level the semiotic

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<sup>64</sup>As an astute believer in the theory of Aryan origins of India, Krishna Mohan's proselytizing efforts were directed at the upper castes of the Hindu society. In defining the term 'native' in the context of British India he says, '[a]ddressing, however, the present audience, I use the term with reference to the latter only. It is the natives of the land on whose attention I wish on this occasion to press the claims of Christianity. But the word native is itself a loose expression. Judicially, it stands for all who are not British subjects—who are not of pure British origin. The legal definition of the term accordingly comprehends numerous races and communities. I use the term, however, in a restricted sense, meaning thereby the descendants and successors of the Aryan emigrants who occupied the country in the earliest ages of which we have any history or tradition, and formed that great community of scholars, heroes, artisans, and merchants which willingly placed itself under the spiritual guidance of Brahmins and Rishis.' Banerjea, K. M. 'The claims of Christianity in British India: a lecture to educated natives of India, delivered in St. Paul's Cathedral, Calcutta, on Friday, June 17th, 1864.' Madras: Religious Tract and Book Society, 1869: pp. 2-3.

<sup>65</sup> Alexander Duff (1840); p. 331.

fault lines of the public spheres and the individual convert collapse to materialize the spectacle of conversion. Read in this context, the presumed agency of the individual inadvertently becomes part of the larger script of the public spheres. His individual agency that he construes by making a public spectacle about his conversion posits itself in the cusp of the two 'apparently' colluding public spheres. Subsequently, his ticket to heroism or his moment of glory stands out as a commentary on the opinions of both the public spheres.

The intersecting public spheres and the individual convert create their own models of the extraordinaire. It would be too simplistic to read the conversion of Krishna Mohan Banerjea either as institutionalized defiance or an individualized act of religio-social rebellion. I argue that with *The Persecuted* as the enunciation of the epiphanic moment (the act of conversion), Banerjea generates his own narrative authority over his religious choice, ironically by alluding to socially codified modes of dissent. This narrative agency is tacitly guided not by any sacerdotal authority but by interlocking vectors of exclusions.

#### *Deviance as spectacle: The Persecuted as a play*

Written in the year 1831, *The Persecuted* is considered as one of the earliest plays written by Indians in English. Having recently been ostracized by his family for allowing his friends to eat beef and drink alcohol at his grandfather's residence, it seems that Banerjea had written it in defence of his position. Intriguing as it may seem, Banerjea did not attempt any other creative writing in his lifetime. The curious case of one piece of creative work within an impressive oeuvre of essays and lectures during the span of his life has not been adequately theorized or mulled upon. It would be safe to estimate that he was conscious of his failure as a creative artist and had stopped writing fairly early in his career. In fact *The Persecuted* was one of the earliest pieces that he wrote a good 50 years before his last collection of essays: *Two Essays as Supplements to the Arian Witness* written in 1880.

In the course of this section I would propose to locate this play as a part of a larger performative act, that of his conversion. Banerjea is better known for his rather polemical essays and his translations of Sanskrit texts into English. A curious case in the history of the Indian writing in English, this was written with little hope of being staged. Conflating the categories of the text as a reading experience and drama as essentially a performative genre, the author is successful in creating a dramatic

tension in a printed form. Choice of the drama as the preferred form may have also come from the fact that drama in nineteenth-century Bengal was an elite 'high' form and privileged over other forms of entertainment.<sup>66</sup> With the curiosity factor looming large, this text has been either largely seen as one of the early attempt to write plays in English or as a polemical piece against the Hindu conservative force in Bengal in the nineteenth century.<sup>67</sup> A review of the play in *The Athenaeum* had stated that, '[w]e have drawn attentions to these Hindoo productions for reasons even more interesting than literary merit; as being signs of the Indian times, and indications of a moral change. Krishna Mohan Banerjea we shall never see; but, as he is a reader of *The Athenaeum*, we must remind him that scepticism is the only stage of intellectual progression; having got so far, he must get further. Be life, not scepticism, is the end of inquiry'.<sup>68</sup> I shall argue in the course of this chapter that the dramatic text figures as a centrepiece which is part of a performative act that culminates in Banerjea himself converting to Christianity.

Published in the year 1831, this text comes close on the heels of the incident that shook conservative Kolkata of the early nineteenth century. Some of Krishna Mohan's friends had habitually consumed 'taboo' edibles such as beef and alcohol and decided to part with the bones of the same by throwing them within the premises of a pious unsuspecting Brahmin next door, in order to pollute him. The assault on the Brahmin coupled with the consumption of the prohibitive food that is tantamount to losing one's caste and religion had brought about a very public announcement that disinherited and ousted Banerjea from his grandfather's house.<sup>69</sup> The play was therefore written with the polemics involved in this entire incident that had brought Banerjea into the liminal spaces of society. As part of the Young Bengal movement, as we have seen earlier, the main objective was reforming Hinduism. This did not necessarily mean giving up his religion forever. Ostracized by the Hindu community and given shelter by the missionary Alexander Duff until his conversion in 1832, this period marks the most important journey of his life. Fraught with inherent tensions and gross generalizations as well as rallying

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<sup>66</sup> For details and discussion on the same see Bhatia, Nandi. *Acts of Authority/Acts of Resistance, Theatre and Politics in Colonial and Postcolonial India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>67</sup> Gokak, V. K. *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglican Poetry*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1970. Das, Sisir Kumar. *A History of Indian Literature: Western Impact, Indian Response 1800-1910*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1991. Iyengar, S. *Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1994. Cf. The previous chapter's discussion on the early Bengali theatre.

<sup>68</sup> Review article of *The Persecuted. The Athenaeum*. London, Saturday 23, 1832: pp. 394-395; p. 395.

<sup>69</sup> Śib'nāth Śāstrī. *Rām'tanu Lāhīrī o tat' kālīn baṅga samāj*. Kalikātā: De'j, 2009; p. 67.

archetypal representative characters the play would have been like any other of his age except for the fact that it mirrors the rationale behind his conversion to Christianity.

Banerjea is quite a self-reflexive writer and he knew that the merit of his play did not lie in its dramatic excellence and might have intended it as a closet drama. His preface begins with a series of disclaimers: '[i]n submitting the following pages to the public, the Author feels inclined to observe that the reader will be disappointed if he looks after the dramatic excellence in the following pages. The intention was not to preserve that link unbroken which tragedies and comedies are distinguished by'.<sup>70</sup> Instead, '[t]he Author's purpose has been to compute its excellence by measuring the effects it will produce upon the minds of the rising generation'. The preface to the text promises a slew of polemical rhetoric that refutes the status of Hinduism in nineteenth-century Bengal:

The inconsistencies and the blackness of the influential members of the Hindu community have been depicted before their eyes. They will now clearly perceive the wiles and tricks of the Brahmins and thereby be able to guard themselves against them. It was not the author's object to invent a story and preserve a connection throughout. He has just taken advantage of a plan that suited his purpose best and expatiated on what may be termed the 'pith and marrow' of his publication. He pledges he has 'nothing extenuated nor set down aught in malice'.<sup>71</sup>

The play offers a caustic rebuttal of the practices of the Hindu community and in particular against the hierarchical Brahminical ordering of the society. However, the author is quick to quip that it is hardly a dramatic piece in the sense that his objective was not to 'invent a story and preserve a connection'; that is, neither does it offer a plot, nor does it follow the dictates of the consistency of time, the two most important characteristics of a classical Greek tragedy. Banerjea, like his counterparts at the Hindu college, was trained in the Western classics, at least in translation, which we know from our earlier discussion of Madhusudan Dutt. He also mentions a 'plan' where the play forms a part and points to the role it plays in a larger performative act. His resolve to write this drama as foreshadowing his conversion and that of his fellow Young Bengal colleague was evident from Alexander Duff's observation about Krishna Mohan Banerjea's reaction to the conversion of Mohesh Chunder Ghose. To quote: 'The editor of the Enquirer, in

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<sup>70</sup> Banerjea, K. M. *The Persecuted of Dramatic Scenes, Illustrative of the Present state of Hindoo society in Calcutta*. By Baboo Krishna Mohana Banerjea. Calcutta: East Indian Press, 1831: Preface.

<sup>71</sup> *The Persecuted*: Preface.

giving an account of the baptism of M.C. Ghose, expressed a hope that he should be able, ere long, to “witness more such happy results”. He himself was the next candidate for baptism’.<sup>72</sup>

From the language to the writing of the play it was a conscious attempt at harnessing the positive opinion of a group of elite individuals of the Bengali society and the Europeans present in Calcutta.

It is just as well for the author to make an apology for the imperfections in style and English composition that his work may contain. His knowledge of the English language depends solely upon the education afforded to him by the Hindoo College through the kind recommendation of the Calcutta School Society. Under the consideration that the author has not yet arrived at the age of twenty—that he was born of parents and brought up by men whose language, manners, and customs are in no respects similar to those of the people in whose dialect he has published the following production and that he was not assisted by any in the work, every generous mind will be ready to overlook his defects. He hopes he has been intelligible to all in the following pages.<sup>73</sup>

Interestingly enough, he makes an apologetic statement in the preface to overlook the defects in the composition. English as the language of the play was clearly an informed choice for K.M. Banerjea as there are ample indications in the passage quoted above where he states that the language has no bearing on his immediate surroundings or his pedigree. While he commits himself to a language which is not organic to his habitus, he is interested in forging another crucial relationship which will secure a new constituency for him. By marking Hindu College and Calcutta School society (run by David Hare), both the intuitions which do not take to promoting Christianity but encourages a liberal Western education, he makes his liberal western intellectual ancestry amply clear.

He cannot help acknowledging the great encouragement he has received from the English community in particular; several gentlemen having each subscribed for, from 2 to 6 copies. As the following is the author’s first production of this kind, his feelings impel him to give its warmest thanks to the visitor managers and teachers of the Hindoo college, and the Secretary and members of the Calcutta School Society, for the education he has freely received through their favours and superintendence.

He seems to suggest that the oppositional parameters that the play operates within is best understood by a collective of the English community at large and a

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<sup>72</sup> Duff, Alexander. *India and India Missions: Including Sketches of the Gigantic System of Hinduism, Both in Theory and Practice; Also Notices of Some of the Principal Agencies Employed in Conducting The Process of Indian Evangelization*. Edinburgh: John Johnstone, Hunter Square, 1840; p. 674.

<sup>73</sup> *The Persecuted*: Preface.

select few Indian audiences who are equipped with an education that was quite similar to him. As we have seen with the other authors in the course of the discussion, most notably with Madhusudan Dutt, the constituency is defined largely by a common textual denominator. Banerjea has made apparent the objective at the preface of the play and hence it comes as no surprise that the characters are stock characters. The descriptions of the *dramatis personae* indicate that most characters in the play are defined unilaterally and with the express purpose of representing their constituencies. For example, ‘Kambed, Debanuth, Ram Lochun—Orthodox Hindoos of influence and respectability’ and even the principal protagonist of the play, Mohadeb (which is another name for one of the most important gods of the Hindu pantheon, Shiva) is introduced just as a Hindu. There are other functional categories outlined like servants as well as bearers and a Brahmin, who are liminal to the narrative of the play. The only exception to this largely religious categorization of the characters is Lall Chand who is the proprietor of a newspaper. There is a tacit identification with the role of print for the dissemination and comprehension of the play. As a result, reserving a position for the representative of a newspaper in his play is crucial to the understanding of the repercussions of the play. It is of little doubt that Banerjea, who himself wrote for several newspapers and was to edit *The Enquirer*, was acutely aware of the importance of newspapers in building public opinion by the 1830s.

While the author is acutely conscious of both the intention and the intended audience of his play he adheres to the claims that he makes in the preface to the play. The opening scene of the play has a marginal character (often faceless and nameless in the society), the figure of the servant, introducing the key conflict:

*Young servant.* The course of nature is indeed inexplicable. Water carries fire within it; and cold emits heat. Our Kurta<sup>74</sup> spends hours and hours after devotion; my young master—ha! What does he—eats beef in his room!—ha! ha! ha!—fine contrast—excessive devotion on the one hand, and eating beef in the other! —Kurta’s old servant eats *Gopal’s prasad*<sup>75</sup>; I—supply by Baboo with bread and meat—Fine indeed; nay *very* fine until these are not discovered; *very* fine until I taste not old Mohadeb’s resentment; *very* fine until Kurta is ignorant of these.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> The text explicates it as: ‘Means the head of a family.’

<sup>75</sup> ‘In almost all Hindoo families there are household gods. These gods are designated by the names of *gopal, godhadhur* &c. &c. —the Hindoos by means of *munters* dedicate eatables to these gods—these eatables after being dedicated to the deities are called *prosauds*. It is great virtue to eat them.’

<sup>76</sup> *The Persecuted*; p. 2.

Within the frame of a single family we have two generations with divergent views of the role of Hinduism in their lives and this conflict of generations is mirrored in the relationship between the father-son duo of the servants, to suggest its pervasive nature across the social spectrum. Banylal (who mirrors Banerjea's dilemma) has taken to eating the most sacrilegious of things, beef, while his father has devoted his life to Krishna. Banylal had taken to identifying with Western customs and eating habits which is amply made visible by the use of forks, spoons and knives, eating 'bread, biscuit, roast meat and wine' and '[...] at a table upon chairs'. Therefore it is but expected that he would mouth the key concerns of the play and he does so in the first Act itself where he vehemently denounces Hinduism.

*Bany.* What do I hear? Am I discovered?—well I am not surprised—I anticipated all that are now transpiring, when first I began to feel hostile to Hindooism—Such occurrences must happen. When knowledge has begun its march, Hindooism must fall and must fall with noise. Reformation must come on and excite heart-burning jealousies among men.—Gods! What will my father think when he hears these? What will the bigots say when they understand my thoughts and feelings?—I fear—I fear—not for the bigot's rage and the priest's thunders. But I fear—I fear—for my old father; these matters after his death would be blessings; but now they will poison my comforts. The old man will be lost in horror and surprise. His life may be affected—what scenes are coming! Am I at last to be instrumental in bringing on his death? The very thought is miserable—Philosophy! Art thou so weak? Is nature so strongly opposed to thee?—aye;—but this will not surprise me, I expected this and am prepared for it—prejudice and liberalism cannot long reign under the same roof without rupture.<sup>77</sup>

Most importantly it is not Banylal in isolation who debunks Hinduism, as the Old Servant reports to his father, he is accompanied by '[h]is friends of the School'. Apart from the elitist narrative of the play that seeks to engage a coterie of Western educated youth, it also significantly includes the participation of the presumably uneducated young servant in the debauchery in equal measure. Mohadeb the father has predictable things to say, which were part of the horrified rhetoric of a largely conservative Calcutta of the early nineteenth century, who were

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<sup>77</sup> *The Persecuted*; p. 5.

experiencing for the first time since the establishment of the Hindu college in 1817: a youth movement. To quote: 'I heard a rumour that they are young men whose minds are unrestrained; I scarcely believed it. I now feel it was true, and have the mortification to see my own son among the number! Heavens!'<sup>78</sup> Breaking taboos of dining and social behaviour is as much part of the performance of establishing a non-Hindu identity as the perception of horror amongst the conservative Hindu gentry that it triggers. Defiance and horror therefore form the core language of this narrative with the western education system as the axis.

Mohadeb utters the prototypical response of the colonial elite who had sent their sons to the Hindu college and other such institutions for securing a better social and economic position in the colonial machinery: 'O misery! O misery! O misery! Is all his reputation as a learned man come to this?—when I heard about his influence on the literati my joy knew no bounds—but now—ah what a falling off—why did he not remain in perpetual ignorance? Why have I only been so unfortunate? Who does not put his son into school? Why is he so corrupt and others unspotted?'<sup>79</sup> Banerjea highlights the problems of filial attachments which come in the way of the rejection of superstitions. Banylal is torn between his duty towards his old father, who is likely to be out-caste and his obligation towards the education and knowledge that he had received. The worst affected by the sacrilegious activities of the youth, represented here by Banylal are the Brahmin hedonists who fear that they have 'unshackled the bonds of religion'. However, as a retaliatory measure, the Brahmins approach the press. The media is seen as the most efficacious source of dissemination of information and ideas and which ultimately has the capacity to garner public opinion to ostracize Banylal. The Proprietor of the newspaper therefore says:

Why raise false reports against these fellows—exaggerate the least cause you may get—prejudice the people against them. Utter their names with the most abusive epithets—Do all these, nay more; I am resolved to summon all rich men to a common assembly, and laying these matters to their consideration pass an order to Mohadeb to turn his son out—that shall be my duty. While you cry out against them, abuse them at home; abuse them everywhere. Go nowhere but speak ill of them. Alarm the natives; let every street, every road, ring with invectives against them. Do at these and fear not; I will support you as long as I breathe.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *The Persecuted*; p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> *The Persecuted*; p. 9.

<sup>80</sup> *The Persecuted*; p. 17

The play ends in the larger anticipation of the spectacle of conversion that Krishna Mohan was to undertake a few months later. The group of Hindu youth debate religion relentlessly and is disillusioned by the excesses of Brahminical hierarchy but is unsure of the direction that their lives are going to take. Pledges of dedicating oneself to truth are solemnly taken and Banylal devotes himself to the service of the nation.

Bhy. I pledge as long as I live, I will be a devoted servant to the cause of truth and Hindoo reformation.

Bany. And I doubt not you have found an echo in every one of us—let us friends thus go on—let us be insensible to every consideration but that which may secure our object. Let us enter the field with fortitude and perseverance—let us handle the sacred cause, and desert it only by our death. Our lives may be lost, but let us not shrink from fear—Let 'bear on; bear nobly on' be our watchword. Let us prove ourselves dutiful sons of our country by our actions and exertions. Now let us see what strength can ignorance and bigotry bring into the field. Let us mark how feeble is prejudice when rational beings attack it with prudence. Perseverance, and Prudence be our motto and let us hold out our position in spite all difficulties and all dangers that may fall into our way.<sup>81</sup>

The closure of the play not only equates Hindu reformation with the service to the nation but most importantly takes the dramatic tension of the play to a crescendo. For most part of the play, the most important disclosures and plot developments are not reproduced on stage but only reported. The central action of the play is the clandestine meeting of Banylal with his friends and consuming forbidden food which is unveiled to Mohadeb through the reportage of his faithful servant. The only dramatic vigour that the play offers is at the very end where Banylal and his coterie debate on the efficacy of Hinduism as practiced in nineteenth-century Bengal. But the pronouncement at the closing stages of the play presents itself as a toothless commitment without any logical progression preceding it. Instead of offering finality to the play, the hastily drawn closing remarks introduce the possibility of a decision in the making and suggests of more actions to come. In maintaining the dramatic tension at the very end of the play and having vociferously argued for the rejection of traditional Hinduism he prepares the stage for his conversion. Therefore, his conversion in the following year in 1832, a few months later, where he offers himself as a spectacle to be emulated, provides the logical conclusion to the narrative. Beginning with the performative rejection of Hinduism by friends and his subsequent social ostracization (both of which are

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<sup>81</sup> *The Persecuted*; p. 35.

replicated in his play), followed by the publication of his play and his conversion, complete the entire performance of deviation, rejection and progression.

Banerjea importantly construes his new found Christian identity not merely through a complete rejection of Hinduism but by first proposing, albeit with a whimper, a reformed Hinduism.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, the play functions at levels of inclusion and exclusion that enables the author to retain his narrative authority even as he parts ways with Hinduism. The dramatic text enacts its part in toying with the social and religious shibboleths, in the process securing benefits for a nouveau Christian.

His chequered personal history, having fought the church authorities over equal pay for Indians and Europeans had ensured that he was counted among the foremost of the nationalists in nineteenth century Calcutta. But aligning with his mythical past (largely derived from Hindu mythology and Vedantic ideals) he created like many of his contemporaries a logic of progression.<sup>83</sup> In his 'fulfilment aesthetics'<sup>84</sup>, he is at pains to scourge the Vedas and the Brahmanas for evidences of Christianity.<sup>85</sup> At almost the very end of his writing career in 1875, he wrote a crucial text, *The Arian Witness*. One of the key objectives of the text was to argue for a common descent of the Indo-Arians and the Hebrews and begin '[a]n investigation

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<sup>82</sup> The tensions between the duty to the nation and a reformation of the society have formed the backdrop for this narrative. Solomon, Rakesh H. 'Culture, Imperialism, and Nationalist Resistance: Performance in Colonial India.' *Theatre Journal*, 46. 3 (1994): pp. 323-347.

<sup>83</sup> He takes recourse to history and its objective relationship to facts as a case in point: 'For with the simple and elementary Christianity, which I am now propounding, the issue is one of fact—not of speculation. The point to be decided is—not a favourite theory of a particular religionist on a particular question—but a question of history to be settled on the same broad principles on which other historical facts are decided by scholars and critics. The consideration is one rigidly historical, and of itself excludes theories and speculations of all kinds. If the fact be established, it may lead to other inferences and deductions that may be logically or morally drawn from it—but those deductions have nothing to do with the investigation of the facts from which they are deducible. True philosophy requires that facts are to be investigated irrespective of consequences.' Banerjea, K. M. *Dialogue on Hindu Philosophy, Comprising the Nyaya, the Sankya, the Vedant; to which is Added a Discussion of the Authority of the Vedas*. London: William and Norgate, 1861; p. 43.

<sup>84</sup> Fulfilment theology is stadiial understanding of religions where other forms give away to ultimately converting to Christianity: 'According to traditional understandings, fulfilment theology is associated with John Nicol Farquhar in his book, *The Crown of Hinduism*. However, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, Faruquhar's role was far less significant, the idea having become commonplace by nineteenth century. While it is unclear when and where any distinct idea of a tradition of fulfilment began, the main ideas it propounded were circulating in liberal theological circles in the UK from around the 1840s.' Hedges, Paul. 'Post-Colonialism, Orientalism, and Understanding: Religious Studies and the Christian Missionary Imperative.' *Journal of Religious History*, 32. 1 (2008): pp. 55-74; p. 56.

<sup>85</sup> Most literature about Krishna Mohan Banerjea points to his fulfilment aesthetic, essentially meaning that Hinduism would lead to Christianity, was seen as his ticket to Indian Christianity. Ghosha, Ramachandra. *A Biographical Sketch of the Rev. K. M. Banerjea*. Calcutta: N. C. Ghose, 1983. Sathianadhan, S. *Sketches of Indian Christians*, Madras: CLS, 1896; Paul, R. D. *Chosen Vessels*, Madras: CLS, 1961. Phillip, T. V. *Krishna Mohan Banerjea, Christian Apologist*. Madras: CLS, 1982.

of their ancient legends, traditions, and institutions in the light of corroborative evidences of sacred history and some of the fundamental principles of Christian doctrine'.<sup>86</sup> K.P. Aleaz submits, Banerjea's promotion of Inclusivism, in later stages of his life suggests a continuum rather than a break with his Exclusivist politics earlier. Conversion to Christianity presents itself as a logical imperative after Hindu reformist agenda tethers and consequently forging an identity through the discovery of Prajapati as a pre-christ attests itself persuasively as a narrative catharsis. Nationalist policies plays their part as much as his elitist highly sanskritised erudition in this ritualistic purging.

In sum, Krishna Mohan Banerjea's conversion has introduced varied readings of Christianity as iconoclasm. However, the politics of conversion and iconoclasm as bemired in the tensions of institutionalized religions and the public sphere has to be read with caution. Krishna Mohan Banerjea's later life as a professional missionary puts the certitudes of reading this play as an independent interlude into disarray. Nonetheless, a native missionary's articulation of conversion as ideological innovation launches other participant variables. Key among them is domestication of Christianity. The next chapter on Lal Behari Day (another native missionary stationed in the suburban areas of Calcutta) focuses on the native missionary's relationship with institutionalized religion and its literary domestication.

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<sup>86</sup> Banerjea, K. M. *The Arian Witness: or the Testimony of Arian Scriptures in Corroboration of Biblical History and the Rudiments of Christian Doctrine Including Dissertations on the Original Home and Early Adventures of Indo-Aryans*. Calcutta: Thacker Spink and Co, 1875.

## Chapter Four

### *Subsumed Territorialities: Lal Behari Day and The Folk-Tales of Bengal*<sup>1</sup>

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In the earlier chapters, I have argued that conversions to Christianity as forms of religio-social dissent were essentially often an urban upper-caste elite affair. The crisis of entitlement of the urban converts (Part I Chapter 3) were often mitigated by participating in autochthonous narrative traditions. Lal Behari Day (1824-1892) was part of the new class of Western educated prescient men, avid stakeholders in the print boom, who had converted to Christianity and actually became a clergyman as a mark of progress. With Reverend Lal Behari Day's<sup>2</sup> *Folk Tales of Bengal* placed at the centre of this frame, in this chapter, I argue that the first generation Christian converts were trying to forge new methods of securing Bengali Christian identities by re-inventing fiercely territorialized literary genres.

#### *Compartmentalized identities*

In the year 1874, the raja of Uttarpara, Baboo Joy Kissen Mookerjea announced a reward of Rs 500 for anybody who could write a novel illustrating the 'Social and Domestic Life of the Rural Population and Working Classes of Bengal'. Govinda Samanta, Lal Behari Day's long prose work on the Peasant Life of Bengal won the prize and in the process brought instant glory. 'Day's book later went into several editions under the name *The Bengal Peasant Life* and remained a rapid reader for high school students up until 1930's. It is still found in many Bengali homes and second-hand bookshops in Calcutta'.<sup>3</sup> But, much seems to have changed by the 1960s post independence India, when Devipada Bhattacharya<sup>4</sup> laments that the students no longer identify with Lal Behari Day. While *the Folk Tales of Bengal* and *Bengal Peasant Life* had been part of his high school curriculum (presumably in the 1940s), according to Tara Krishna Basu his MA class seems to have been oblivious of his existence. The utility of Day's text lies in its ability to teach 'good English' and

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter has been published as an article. Chattopadhyay, Dhruvadi. 'Subsumed Territorialities: Lal Behari Day and The Folk Tales of Bengal. *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Sudasiestudien*. 29 (2012): pp. 21-52.

<sup>2</sup> De is a common Bengali surname of the sonār bene caste and may possibly be spelt as Day.

<sup>3</sup> Samir Dasgupta. 'Life in a Bengali Village, The Bengal Peasant from time to Time.' Tara Krishna Basu. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*. Vol. 13, No. 1, Part 1 (Oct. 1964): pp. 115-117.

<sup>4</sup> Debipada Bhattacharya is credited for having rescued Lal Behari Day's only Bengali novella from obscurity in 1968 while researching at the Jaikrishna library in Uttarpara, and subsequently published critical literature on the oeuvre of Day. Tara Krishna Basu has researched extensively on the historical dimensions of the Bengal peasantry and has cited Lal Behari Day as an authority on the same.

inform the students about the land of Bengal.<sup>5</sup> Such has been the fame and the authenticity accorded to the descriptions of village life by Day that Tara Krishna Basu in 1931-34 traced the village of Day's imagination 'Kanchanpur' to one in the Burdwan district 66 miles north-West of Calcutta. And as late as 1958, the Indian Statistical Institute conducted a similar survey to document the changes in the village life of Bengal from Day's time to post-independence era.<sup>6</sup>

His popularity as an authentic annalist of rural life was not just limited to the English teaching classes of post-independence India, but was equally favoured during his lifetime. After the publication of *Govinda Samanta* it was enthusiastically reviewed both in England and in India. While the English celebrated the author for his mastery over the English tongue, the Indians hailed it as a 'truthful portraiture of the manners, customs, and habits of people'.<sup>7</sup> One of the contemporary critics in English daily had written:

It is an admirable book, and is doubly valuable as a source of information, because it is the work of a Bengali gentleman, who must have far better opportunities of knowing his own country people than are open to even the most experienced European. Europeans in India often ask themselves a question to which they are seldom able to give an answer, 'what do all these crowds of men who throng the streets think about?' possibly the difficulty we find in answering this question argues a want of imagination in us, but more probably it shows merely that we do not know the details of subjects which take the place of 'home' discussions on crops, wages, weather and local grievances: the author of *Govinda Samanta* has put it out of our power to read his book, and remain ignorant of the interests of one considerable class of his countrymen. A warmth of tone permeates every page, and not a little of the attractiveness of the book springs from the glow of kindly sympathy that everywhere infuses itself into the narrative.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In Bhattacharya's words, 'bangades'ke jānā o bhāla imreji śekhā ubhay uddeśayī oi grantha pāthe pūrṇa hata'; p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Basu, Tara Krishna. *The Bengal Peasant from Time to Time*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House; Calcutta: Statistical Publishing Society, 1962: pp. 1-37.

<sup>7</sup> Ironically Day often enters the world of the customs and practices of Bengalis with a foreign eye; his ethnographic accounts are filtered through Western (Orientalist) paradigmatic frames: '[n]o Raiyat in Bengal ever goes to his field without the hookah in his hand and a quantity of tobacco wrapped up in a fold of his dhuti. The machinery he uses for smoking is altogether of a primitive character. A hollow tube is inserted into a cocoa-nut shell through the opening at the top; a small hole is bored between the two eyes of the shell: the shell is more than half filled with water: a small earthen bowl called Kalki, filled with prepared tobacco and fire, is put on top of the hollow tube; to the hole between the eyes of the cocoanut is applied to the mouth, which thus draws in the smoke through the tube, making the gurgling noise of the water inside the shell bhroor, bhroor—which to the overworked raiyat is more refreshing than the music of the vina or tanpura. 'Although he uses the terminologies of British ethnographers his deep attachment to the lives of the Bengali rural folk is evident in according a musical edge to the otherwise "primitive" practice of smoking in rural Bengal. Lal Behari Day. *Bengal Peasant Life*. New Delhi: Book Society of India, 1970 (first published as *Govinda Samanta, or the History of a Bengali Raiyat*, later revised and renamed edition of 1908): pp. 15-16.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in the Introduction. *Recollection of My School Days*. Calcutta: Editions Indian, 1981; xi.

Day had lost most of his audience by second half of the twentieth century, but his writings are still believed to offer an immense anthropological value. While the academia in the earlier part of the twentieth century had included Lal Behari Day to 'teach good English' and familiarize the students about the rural realities of Bengal, the later day critics of Indian Writing in English were happy to find Day advocating an 'Indian way of writing English'.<sup>9</sup> Both these readings were in fact interconnected as the colonized were looking to appropriate the colonizer's tongue.

In all these readings there was a ubiquitous appendage attached to the understanding of village life in Bengal: Day's Christian identity.<sup>10</sup> The anthropological value of his work tied to his Indian English expertise stood for an intensely localized dispensation of literary excellence from Bengal. His pluriform identity was related in a large measure to his association with Bengal as a politico-social concept. This chapter will contend that his engagement with a rural as the embodiment of a provincial national identity is not merely limited to the colonial urban elite's romantic engagement with the rural. It is rather born out of desire to weave the 'alien religion' (Christianity) into the most effusive and potent signifiers of territorialized identities—the unmediated and virgin rustic.

As discussed in Part I Chapter Two, his conversion to Christianity could not convincingly take away his caste from him and he remained fiercely attached to his bhadralok identity all his life. In 1872, in fact, he had written on his own caste, the subarna banik community, in an article titled, 'The Banker Caste of Bengal' where he had outlined the beneficent aspects of this caste in the societal fabric of Hindu Bengal.<sup>11</sup> The constitution of castes and its related social practices dogged him throughout his life and is evident in all his literary endeavours.

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<sup>9</sup> Day's scathing criticism of the English reading book published for the Indians by Messers Row and Webb written in 1874, *Hints on the Study of English*, is rather well-known. He refutes the fact that Indians cannot write English as good as the English native speakers and in turn points out several errors inherent in the book. 'What shall we say then of the two gentlemen who laugh at 'Baboo English' and at the same time commit egregious blunders and murder the Queen's English?' *Hints on the Study of English, The Bengal Magazine*. September 1874; p. 674.

<sup>10</sup> In the context of the literary studies concerning folk tales in Bengal, Day's Christian identity is a crucial presence; cf., for example, Mazharul Islam, *A History of Folktales Collection in India and Pakistan*. Dacca: Bengali Academy, 1997, Barun Kumar Chakraborty. *Stalwarts of Bengali Folklore*. Kolkata: Sujana Publishers, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Umesh Chandra Dutt recounts how Day was very conscious of his caste identity and proclaimed himself as a vaidya and hence eligible for education. He also seems to have claimed that the downfall of their caste was owing to Ballal Sen. 'Purātan Prasāṅga'. *Dvitiya paryāy in Bhaṭṭācārya* 2001; p. 17.

He was equally perceptive of his privileged position as Western educated upper-caste elite and hence chose his target audience likewise. In the dedication to the series of lectures to refute the binding tenets of Brahmoism (the closest rival to Christianity given its rather liberal monotheistic approach) he concedes that his aim was 'to put before my educated countrymen the claims of our most Holy Faith'.<sup>12</sup> But Day's provincial communal selfdom was ruefully aware of the de-territorialization of the Bengali bhadralok class. As recipients of colonial education, the Bengali babus had acquired unprecedented mobility within the dominions of British India often as colonial officials and traders. By the time *Folk tales of Bengal* was serialized in *The Bengal Magazine*, Day had widely travelled across India and was very conscious of a large scale presence of English educated Bengali Babus across the country.

A Bengali babu is the Englishman's right hand in the North-West. Hence Bengalis are found in all parts of the Bengal Presidency. Benares alone contains ten thousand Bengalis; and the cities of Allahabad, Cawnpore, Lucknow, Agra, Delhi, Lahore, are full of them. Bengali writers keep account in residencies of Nepaul and Indore, Bengali babus manage almost the whole of the subordinate business of the Railway in North-West as in Bengal; Bengali sub-assistant surgeons lance boils at Debreoghur and at Rawal Pindee; Bengali dak munshis do the work of the Post Office at Sepree and Sibsagar; Bengali overseers construct roads in the wilds of Assam and the mountains of Sikkim; Bengali teachers instruct the youth at Benares and of Lahore; Bengali telegraphers flash intelligence from one end of the country to the other; and Bengali missionaries proclaim the glad tidings of salvation to the Hindustani, the Punjabee and the Sindian [...] Hindustanis and the Lacedaemonians, Bengalis are the Athenians of India. Hindustanis are locomotives, Bengalis engineers.<sup>13</sup>

His alert attempt at locating all his narratives in rural Bengal poses an interesting relationship with this new modes of de-territorialisation in which he was himself a participant (he had travelled from the rural Bengal to the colonial metropolis, Calcutta). This inter-play between a Bengali national identity tied to its rural roots and its simultaneous romantic literary excess in the age of intense mobility becomes foundational for Day.

This comes as a corollary to his somewhat interesting life. He was born to a rather poor household in the Sonapalasi Village on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1824. The Day family belonged to a middling caste of the Subarna Banik. His stock-broker father insisted on his English education in Calcutta. English education was more

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<sup>12</sup> Lal Behari Day. *Antidote to Brahmaism in Four Lectures*. Calcutta: Messrs. G. C. Hay and Co., 1869; p. i.

<sup>13</sup> Lal Behari Day. *Recollections of My Schools Days* New Delhi: General Books, 1981; p. xiii

important to Day's father than the risk of conversion to Christianity of his son and he was sent to General Assembly's institution run by the Scottish missionary Dr Alexander Duff.<sup>14</sup> Although, Lal Behari accords equal importance to the English education provided by Hindu college and the General Assembly's Institution, he cautions against the 'evil effects of a purely secular education' that led to a 'the wildness of views; the reckless innovations they were introducing; the infidel character of their religious sentiments; and the spirit of unbounded liberty or rather lawless licentiousness'. Duff believed '[i]t is no doubt a pleasing spectacle to see the ancient fortresses of error battered down by the forces of knowledge; but while the consequent scene of confusion and havoc cannot be looked upon without horror, it is heaven upon earth to see the fair temple of truth erected on the ruins and *debris* of falsehood'.<sup>15</sup> Via the education system of the missionaries, like many of his compatriots Lal Behari had been convinced to convert. Hailing from an upper caste (although he did not belong to the two uppermost and influential castes of the Brahmin and the kayastha) his conversion was meant to be more special than the others. Duff conceded that all conversions were special but the upper caste conversions 'though small in number, were in quality of inestimable value' and their influence on the larger Hindu society would greatly surpass 'what might be expected from their numerical amount'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ian Copland outlines three broad reasons why English education and Christianity were synonymous in nineteenth century India with Alexander Duff as the pioneer. 'One argument in favour of education as an alternative conversion strategy was that a strong dose of Western science and philosophy (even though secular) could serve, by exposing the falsity of the superstitions on which Hinduism rested, to make ready the minds of the natives to receive God's word. William Wilberforce, one of its earliest advocates, predicted that the dissemination of Western education would lead to Indians becoming Christians almost involuntarily—"without knowing it." Another advantage of the educational route was that it had the potential to provide privileged access to the children of high caste Hindus, education in nineteenth century India being an elite preserve. It had always been an article of faith with the missionaries that if they could convert the Brahmins, the lower castes would follow suit. Yet a third advantage was found in the nature of the schooling process. As former seminarians, the missionaries did not need to be told that classrooms are designed for indoctrination. By the 1830s, thanks in part to an unrelenting campaign waged by the Calcutta based Scottish missionary Alexander Duff, most church leaders connected with India had come round to view that an investment in education was the way forward. Consequently, when the government's call went out, it found the missionary societies not only willing but also able—to some extent—to provide.' 'The Limits of Hegemony: Elite Responses to Nineteenth-century Imperial and Missionary Acculturation Strategies in India.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 49. 3 (2007): pp. 637-665, 644.

<sup>15</sup> Lal Behari Day. *Recollections of My School Days*. Calcutta: Editions Indian, 1981; p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> Duff seems to have faith in the filtration theory, wherein once the upper castes were converted the effect would trickle in to the other less significant lower castes. 'Hundreds, or even thousands of baptisms among the low caste, or no caste, or illiterate grades, generally would not have excited a tithe of the mental stir and inquiry then exhibited among all classes; sagacious natives (now) began to think in a way they never did before [...] others were painfully haunted with the fact that a Kulin Brahmin had actually proclaimed the faith of Brahma, a lie, and the abhorred religion of Jesus, the Truth.'

Day's conversion to Christianity in the year 1843 (the same year as the famous conversion of Michael Madhusudan Dutt) proved indeed consequential to the spread of Christianity in Bengal. Sipra Mukherjee is of the opinion that Day was disappointed that his conversion did not generate as much a public furore as that of the likes of Krishna Mohan Banerjea, and he attributes this to his comparatively low subject position both in terms of caste and class.<sup>17</sup> These tensions of caste and class were apparent in his formulations of the project of converting fellow Bengalis as a preacher.

Not only was he a prolific writer and a journalist but a missionary of the Presbyterian Church who had travelled to the interiors of rural Bengal to spread the word of God.<sup>18</sup> Locating his missionary activities in rural Bengal (Kalna, close to his place of birth) he was consciously trying to dismiss the notion of Christianity as an urban elite phenomenon. Day as a missionary was very vocal and often appeared in the public realm to advocate the spread of Christianity in Bengal. His brand of Christianity was intimately tied to his Bengali identity. Although he had converted to Christianity at the behest of Alexander Duff he fiercely fought for the representation of Indians in the missionary council of the Church and vociferously argued for equal pay for Indian and European missionaries.<sup>19</sup> Even as he advocated the necessity of a Bengali church he was equally uncomfortable about the absence of a process of integration.

Their hatred, in general, of Christianity is more intense than before, simply because they regard Christianity as the religion of the Europeans. Some however, think that the insurrection has improved the disposition of the people towards Christianity. This they infer from the conversion of a Maulavi here, a Fakir there, and a few other isolated facts. All that I can say to this sort of reasoning is that, nothing is more fallacious than facts. Taking it for granted then, that there is at present a greater disposition in the people than before upon as European thing—and English Christianity was

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Alexander Duff. *India and India Missions, Including Sketches of the Gigantic System of Hinduism, Both in Theory and Practice*. Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1840; p. 679.

<sup>17</sup> The partial treatment in terms of public rage was made conspicuous by the fact that both Dutt and Day converted in the same year. As Mukherjee quotes Debipada Bhattacharya, 'the poor and fatherless lad Lal Behari Day from the Subarna-banik community converted [...] there was hardly any ripple made in the community and Behari could never forget that in the eyes of the Hindu society he was considered inferior in status.' Mukherjee, Sipra. 'Conversion without "commotion", Reverend Lal Behari Day's Chandramukhir Upakhyān (story of Chandramukhi).' Eds Richard Fox Young and Jonathan A. Seitz. *Conversion to Christianity in Modern Asia*. Leiden: Brill Books, forthcoming.

<sup>18</sup> Lal Behari Day is known to have edited quite a few journals: *Arunadoj* in Bengali and *The Bengal Magazine*, in English apart from the *Hooghly College Magazine*.

<sup>19</sup> Sipra Mukherjee. 'Lessons from the Past.' *The Telegraph*. Calcutta. May 31, 2005.

exhibited before the natives not perhaps in its most amiable features during the late rebellion [...]<sup>20</sup>

He accedes that owing to the British rule 'a new era has been inaugurated in the history of India' which was 'an era of social and moral progress'<sup>21</sup> but he was simultaneously trying to establish a unique Bengali identity born from the womb of an urban metropolis which was in constant dialogue with its rural surroundings.<sup>22</sup> The social and moral progress that has touched 'city of palaces' in the mindscape of Day was always already in association with the rural and I shall argue in the course of the chapter that this relationship finds its fruition in his collection of folk tales. This began with his understanding that a unique (Bengali) literary culture was inextricably tied to its territory (Bengal), which apparently was not an isolated event but fits its context. It can be argued that the engagement with a territorial location as engendering identities was the product of a precise moment of history: Manu Goswami has plausibly demonstrated that it was after 1858 that the nationalist imaginings connected economy, territory and culture.<sup>23</sup>

In his first English novel, *Govinda Samanta*, he was conscious about writing an 'authentic history' and set out in the preface to outline the expectations that one might have about his text. Acknowledging his debt to the Western education system he begins with a quote from Crabbe.<sup>24</sup> Concomitantly, he dismisses the prospect of aligning himself with the Great Sanskritic tradition of Valmiki, Vyas and the compilers of the Purāṇas 'which are full of supernatural beings and happenings. 'Such marvels, my reader, you are not to expect in this unpretending volume. The

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<sup>20</sup> Lal Behari Day. *Searchings of Heart in Connection with Missions in Bengal: an Address Delivered at the United Monthly Missionary Prayer-meeting held on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December, 1858, in the Union Chapel, Calcutta*: Tomohur Press; p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> Recognizing oral cultures as capable of producing history is a nineteenth century phenomenon, suggests Vasudha Dalmia: 'For one thing, historiography in the late nineteenth century Britain and Europe had itself undergone changes. Anthropology and folklore were widening the bounds of old-style history, and made itself felt in the colonies almost immediately.' Dalmia, Vasudha. 'Vernacular Histories in late Nineteenth Century Banaras: Folklore, Puranas and the new Antiquarianism.' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 38 (2001): pp. 59-79; p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> Day 1858; p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> These nationalist imaginings play against the potent binary of 'territorialized particularity and universalized social relations.' Goswami, Manu. 'From Swadeshi to Swaraj: Nation, Economy, Territory in Colonial South Asia, 1870-109.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 40. 4, October (1998); p. 612.

<sup>24</sup> The village life, and every care that reigns  
O'er youthful peasants and declining swains,  
What labour yields, and what that labour past  
Age, in its hour of languor finds at last;  
What form the real picture of the poor,  
Demands a song — the muse can give no more.  
*Govinda Samanta*. London: Thacker and Spink, 1874; Preface.

age of marvels has gone by; the giants do not pay now-a-days; scepticism is the order of the day'.<sup>25</sup> Instead, he promises to provide an 'authentic history' of the life of a Bengali Ryat, devoid of 'thrilling incidents' and 'romantic adventures'. Although he makes continuous erudite references in his text to Western classics he refrains from the affected prose of the new class of English educated gentry: 'You are not to expect here "grandiloquent phraseology and gorgeous metaphors". Some of my educated countrymen are in love with sonorous language. The use of English words two or three feet long is now the reigning fashion in Calcutta. Young Bengal is a literary "Bombastes Furioso"; and young Bengalese is Johnsonese run mad'. As opposed to this tradition, 'we plain country folk talking of fields, of paddy, of the plough and the harrow, have no sublime thoughts, and do not, therefore require sublime words'.<sup>26</sup> However, while Day is critical of the grandiloquent language of his contemporaries, his own text is replete with references from the Western classics. Shakespeare is summoned to compare the ugliness of a rural Bengali woman<sup>27</sup>: 'The spinster may be as ugly as one of the Shakespeare's witches, and the young may be deformed as deformity itself, the *ghaṭak* (the matchmaker) sees no defect in either'.<sup>28</sup> Even when the *Rāmāyaṇ* is invoked to celebrate the marriage of one of the principal characters of the novel Malati, it is Griffith's translation of the epic.<sup>29</sup> These references and examples point to Day's desire to weave familiarity into his text for an audience that might not be acquainted with the cultural landscape of rural Bengal.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. Xvi.

<sup>27</sup> Most of references seem out of place and not entirely in sync with the 'authentic history' that he claims to write. Despite his own engagement with the system he is fairly critical about it: 'Our educated young men, our BA's and MA's in general, can hardly write a common letter in everyday English. They will write you a long essay on the feudal system in Europe, or a critique of 'Macbeth', or an analysis of 'The flower and the Leaf', but they will murder the Queen's English in writing a common business letter. There must be something vicious, something essentially wrong, in such a system of education. Of the two systems, the system of the village *pathshala* are more sensible. By all means have the ornamental part of education but do not sacrifice utility to ornament. An MA and Fellow of the Calcutta University, when joining his appointment at a Mofussil Station, thus notified his arrival to his official superior: "Sir, I beg to inform you that I have arrived here yesterday "O Tempora! O mores! Can nothing be done to remedy this disgraceful state of being?"Therefore, twin forces of indentification and disengagement with the Western knowledge network which was not uncommon for his times. Ibid.; p. 116.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>29</sup> Here Sita stands, my daughter fair  
The duties of thy life to share,  
Take from her father, take thy bride,  
Join hand to hand and bliss betide.  
A faithful wife, most blest is she,  
And as thy shade will follow thee.  
Ibid., p. 92.

The claim to write an authentic tale representative of the life of the Bengal peasant from within, is essentially a narrative constructed through the lens of an urban English educated youth.<sup>30</sup> Constant harping on writing a true tale of rural Bengal within the frame of an informed Western knowledge framework (which seems inescapable in this text) allows Day to take liberties of looking at religious experiences.<sup>31</sup> Localized deities that bear no reference to the Vedic pantheon like the goddess Shashti (*ṣaṣṭhī*) make frequent appearances in his text. In fact as representatives of rural Bengal, Day successfully highlights a religious life that is divorced from so called high-Hinduism of the Vedas, which was in vogue following the success of the Brahma Samaj movement. It is at this level that he differentiates his text from the canon, and looks ahead at forging a new one.

The identity of this new strain of literature is both fiercely territorial (located in the hinterland of Bengal) and diffused (born in the colonial knowledge framework of the new metropolis of Calcutta). The vantage point of both the etic and emic spaces allows for the poet to introduce Christianity as a subterranean stream that runs through the length of his works.<sup>32</sup> Even as he rationalizes the worship of the cow citing the practical usages of the same, he justifies the worship of Shashti using the Christian scriptures: 'May we not regard this amiable fiction of Shashti as an admiration of the teaching of scripture, that children are the special objects of the ministrations of celestial spirits?'<sup>33</sup> He deliberately introduces Christianity in spaces that were hitherto not part of the established Hindu Vedic canon. These spaces were subtly utilized to characterize the lens through which the village life is examined; hence the village matchmaker is capable of possessing 'the

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<sup>30</sup> This is perhaps most evident in his rather defensive account of the rural Bengali folk superior hygiene as opposed to the British. For a detailed analysis on the same see: Kupinse, William 'The Indian Subject of Colonial Hygiene.' Ed. William A. Cohen. *Filth, Dirt, Disgust and Modern Life*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005: pp. 250-264.

<sup>31</sup> Day proposes a stadial vision of the mythic religion of the Hindus. 'It has been remarked by a deep thinker that, "popular religions answer only for a certain stage of culture". And, certainly, with the growth of the general intelligence of a people, their faith in religious traditions diminishes, and the opposition between the theosophy of men of culture and the mythic religion of the populace becomes less and less marked.' Lal Behari Day. *Antidote to Brahmaism in Four Lectures*. Calcutta: Messrs. G. C. Hay and Co., 1869; p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Here I borrow the usage from the linguist Kenneth Pike. Although it was born in the context of linguistics, these two terms are in wide currency in cultural anthropology. The term 'emic' indicates an account or description that is organic to the culture whereas etic relates to an account by an outsider or observer. In our context, Lal Behari Day and his text plays both parts. He was born in a village but left the village early in his life to get an English education in the metropolis. Filtered through the English education system and his subsequent conversion to Christianity, his view of the village life is both as an insider and an outsider. *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate*. Eds. Thomas Headland, Kenneth Pike and Marvin Harris. London: Sage, 1990.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

highest Christian virtue in perfection, in as much as he possesses an unlimited measure of that charity which covers a multitude of sins'.<sup>34</sup>

His Bengali novel, *Chandramukhīr Upākhyān* (1859) is again set in a village in Bengal. This is his only literary endeavour which to some measure directly deals with conversion to Christianity. As the explanatory sentence that appears alongside the title suggests, 'this book is intended for the instruction and entertainment of young persons'.<sup>35</sup> It records in details the life of the heroine Chandramukhee in her familiar surroundings in a village in Bengal. This village is, however, not isolated and untouched by the happenings in the metropolis. Chandramukhee is married to Hemchandra, a student at a college in Calcutta (recipient of Western education and proficient in English). Interestingly enough it is his brother Nabakumar, one who is not actively part of the narrative, who converts to Christianity.<sup>36</sup> Hemchandra due to his English education is not happy with the Hindu religion but he does not convert to Christianity but remains committed to the Brahmo faith with the consequence that his life is rudderless and wasted. In stark contrast his converted brother Nabankumar is contended with his life and gets scholarships and is very successful in college. This is as close as Day gets with conversion to the rural Bengal. He never alludes to a complete overhauling of the Hindu religious machinery, nor is he dismissive of the customs and localized rituals of the country. He is, however, fairly critical of many of the socio-cultural practices of Bengal. For example, he calls the dressing style of women in rural Bengal as uncivilized and thinks that the only solution to all the problems plaguing the villages is to convert to Christianity.

I would like to argue in the course of the next sections that these novels in fact established the tenor for his collection of folk tales. The fierce territorial identity that serves as the foundation for most of his works related to Indian life creates a vantage point where both the etic and the emic exchange notes, and opens the space for a new literary identity which is aimed at organically accommodating a 'foreign' religious order.<sup>37</sup> The labyrinthine complexities of his location as an English

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>35</sup> Day, Lal Behari. *Chandramukhee, A Tale of Bengali Life*. Serampore: Tomohur Press, 1859.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Sipra Mukherjee. 'Conversion without "commotion"', Rev. Lal Behari Day's *Chandramukhīr Upākhyān* (story of Chandramukhi).' Eds. Richard Fox Young and Jonathan A. Seitz. *Conversion to Christianity in Modern Asia*. Leiden: Brill Books, forthcoming.

<sup>37</sup> I shall discuss in the course of the chapter that folklore was often appropriated as cultural markers for the constitution of various community groups. Scholars such as Alan Jabbour argue that folk narratives locate themselves at the interstices of various identity locations. 'We must train ourselves to think of works of folklore, not as autonomous cultural expressions, but as creative fluids that flow

litterateur and a preacher in rural Bengal set the tone for re-inventing a intensely terrine literary genre: the folk-tales.

### *Representing the 'real': documenting the 'little tradition'*

To fathom the various dimensions of Lal Behari Day's foray into the folk literary scene in late nineteenth-century Bengal it is germane to understand the implications of the twin aspects of the term 'folk' and its related domain of literature.

Like their Indian counterparts, the origins of the term folklore/folk literature in West remains uncertain. The first reported usage in the English language is a curious one, written in the form of a doggerel written on the back of a photograph presented to G.L. Gomme.

If you would fain know more  
Of him whose photo here is—  
He coined the word Folk-Lore  
And started Notes and Queries<sup>38</sup>

Apparently William Thoms's first coined the word in his now famous essay 'Folk-Lore' which was published in the *The Athenaeum* in 1846. His definition leans heavily on anthropology, as he appeals to collect 'the manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs'.<sup>39</sup> As a great admirer of the *Deutsche Mythologie* (1830) by Jacob Grimm, he sought to compile a National Folklore tradition on those lines. He claimed that "'apparently trifling" facts can be significant when used in the illustration of the source of National Mythology—in confirmation or disapproval of the learned upon the point,—or by comparison with cognate traditions'.<sup>40</sup> The folk traditions in the West received exposure in the wake of the explosion of print as a natural corollary adding new dimensions to the print culture which was in some sense producing more 'old books' than new. Folk

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through the permeable membranes of groups. Such a flow nourishes and invigorates groups, who use folklore to express their identity. But standing back from the group in the present, we can see that as folklore moves through time and space, it constantly crosses group boundaries. Indeed, in its most powerful forms, it often redefines these boundaries.' 'Intracultural and Intercultural: The Two Faces of Folklore.' Eds. M. D. Muthukumaraswamy and Molly Kaushal. *Folklore, Public Sphere and Civil Society*. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and National Folklore Support Centre, 2004: pp. 17-22; p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> *Notes and Queries* is the Journal Thoms founded in 1849. Sadhana Naithani, 'To Tell a Tale Untold: two Folklorists in Colonial India.' *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 39, No. 2/3, Dec. 2002: pp. 201-216.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Jonathan Roper. "'Our National Folk-Lore": William Thomas as Cultural Nationalist.' Eds. Krishna Sen and Sudeshna Chakravarti. *Narrating the (Trans) Nation, The Dialectics of Culture and Identity*. Kolkata: Dasgupta and Co., 2008: pp. 60-74.

<sup>40</sup> Thoms, William. *Anecdotes and Traditions Illustrative of Early English Literature and History*. London: J. B. Nicholas for Camden Society, 1839; Preface.

initiated the forms of identity formation that relied heavily on the possibility of repeatability in the print medium.<sup>41</sup> Archiving and printing folk in the West sealed the relationship not only between oral and print culture but between nation and its 'authentic' articulation. Both with the West and in India, the folk form's revival in myriad avatars was perhaps the signal of a society's search of 'authentic' identity in a moment of crisis.<sup>42</sup>

Both in the archiving traditions of the West and in Colonial India, folk emerged as the potent form owing to its tag of authenticity.<sup>43</sup> Unlike other formulations of identity, the one that emerged out of sourcing an archive for the folk forms was derived of a 'material' base, involving physically travelling and looking for narratives.<sup>44</sup> Apart from the authenticity tag in the South Asian context it also creates 'an illusion not just of synchronic homogeneity but also of historical and geographical fixity'.<sup>45</sup> It is this very material context that makes the 'little tradition' a parallel contribution to the otherwise 'high literature'.

There has been a sustained debate as to what qualifies as a folk Tale in Bengal. To begin with there have contentions whether an umbrella term like folk literature or folk tales can be used to designate an array of narrative practices. One of the earliest scholars of folk Literature in Bengal, Dinesh Chandra Sen, had classified 'katha' (*kathā*) into four distinct groups: *Rūp'kathās* or fairy tales,

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<sup>41</sup> Adam Fox. *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Here I borrow from Frank J. Korom's formulation that 'without passing verdict on the positive or negative qualities of social dynamics involved in creating so called, authentic culture from a perceived vanished past, it is safe to say that such moments of critical reflection, when a subjugated community feels that it is no longer in possession of its own destiny, allow for cultural revivals to occur, resulting in the resurrection of seemingly lost elements of indigenous culture like a phoenix rising from the ashes.' Korom, Frank. J. 'Gurusaday Dutt, Vernacular Nationalism, and the Folk Culture.' Ed. Firoz Mahmud. *Folklore in Context, Essays in Honour of Shamsuzzaman Khan*. Dhaka: The University Press Ltd, 2010: pp. 257-273; p. 258.

<sup>43</sup> Blackburn suggests that the authenticity tags also come from the continuity that folk traditions promise. One story is consistently reproduced over the ages to suggest 'an unchanging role of domesticating the cosmos.' Blackburn, H. Stuart. 'Domesticating the Cosmos: History and Structure in a Folktale from India.' *Journal of Asian Studies*, 45. 3 (1986): pp. 527-543, 527.

<sup>44</sup> Sadhana Naithani takes an exception to the understanding of the oeuvre British colonial folklorists as a whole. She argues that in fact the theorists of folk literature in the heydays of colonial folk archiving and publishing practice (last two decades of Nineteenth century and first three decades of Twentieth century), who were located in London differed significantly in principle from those who were collecting tales in the 'field.' The collectors located in the field made elaborate cases to highlight the authenticity of the tales by rich descriptions of the locale and thereby reinstating the importance of empirical evidence. See Chapter 4 Naithani, Sadhana. 'Theory: Colonial Theories of Folklore.' *The Story-Time Of the British Empire, Colonial and Postcolonial Folklorists*. Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Appadurai, Arjun. 'Afterword.' Eds. Arjun Appadurai, Frank J. Korom and Margaret A. Mills. *Gender, Genre, and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991; p. 469.

humourous tales ('these may not be often pointed and subtle, but they show the power of appreciating humorous situations by the rural folk in their own way'), *Brata kathās* ('rural tales interspersed with hymns. These tales were recited in the ritualistic ceremonies. The deities addressed in these tales are not from the Aryan pantheon, but stem locally from non-Aryan sector'), and *Gīta kathās* ('are tales interspersed with songs recited by old widows assisted by a chorus before the ladies of high rank during the days of confinement. On the sixth night, according to the Hindu belief, the Vidhata Purusa or the god of fortune is said to come down to write on the forehead of the baby its fate, and the mother and her attendants remain awake the whole night listening to these stories').<sup>46</sup> Apart from these rather fuzzy distinctions, other categories have also been suggested like *Gītikā* (ballads), *lokakathā* (folk-narratives), *upakathā* (fairy tales often containing parables, based on stories of birds and animals), *purākāhini* (mythical stories), *itikathā* (legendary and historical ballads), etc. In sum, Bengali folk-tales are a porous category which stubbornly defies definition. Hence the 'recurring element of circumstantial ambiguity, stemming from life that is lived', says Alokerañjan Dasgupta, gives it 'the artistic freedom of moulding a theme'.<sup>47</sup> These various modes of stratification go to show the complex character of the analysis involving the characterization of folk literature in nineteenth-century Bengal.<sup>48</sup>

It is uncertain as to when the litterateurs in Bengal took to folk-literature.<sup>49</sup> But to all appearance the trend began with the idea of according legitimacy to the portrayal of the rural as the uncontaminated space, untouched by the world outside. By the end of the century, Ranbindranath Tagore had written a very significant series of essays *Grāmyasāhitya* in which he collected the rhymes written for

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<sup>46</sup> Sen Dinesh Chandra 1985 (1920); p. 53-58.

<sup>47</sup> Alokerañjan Dasgupta. 'Problems of Defining the Bengali Folk-Tale.' *The Shadow of a Kite, and Other Essays*. Kolkata: Dasgupta and Co., 2004; p. 143.

<sup>48</sup> Apart from the usual commentary about folk representing the true rural India, Sankar Sengupta presents us with the interdependence of scientific rationality and folk literature. 'Collection, selection, classification and preservation' of folklore is emblematic of the scientific approach of a nation to preserve the 'real' national identity. *Folklore and Folklife in India, An Objective Study in Indian Perspective*. Calcutta: Indian Publications, 1975.

<sup>49</sup> Syed Mohamad Shahed is of the opinion that it was in fact missionary enterprises in colonial Bengal who first initiated the process of collecting folk tales in Bengal. 'From the eighteenth century the region of Bengal was occupied by the British East India Company, whose administrative personnel and Christian missionaries acted as links between Western civilization and the elite of the developing city of Calcutta. Credit for the first few collections of Bengali folk literature goes to these people. Four compilations of Bengali proverbs were published between 1832 and 1872 by the missionaries William Mortan and James Long, and folktale collections were issued by Sir George Griarson in 1873 and Reverend Lal bihary Dey in 1883.' Shahed, Syed Mohamad. 'Bengali Folk Rhymes: An Introduction.' *Asian Folklore Studies*, 52. 1 (1993): pp. 143-160, 146.

children.<sup>50</sup> These sets of essays were representative of a certain test romantic paradigm of turning to the rural hinterland to look for spaces of innocence. In this anecdotal essay, Tagore portrays an idyllic picture of the Bengal countryside as he takes a boat ride through the serpentine river channels of rural Bengal.

Bengali literary historiography does not usually admit folk-literature very prominently in the canon. Dušan Zbavitel while writing the history of Bengali literature and tracing the birth of modern literature fails to mention the role of the re-discovery of the folk literature.<sup>51</sup> However, when talking about the *gītikās* of the medieval literature, he makes a distinction between 'art literature' and folk-poetry.

A Western folklorist would probably hesitate to call them 'pure folk-poetry', however. Many of the ballads bear the names of their authors in colophone (though these may be, and sometimes no doubt are, also names of later singers whose repertory they formed) and they were, in many cases at least, preserved by professionals, not circulating from mouth to mouth, as is the case with 'usual' folk poetry. Thus they may be considered a border type between art literature and folk-poetry.<sup>52</sup>

Like Zbavitel, Tagore about a century ago did not banish folk-literature from literature proper but accorded a special place for it. He found music in the everyday chores of the farmer, ironsmith, boatman and the carpenter, but wanted that a new ideal should be followed in understanding the beauty of this music. Interestingly enough, this unique music could only be comprehended by the local people and could be extended to include the '*deś*'.

The roots of the tree are bound to the ground and the trunk is spread towards the sky, likewise everywhere the lower section of the literature is hidden within the limits of one's own country (*svadeś*); it is particularly and restrictively local and national (of the *deś*). It can only be appreciated and accessed by the general public of the country and outsiders are not allowed within its precincts.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The Tagores patronized the study of folk literatures by the turn of the twentieth century. Rabindranath Tagore urged Dakhina Ranjan Mitra Majumdar to collect and study the folk literature of Bengal. Abanindranath Tagore collected and illustrated folk tales and had written '*Kṣīrer putul*' (the condensed milk doll) (1896).

<sup>51</sup> It is not just Zbavitel, but most Bengali literary historians fail to mention the role of folk literature in the birth of the modern consciousness. For example, Sen, Sukumar. *History of Bengali literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1971.

<sup>52</sup> Zbavitel, Dušan. *A History of Indian Literature, Bengali Literature*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1996; p. 191.

<sup>53</sup> Ṭhākur, Rabindranāth. 'Grāmyasāhitya.' *Rabīndra racanābali*, Vol. 5. Kalikātā: Bīśvabhāratī, 1995: pp. 792- 809.

Tagore provided an imposed 'pure' organic character to the literature that had emerged from the soil.<sup>54</sup> This argument has been furthered in the analyses of the history of the Bengali literature as well. Srikumar Bandyopadhyay in examining the tradition of the novel in Bengali, gives credit to 'lesser' forms of literature and duly conflates the categories of the 'fairy tales' and folk-literature. 'To fathom both the inside and the outside of Bengal', says Bandyopadhyay, 'one has to turn to the *pallisāhitya* (village literature) which is devoid of the influence of Sanskrit'.<sup>55</sup>

There is an understanding of folk-literature as a standalone literary space which has little or nothing to do with the canon of Literature.<sup>56</sup> Tony K. Stewart argues that the label of folk literature<sup>57</sup> 'serves at best as a vague classification that usually lumps together all types of literature that are in form and function different from courtly or high literary works, a kind of non- or less-literary class, generally understood to be oral in composition and transmission'.<sup>58</sup> The predominant orality of this literature coupled with its subaltern roots and the popular space it occupied was used to recover an untapped history.<sup>59</sup> This history was quite unlike the high culture of the perceived glorious past of Aryan India.

Unlike Sanskrit sources that mostly recorded the remoter past, folklore to the folklorists became the living document of history that had accumulated experiences through various conquests and regimes and collected memorabilia as it moved across time. This virgin territory could now be ploughed to look for a new

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<sup>54</sup> There has also been the notion that the folk literature dissolves the boundaries between religious practices which the mainstream literate cultures strive to preserve. For example, Ashutosh Bhattacharya and Dinesh Chandra Sen point out that the Vaishnava padas having a profound influence on the songs of the Muslims like *bijer gān*, *ghāṭu gān*, *rākhālī gān*, *sāri gān*, etc. Bhaṭṭācārya, Āśuṭoṣ. *Baṅgīya lok-saṅgīt ratnākar*. Calcutta, 1966. Sen, Dinesh Chandra. *Folk Literature of Bengal*. Calcutta, 1920; p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> Bandyopādhyāy, Śrīkumār *Baṅga sāhitye upanyāsēr dhārā*. Kalkātā: Modern Book Agency, 1968; p. 15.

<sup>56</sup> A. K. Ramanujan completely disagrees with this formulation as he believes that the categories of 'classical vs. folk, written vs. spoken, fixed vs. free or fluid' are sufficient to understand the literary imaginations of India. Most of this is due to what he calls an 'oral literacy' in India. Ramanujan, A. K. 'Who needs Folklore? The Relevance of Oral Traditions to South Asian Studies', *Manushi*. Vol. 69, 1999; p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> Taking another extreme stance, he talks about the understanding of the folk-literature that is denied a historical context: 'especially what we lump together as "folk literature"—to crystallize moments of cultural narration, ossifying them in some standardized way that is delivered in an acceptable genre.' Tony K. Stewart. *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pirs, Tales of Mad Adventure in Old Bengal*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004; p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> As Kirin Narayan points out, there is a problematic covalence in 'the attitudes prevalent in the scholarship since the colonial times which equate the "folk" with villagers and "folk-lore" with bounded, authentic, unchanging materials.' 'Banana Republics and V. I. Degrees: Rethinking Indian Folklore in a Postcolonial World.' *Asian Folklore Studies*, 52. 1 (1993): pp. 177-204.

<sup>59</sup> For the role of popularity in the framing of the discourse of Folk literature, see Ananda Coomaraswamy. 'The Nature of Folklore and Popular Art.' *Quarterly Journal of Mythic Society*, 1936.

'national' identity. One of the pioneers of archiving of folk literature of Bengal, Gurusaday Dutt, asserts that folk literature signifies 'the soul characteristics of each nation'.<sup>60</sup> Stuart Blackburn's conjecture that nationalism, in fact, had to rely on folk literature as the sentinel of a pre-colonial traditional past to usher in cultural revivalism and resolve the debate between tradition and modernity is particularly convincing.<sup>61</sup> The demands of the new national identity involved looking for secular spaces and in this the folk literature was chiefly successful. Both Dinesh Chandra Sen and Dakshina Ranjan Mitra Majumdar were keen on documenting ballads from the eastern part of the undivided Bengal where compartmentalized religious identities were seriously challenged. Muslim ballads spoke of the love between Krishna and Radha and both the Hindus and the Muslims seem to have rested their faith in a local deity called the Satya Pīr.<sup>62</sup> Sen was also of the opinion that this folklore revealed the 'agnostic spirit of primordial folk consciousness that preceded the advent of the two contemporary religious traditions of Bengal; Hindu and Muslim'.<sup>63</sup>

But in any case, the rediscovery of the folk tradition in the annals of Bengali literature begins with Lal Behari Day's *Folk Tales of Bengal*. There is no recorded precedent by a Bengali trying to archive oral folk-narratives.<sup>64</sup> There were several attempts to translate texts from the Arabic through Western sources, or from

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<sup>60</sup> He waxes eloquent about the unadulterated nature of folk literature: 'For the folk art of a nation its the sincerest and most spontaneous collective expression of its essential philosophy of, and outlook on, life and of the distinctive moral and spiritual ideas of the race—of its simple joys and sorrows as well as of its highest aims and aspirations expressed through an art language especially suited to its race-genius and embodying imagery, turn of expression, tonality and rhythm peculiar to it and evolved through countless centuries by the operation of the physical environment and spiritual and cultural values.' *Folk Arts and Crafts of Bengal: The Collected Papers*. Calcutta: Seagull, 1990; p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Blackburn draws largely from Tamil sources to show how nationalism was desperately in need of a pre-colonial past and folk literature served as the perfect resource. 'It was pre-colonial, traditional literature that the tales had been viewed right from the beginning of the nineteenth century; they were first brought into the public sphere through print as reflections of Indian tradition, but later they were condemned precisely because they reflected what were increasingly considered reprehensible features of that tradition.' *Print, Folklore and the Nationalism in Colonial South India*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003; p. 149.

<sup>62</sup> Dinesh Chandra Sen. *The Ballads of Bengal*. Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1988 (1923) and Dušan Zbavitel. *Bengali Folk- Ballads from Mymensingh and the Problem of Their Authenticity*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1963.

<sup>63</sup> Dinesh Chandra Sen. *The Folk Literature of Bengal*. Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1985 (1920); p. xviii.

<sup>64</sup> Sadhana Naithani discusses the possibilities of native informants recording and writing such texts which were paraded as texts written by their European masters. These texts as she observes are subsumed in the ideological premises in which it was born. 'Chaube's text and Crooke's titles reflect individual perspectives, capabilities, and folkloristic concerns. Chaube emerges as one not only learned about the culture of his land, but also steeped in the context of British colonial India. His correct British English translations are peppered with official terminology: the language of the courts, revenue departments, ethnographic surveys, and military hierarchies. In one tale, the Jinns have a 'Jinn-i-Chief.' And in yet another, a female character possesses 'native simplicity.' *In Quest Of Indian Folktales, Pandit Ram Gharib Chaube and William Crooke*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006; p. 204.

Western sources right away, like Nilamani Basak's *Ārabīya Upanyās* (1850), Alok Nath Nyaybhushan and Radhamadhab Mitra's *Ārabyaupanyās* (1857), which are versions of the 1001 nights, or Mahendrachandra Mitra's *Hātīm tāi*, etc. Madhusudan Mukhopadhyay had published the translated version of Hans Anderson's tales serially under the banner of the Bengal Family Library from 1867-1870. But no concerted attempt to record oral rural narratives had yet been made.<sup>65</sup>

Day's predecessors in this regard were the colonial officials and the main thrust of their studies lay in the anthropological value of the vast material rather than the literary worth.<sup>66</sup> Day inherited many of the features of his European predecessors while simultaneously introducing his own registers. However, the major departure is in Day looking for a literary heritage rather than a simple anthropological narrative. Day was percipient of the fact that his new found religious identity was seen as a rupture in terms of socio-cultural identity. By introducing the folk as a continuous and uncontaminated literary form he was not only assured of the returns of a nascent nationalism, but it also provided him with the basis of weaving new-found religious dispensations into the narrative.

Colonel Tod had written the *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Dr L.P. Tessitory *Indian Antiquary*, Mr C. Swynnerton (a missionary) *The Romantic Tale of Punjab*, Sir R.C. Temple *Legends of Punjab*, C.F. Usborne *Punjabi Lyrics and Proverbs*, William Crooke *An Introduction to the Popular Religion and Folk-Lore of Northern India*, Dr Grierson *Indian Antiquary of India* to name a few. Most of them insist on a very community and caste specific delineation of the tales. Maive Stokes in the Preface to *Indian Fairy Tales* goes into great lengths to illustrate the marginal identities of her sources which range from the ayah to the mocha and Karim the Muhammadan is thrown in for good measure.<sup>67</sup> This list is indicative of the fact that Folk literature before Day was largely a British Orientalist prerogative.<sup>68</sup> Given the developments concerning folklore in Europe, in the nineteenth century they have been invariably

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<sup>65</sup> This rather constructed covalence which relies on the discovery of 'real' earthy tales completely overlooks the urban folklore which were present in an emerging metropolis such as Calcutta. See for example, Soumen Sen 'Folklore, Urban Hindu Domesticity of Nineteenth Century Kolkata, and Sri Ramkrishna Kathamrita.' Ed. Firoz Mahmud. *Folklore in Context, Essays in Honour of Shamsuzzaman Khan*. Dhaka: The University Press Ltd, 2010: pp. 205-216.

<sup>66</sup> K. D. Upadhyaya opines '[t]he credit for starting Folklore studies in this country must be given to the early generation of those Englishmen who came here as recruits in the Indian Civil Service.' 'A General survey of Folklore Activities in India.' *Midwest Folklore*. 4. 4 (1954): pp. 201-212, 202.

<sup>67</sup> Maive Stokes. *Indian Fairy Tales*, London: Ellise and White, 1880; Preface.

<sup>68</sup> On the impact of Orientalist initiatives on the 'discovery' of folk literature in India see Trilochan Pande. 'The Concept of Folklore in India and Pakistan'. *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde = Archives suisses des traditions populaires*. 59. 2 (1963): pp. 25-30.

read against the paradigm of the building of nationalist ethos in modern Europe, which then served as a precedent for their Indian counterparts.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, if collecting and publishing folk-lore was already a charged colonial knowledge network, what did Lal Behari Day want to achieve when he collected the stories popular in the villages on nineteenth-century Bengal? This is the question that will concern us in the remaining part of this chapter.

### *The Folk Tales in their context*

In the chronology of Lal Behari Day's major works, his collection of folk tales comes quite late. His novella (the only text where he mentions in passing an actual case of conversion) *Candramukhīr Upākhyān* (The story of Chandramukhee), was published serially in 1856, in *Sam̃bād Aruṇoday* and later as a book in 1859 with some changes to the plot. The other book for which Day had received much appreciation both at home and in England, *Govinda Samanta or the History of the Bengal Raiyat* (later published as *Bengal Peasant Life*), was printed in 1874. Day began serializing his folk tales in *The Bengal Magazine* from 1875 and it was collected and published in the form of a book only in 1883. The sequences of authoring of his major works, apart from his numerous journalistic articles, suggest that the archiving of Folk-literature was a mature work that bore a reasoned argument about the representation of rural life (which he was known and celebrated for).

In terms of the paratextual material, the present text is multi-layered.<sup>70</sup> It contains illustrations, dedications and a rather long preface. Illustrations by Warwick Goble that accompanies the text was only added in the 1912 edition of the book and did not appear in its first edition in 1883. The illustrations were an interesting addition as they de-territorialized the stories. The illustrations are reminiscent of Mughal and Rajput paintings of princesses and even the topography

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<sup>69</sup> This comes with an understanding that folklore in the Western context is understood as being bound by national boundaries and often the result of the modern nation building process. For example, Abrahams, Roger D. 'Phantoms of Romantic Nationalism in Folkloristics.' *Journal of American Folklore* (1993): pp. 3-37.

<sup>70</sup> 'The literary work consists, exhaustively or essentially, of a text, that is to say (a very minimal definition) in more or less lengthy sequence of verbal utterances more or less containing meaning. But this text rarely appears in its naked state, without reinforcement and accompaniment of a certain number of productions, themselves verbal or not, like an authors's name, a title, a preface, illustrations. One does not know if one should consider that they belong to the text or not, but in any case they surround it and prolong it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb, but also in its strongest meaning: to make present to assure its presence in the world, its "reception" and its consumption, in the form, nowadays atleast, of a book.' Genette, Gérard. 'Introduction to the Paratext.' *New Literary History*, 22. 2 (1991): pp. 261-272.

represented the paintings are far from the Bengal landscape. In view of these illustrations which definitively add a fairytale perspective to the stories, one might wonder if (as often happened with such literature in the period) there was a shift of audience towards children readers at work here. Even if that held true, however, it would not weaken the nationalist framework in which Day was operating.<sup>71</sup>

Even before the book was published several tales had already been part of *The Bengal Magazine* (1875-78). But interestingly enough, Day does not exactly reproduce the tales as they were published in the Magazine. The magazine carried exact details of the source of each narrative'. The story of HIRAMAN, the Match-making jackal, the Boy with the moon on his forehead, were heard from Baburali of Santipore in the district of Nadiya, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, 1<sup>st</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1878 respectively. *The Ghost who was Afraid of being Bagged* was recited in August 1878 by Mrs Kedar Nath De of Chinsurah, Hooghly, *the Field of Bones* was heard from Kailas Chandra Banerjea of Sonatigri of the Hooghly District on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1878'. There was also an attempt to give a more Western classical literary feel to the narratives as they were often accompanied by quotations from the Greek and Latin classics. However, Day was equally keen to register his allegiance to the Romantic poets of Britain as he quoted from P.B. Shelley's poem *Adonais* (An elegy that he wrote on the death of John Keats) in the epigraph to his story, 'Life's Secret'.

In the death-chamber for a moment Death  
Shamed by the presence of that living Night,  
Blushed to annihilation, and the breath  
Revisited those lips, and life's pale light  
Flashed through those limbs.<sup>72</sup>

When they were published in the form of a book, Day took care to do away with these referential epigraphs. To give it a literary turn, he eliminated the copious sources that would have given a distinct anthropological direction to the narrative. In this, he is consciously trying to weave a distinct literary narrative of a located folk-literature away from the already established tradition of folk-tales being part of the anthropological strain of folk-literary studies in India. As he rejects his fetish for

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<sup>71</sup> Satadru Sen observes that the late colonial period in Bengal intellectually invested significantly in the development of children's literature as it sought to draw juvenile peripheries. In this context, it is important to observe that Day avoids such overt compartmentalization of reading spaces. With the later illustrations added, the book almost certainly came to target a young audience. Sen, Satadru. 'A Juvenile Periphery: The Geographies Of Literary Childhood In Colonial Bengal.' *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 5: 1, 2004: pp. 1-49, 5.

<sup>72</sup> Day, Lal Behari. *Bengal Peasant Life: Folk tales of Bengal. Recollections of my School-days*. Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1969; p. xvi.

classical Greek literature and with little reference to preceding canonized narratives of what might be called folk-literature in Sanskrit (the most famous examples being of the *Pañcatantra* and the *Kathāsaritsāgara*), he was trying to forge a new literary history which relied heavily on its soil rather than a diffused sense of classical antiquity for its genealogy.

Day dedicates this book to 'Richard Carnac Temple, Captain, Bengal Staff Corps, F.R.G.S, M.R.A.S., M.A.I, etc., who first suggested to the writer the idea of collecting these tales and who has done so much for the cause of Indian Folklore [...]'.<sup>73</sup> Sir Richard Carnac Temple, a member of the Royal Anthropological Institute, was indeed involved in collecting tales from Punjab and had already published several of them with the help of Indian munshis who would act as translators for him.<sup>74</sup> Day's mentor Temple was desirous to study folklore as a science, the prerogative of the colonizer's knowledge network.<sup>75</sup> He proclaimed that this kind of scientific study of the folklores was the privilege of an educated mind:

It must be remembered that the scientific explanation of a phenomenon involves critical observation, which is itself the outcome of a long

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<sup>73</sup> Lal Behari Day. *Folk Tales of Bengal*. Calcutta: Rupa, 2002, Dedication. Ashrah Hossain Siddique in his doctoral dissertation contends that the collection and archiving of indigenous folk materials changed considerably post 1857. After 1857 they were not merely used to fathom the natives but systematically organized to legitimize colonial control. *Bengal Folklore Collections and Studies During the British Period (1800-1947): A Critical Survey*. Indiana University, 1966.

<sup>74</sup> Saddhana Naithani has written several essays on the colonizer folklorists and their Indian collaborators. She has consistently focussed on the creative relationship between the two and their knowledge networks. In the context of R. C. Temple, she talks about the problems of translation and most importantly what she calls the 'missing discourse.' 'Despite the dissimilarity of Mrs Steel's romantic imagery and Temple's military tone, both are based on an imagined countryside. Nothing in their work shows the real, contemporary village known to the author and the narrators—the village coming under new revenue laws, the villagers trying to understand the new lawmakers, the people who called the new ruler "firangi" and made him the subject of their most exciting contemporary stories. How does this not form part of the collectors empirical evidence?' This is in sharp contrast to the response that Day received. He was always the 'native informant's writing truthfully about his village life. 'The Colonial Folklorist.' *Journal of Folklore Research*, 34. 1 (1997): pp. 1-14; p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> His take on folklore deserves a lengthy quotation: 'What is Folk-lore, and what is not Folk-lore? [...] Such an editor will soon find that Religion, so far as it is Superstition—and with many peoples it should be remembered that it is nothing else—is Folk-lore; so is a Social Custom, so far as it is founded on a superstition; while Songs and Catches, Proverbs and Sayings, are only interesting so far as they embody Folk-lore. History, Natural History, and Ethnography, are also Folk-lore, so far as they preserve Legends; Language, again, includes much, in the matter of derivation especially, that is purely Folk-lore: while Antiquities are almost inseparable from Legends. Folk-lore, in fact, is present in almost every subject connected with the study of man-kind, and with many it is so mixed up with sober fact as to be practically inextricable. [...] What, then, is this Folk-lore that we find pervading everything human? It seems to me that the answer is to be found in the term itself. If we take "folk" to mean the general community, we get 'folk-lore' to be the 'lore' of the people. "Lore" means and has meant learning in general, but, putting aside derivations and past meanings—a proceeding to which each generation in all parts of the world has always asserted its right—I think it is fair to say that "lore" nowadays, and at any rate in this connection, is learning of the kind that is opposed to science, meaning by 'science' ascertained knowledge. Folk-lore, then, is, in the first place, popular learning, the embodiment, that is, of the popular ideas on all matters connected with man and his surroundings.' Temple, R. C. 'The Science of Folk-Lore.' *The Folk-Lore Journal*, 4. 3 (1886): pp. 193-212.

continued education; the power of logical deduction, which may be reckoned as being mainly absent from the average popular mind; and the faculty for extended application, which is to a great extent the distinguishing mark of a trained intellect. What chance then has the untutored savage, or indeed the uncultivated member of a civilized race, of arriving at a right conclusion about anything that comes within his ken? [...] Will a savage or an Asiatic peasant, for instance, ever give the true reason for the movement of the trains on the railway that is being made through his lands?<sup>76</sup>

While instituting a premium on the knowledge practices based on science, Temple makes a strong case for a folklorist to have been part of a privileged knowledge network. To further his illustration he remarks that ‘the native mind has not at all yet reached a scientific stage, and, consequently, the most childish derivations are everywhere gravely asserted as reasonable origins for the forms of names’. Day, however, rejects the propensity for a scientific narration and instead prioritizes a literary perspective. Without a decided literary precedent, Day take on Folk-tales as literature he seeks to redefine the modes of production of cognizable knowledge, which is not merely diffusionist in nature.

Lal Behari Day has been charged with taking to the Western mode of literary narration by one of his most successful successors, the compiler/writer of *Ṭhākur'mār Jhuli* (1907), possibly the most well-known collection of Bengali tales at least in West Bengal until present, Dakhina Ranjan Mitra Majumdar. Majumdar while acknowledging his debt towards Day parleys about how the tales had presented themselves in a foreign trunk. He draws a curious genealogy of Day via the Arabian Nights and the Folk Tales of Kashmir.<sup>77</sup> Apart from the language English, what is foreign about Day’s collection of Folk-tales?

As we have already discussed in the earlier section, the colonial anthropologists who were folklore enthusiasts by the end of the nineteenth century had established a tradition of collecting and publishing folklores of India.<sup>78</sup> Even

<sup>76</sup> R. C. Temple. ‘The Science of Folklore.’ *The Folk-Lore Journal*. Vol. 4, no. 3 (1886): pp. 193-212; p. 196.

<sup>77</sup> In the introduction to *Ṭhākur'mār Jhuli*, Dakhina Ranjan Mitra Majumdar writes, ‘Arabian Nights jagater kendre kendre ādar pāiyāche—āp'nār saphalatāy tṛpta haiyāche. Āmāder deśer kebal'mātra kāśmīr kathā (Folk Tales of Kashmir) kathañcit-jatna pāite basiyāche—bideśīya guṇagrāhīr katākṣe pariyañchila baliyā. kintu dhanya āmāder Lāl Bihārī—āmāder bareṇya pathapradarśak. yini prāṇēr āhlāde, antarer ākulatāy ei dhulir jhuli gḥṇāy niṣṣep na kariyā jhāriyā tuliyāchilēn. tahāri maj'būt bilātī trāṅke kariyā bāmlār kathākāhini pṛthibir deśe deśe āp'nār sattā jānāitē pariyañche.’ Mitra Majumdār, Dakṣiṇā Rañjan. *Ṭhākur'mār Jhuli*. Kal'katā: Mitra o Ghoṣ, 1976.; p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Gloria Goodwin Raheja has argued that the formulations of folklores as sources of authentic information by the colonialists where often sanitized versions that flattened out heterogenous elements and that ‘such entextualizations of the speech of the colonized, especially proverbial speech, figured in the construction of a monologic discourse about caste and caste identities, in the naturalization of

though Day dedicates the book to R.C. Temple, however, he completely overlooks the tradition of folk-lore collection in India. He focuses his attention to drawing a genealogy that comes from Scandinavia and continental Europe and nothing that connects it to India.

As I was no stranger to the Märchen of the Brothers Grimm, to the Norse Tales so admirably told by Dasent, Anarson's Icelandic Stories translated by Powell, to the Highland Stories done into English by Campbell, and to the fairy stories collected other writers as I believed that the collection suggested would be a contribution, however slight to that daily increasing literature of folk-lore and comparative mythology which, like comparative philosophy, proves that the swarthy and half-naked peasant on the banks of the Ganges is a cousin, albeit of a hundredth move, to the fair-skinned and well-dressed Englishman on the banks of the Thames; I readily caught up the idea and cast about for materials.<sup>79</sup>

The apparent objective of this particular collection is to prove that the peasant in Bengal is connected in terms of imagination to the 'fair-skinned' and 'well-dressed' gentleman of England. The mediators of forging this relationship of 'comparative mythology', which, as Day suggests is the derivative of comparative philosophy, comes via continental Europe and has no direct ancestral linkage to the English. By this move, Day bypasses an entire tradition of anthropological practices common amongst Indian civil servants and their wives in understanding the people of India. He re-introduces the Folk tales as participants of entangled histories of global travelling genres and not merely derivatives of the discourses of the colonizers. Therefore there is conscious attempt on the part of Day to look for a narrative bereft of direct colonial interventions.

This circumventing prompts us to look at how Day aligns himself vis-à-vis the Western knowledge network of which he was a direct participant, both as a student at the General Assembly Institution and as a Professor at the Hooghly College. Partha Chatterjee in reading the *Disciplines of Colonial Bengal* takes recourse to Foucault while illustrating the peculiar relationship of the Indians to their 'prior' knowledge system in the age of colonial modernity. According to him the English educated Indian encounters his 'prior' knowledge horizontally and is constantly in a

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revolt and other forms of non-compliance, and in creation of an illusion that disciplinary control was carried out with the consent of the colonized.' Raheja, Gloria Goodwin. 'Caste, colonialism, and the speech of the colonized: entextualization and disciplinary control in India.' *American Ethnologist*, 23. 3 (1996): pp. 494-513.

<sup>79</sup> Lal Behari Day. *Folk Tales of Bengal*. Calcutta: Rupa, 2002; p. viii.

relationship of translation.<sup>80</sup> This curious horizontal attachment with the 'prior' knowledge through which the colonial modern approaches new disciplines and in this case the Folk tales lends credibility to this literary lineage that Day is so eager to forge. With its ground firmly held in the territory of rural Bengal it seeks to reach out to a larger parent body of the framework of the disciplines circumventing its 'lesser' adaptations in the form of Folk Tales collected by Englishmen stationed in India.

Forging of this lineage allows him to weave a continuum that is constantly in the process of translation.<sup>81</sup> Most of the texts that he refers to are written in tongues that were not familiar to him, the likes of German and Nordic languages. The frame through which he approaches the Folk-tales is already filtered through a translation process which has rendered the texts in English. The 'foreign trunk' that Lal Behari Day chooses is stratiform, not only in the layers of translation that the final text undergoes but in the complex composition of the knowledge network with its allegiances spread across India and Europe.

Even though the tales are about Bengal, its audience lie possibly in the foreign shores or the English educated Bengali elite of nineteenth-century Bengal. A text which promises a deep connection with the land of Bengal finds its representation in a language and a frame that is supposedly alien. Paradoxically this 'alien' frame corresponds to the charges levied against Christianity. The intransigence associated with an alien culture is traded for multiplicity. So, the

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<sup>80</sup> 'We are forced to recognize, first, that, following its implantation in a different if not entirely alien field, the new discursive formation will open itself to intrusions by various elements in the pre-existing linguistics and intellectual practices of the country; perhaps, the natural-topographical analogy itself becomes inappropriate here, because what happens is that the new indigenous practitioners of the disciplines actively seek out the various points of entry—equivalence, similarity, adjacency, substitutability, and so forth—through which, in a ceaseless process of translation, the new knowledges are aligned with prior knowledges. These prior knowledges are not whose elements may have already gone into the formation of the discipline (such as, let us say, the Greek sciences or medieval scholasticism). These are "prior" knowledges that belong, so to speak, to an anachronistic present, knowledges that one would have assumed overtaken by the history of scientific progress, except for the fact that they now have to be encountered horizontally, as adjacent formations that must be engaged in the process of translation.' Chatterjee, Partha. 'The Disciplines in Colonial Bengal.' Ed. Partha Chatterjee. *Texts of Power, Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995: pp. 1-29; p. 11.

<sup>81</sup> It must be remembered that Day himself was translating the stories from Bengali. Read in this context, Day's collection of tales can be read as what G. N. Devy calls para-literature. According to him, '[i]t may be said that the distinction between literature and para-literature is not a distinction between two different fields, but a distinction within a single field, as the one between totems and taboos within a single culture, or as between self and non-self with a single-field of consciousness. The political dispossession of linguistic and social margins is the root cause of the creation of the category.' Devy, G. N. 'Literary History and Translation: An Indian View.' *Meta: journal des traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal*, 42. 2 (1997): pp. 395-406; p. 397.

'territoriality' that Day is so careful about preserving is subsumed within a complex network of knowledge practices which both creates an optimum space for the insider and the outsider to merge. In a sense it creates a space for a hybrid network of knowledge practices where the indigenous forms of knowledge are made intelligible through the language and structure of the European.<sup>82</sup>

The interplay of knowledge practices however does not encourage a smooth interrelationship between the European and the Christian. In fact the continental folk nationalist genealogy that Day draws from resists such easy equations. But Dutt as the arbiter of the new narrative tradition creates the possibility of altering frames of reference. Creation of this vantage point allows Day to introduce elements of Christian religious practices which are not organic to the culture that he seeks to represent.<sup>83</sup> Christianity is fairly new to rural Bengal; hence this element adds a contemporary aspect to the version of the story telling and immediately provides a context to tales who were apparently devoid of context and time-frames. As we have noticed in the first chapter of this dissertation, Christianity was often viewed as an expression of religio-social dissent by the urban colonial elite, therefore the superimposition of the elite brand of Christianity in the rural everyday heightens the possibilities of narrative intervention. Day is conscious about his position and hence his choice of narratorial voices becomes important here.

After a great deal of search I found my Gammer Grethel—though not half so old as the Frau Viehmännin of Hesse Cassel—in the person of a Bengali Christian woman, who, when a little girl and living in her heathen home, had heard many stories from her old grandmother. She was a good storyteller, but her stock was not large; and after I had heard ten from her I had to look about for fresh sources. An old Brahman told me two stories; an old barber three; an old servant of mine told me two; and the rest I heard from another old Brahman. None of my authorities knew English; they all told the stories in Bengali, and I translated them when I came home.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> For understanding hybrid Colonial textual processes, Lynn Zastoupil's idea of linking Intimacy and Colonialism is particularly useful. Lynn Zastoupil. 'Intimacy and Colonial Knowledge.' *Journal of Colonialism and History*, 3. 2 (2002).

<sup>83</sup> Sumanta Banerjee in the context of popular religious practices in nineteenth-century Bengal uncovers the changes in its character: 'the establishment of the British Colonial system, however, exposed the Indian "little tradition" to a new religion—Christianity. In keeping with the tradition of acculturation in their religious beliefs and habits, some of the old Bengali syncretic sects often adopted and adapted the new practices introduced by the Christian missionaries. Thus, the Karta-bhaja sect followed a set of ten rules and fixed every Friday for a confession-session by its members, reminiscent of the Biblical Ten Commandments and the Catholic practice of confession respectively. Similarly, another sect of popular religion in nineteenth-century Bengal, the Ram-Ballabhis, used to sing a song praising at the same time Kali, the Christian God and Khoda of the Muslims.' *Logic in Popular Form, Essays on Popular Religion in Bengal*. Calcutta: Seagull, 2002; p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> Lal Behari Day. *Folk Tales of Bengal*. Calcutta: Rupa, 2002: Preface.

Thus, for Day, the narrators trace their pedigree to famous German folk tales. The figure of the old woman as the primary narrator is retained with the inclusion of a fairly wide cross-section of the society. From the high caste Brahman to the barber and the servant Day's narrators represent various layers of the caste hierarchy in the Bengali society. The character of the old woman is in continuum with the Shambhu's mother of the novel *Govinda Samanta*. Day laments that Shambhu's mother, the best story-teller in his imagination is long dead and hence he has to find other sources for his stories. Shambhu's mother had a very specific kind of tale to tell the *upakathās* which were primarily on three subjects—'kings and queens, ghosts, and the travels of four friends'.<sup>85</sup> Day is particularly critical about the ghost stories as he believed that '[t]hese ghost-stories, volumes of which are heard by every Bengali boy, produce two effects on his mind—they strengthen his idea of the supernatural, and make him timid and cowardly'.<sup>86</sup> Hence, his narrators and his choice of stories becomes the focal point of the compilation. His careful framing devices suggest that the neither the choice of the narrator nor the stories are an innocent collection. By his own admission in *The Bengal Magazine* he had been collecting stories and listening to a number of them since childhood from Shambu's mother (a prominent character in *Govinda Samanta*). The collection boasts of only a few stories suggesting that he hand picked the stories that he deemed suitable for the purpose at hand. The demise of his ideal narrator, Shambhu's mother, generates a lack thereby instituting Day's legitimacy of fashioning his new narrator.

The most curious character is the Bengali Christian woman who has heard the stories at her heathen home. The hyphenated religious identity of the old woman is superscripted by her old age which signified wisdom. The narratorial figure is at once a marginal Christian woman yet a respectable and hence a dependable source of narratives. Filtering the stories through a Bengali Christian woman Day is in fact introducing a key angular perspective when representing 'prior knowledge'. This knowledge as Day suggests can never be divorced from the religious practices. In his essay 'The Bible and Shakespeare' Day opines that in India there is the abject absence of the separation of the religious from the political.

In every country blessed with the light of revelation there are at least two opposite and conflicting classes of influences at work, viz., those which emanate from its religious, and those which emanate from its national and political life. In countries not blessed with the light of revelation, there is

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

generally speaking no religious life distinct from political life, and the two classes of influences pointed out thoroughly harmonize with each other. In India for instance, there is no social or political system divergent from religion.<sup>87</sup>

It is at this precise juncture that the text is poised, it has an array of narratorial voices and mainly related to the Hindu fold. The religious and the political come together in this narrative as Day is able to inscribe a territoriality and authenticity to Christianity which has thus far been read as an 'alien religion'. With the narratorial figure the nascent Bengali nationalism is organically connected to its subterranean cultural ethos, which is so central to a territorial identity.

Day discusses in great detail the categories of various ghosts who originate from different castes; and outside the realm of this ghost pantheon lies the Muslim ghosts called the '*mamdos*', believed to be the most vicious of the lot. All though we find the mamdo ghosts as a community, the Muslims are otherwise completely absent in Day's Bengali village and its stories. The duality of religions that Day poses in the rural life that he envisages of Bengal; that of Christianity and Hinduism, brings to the fore the artificiality of this careful construct and highlights the political matrix underlying the same. While Christianity forms as the frame through which the stories of the heathen homes find their way into the translated collection of stories from Bengal, the Muslim inhabitants are the silent presences, conspicuous by their absence.

The duality of the religious practices that govern this text is heightened by the treatment of the Christian narrator of the text. In the story of 'The Indignant Brahmin' we find the most powerful gods of the Hindu pantheon, Shiva and Durga. The poor Brahmin in the story is a devout worshipper of the goddess Durga and is gifted with a magic pot that spews sweetmeats when overturned, to alleviate him from poverty. He is tricked into parting with his pot twice, until Durga gives him a pot that spews demons instead of sweetmeats to punish the guilty. The gods and the goddesses in this story are not invoked after a lot of penances neither are they given any divine attributes apart from their ability to produce miracles. They are liminal characters in the story and their order in terms of importance is absent in the story,

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<sup>87</sup> Day, Lal Bihari. 'The Bible and Shakespeare.' *The Bengal Magazine*. Vol. V. Calcutta: S. M. Sirdar Herald Press; p. 228.

which is well in keeping with so many pre-modern Bengali treatments of these deities.<sup>88</sup>

‘The Evil Eye of Shani’ is possibly the most interesting story in the collection. The cult of Shani (*śani*) is a localized cult with no obvious relationship with the Hindu canon of gods proper. In this story he is given equal status with Lakshmi who is one of the most prominent gods of the Hindu pantheon. Lakshmi and Shani both are desirous of testing their power and ask Sribatsa to adjudge the better amongst the two. Sribatsa chooses Lakshmi. Shani is visibly upset and sets his evil eye upon them, but due to the wit and the presence of mind of Sribatsa and his wife they overcome all odds and at the end are prosperous. Day invokes the deity without any contextualization of the ritualistic paeans and anecdotes that accompany the deity. Shani just appears in the beginning of the story and is a silent presence throughout. He hardly seems to have participated in the narrative.

Day however retains a crucial aspect of the story telling in Bengal, uttering a sequence of apparently nonsensical questions. This series of questions at the end of all the stories brings the narrative to a full-circle. The sequence of the questions involves asking a general question and then the anonymous moderator of the conversation poses the question to the character involved and then the narrative moves to further questions. A curious dialogic that is produced due to this sequence of questions foregrounds the importance of the narrator-listener relationship. Interrogation is the key ingredient that makes such a narrative successful. Protagonists of these questions range from the inanimate to the animate from the animal and the insect kingdom to the human beings.

Thus my story endeth  
The Natiya-thorn withereth.  
‘Why, O natiya-thorn, dost wither?’  
‘Why does the cow on me browse?’  
‘why, o cow, dost thou browse?’  
‘why does thy neat-herd not tend me?’  
‘why, o neat-herd, dost thou not tend the cow?’  
‘why does thy daughter-in-law not give me rice?’  
‘why, o daughter-in-law not give rice?’  
‘Why, does my child cry?’  
‘why, o child dost thou cry?’  
‘why does the ant bite me?’  
‘why, o ant dost thou bite?’  
Koot! Koot! Koot!<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> I take this hint from Hans Harder (2011); p. 140.

The possibility of questioning that follows each tale adds a new axis of analysis to these stories. Sequential nonsensical verse that accompanies each narrative eschews the possibility of a complete closure of any narrative. Questioning otherwise age old narratives is the window through which Day's narrative is able to enter an otherwise taut and impervious culture. At this juncture the outside and the insides of culture collide and are able to make way for otherwise extraneous religious influences to be accommodated. Hence, the Bengali Christian narrator is equally at home with this narrative as his or her Hindu counterpart. In sum, the fierce territorial identity that the folk offers in terms of conceptualization in late nineteenth Bengal is utilized by Lal Behari Day to propose an organic understanding of Christianity as an Indian religion. This chapter crucially engages with the relationship between the author's complex subject position and the re-organization of autochthonous literary practices. The next chapter on Shoshee Chunder Dutt explores in detail the contingencies of complex authorial identities, crisscrossing religion and politics in colonial Bengal.

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<sup>89</sup> Lal Behari Day. *Folk Tales of Bengal*. Calcutta: Rupa, 2002; p. 17.

## Chapter Five

### *Shoshee Chunder Dutt and the Legitimation of the Figure of the 'Cynic'*

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Literary discourses on religion in the nineteenth century have been read far too often as inherently oppositional. Given the extreme exigencies of societal upheaval that the colonial rule invited, it is all too obvious that major literary productions might lend themselves to be read as polarized participants (colonial vs anti-colonial being the most common). This chapter focuses on the complexities of subject positions that oppositional perceptions invited by adding the dimension of the Christian religious identity. In the milieu of socio-political foment, prominent literary authors dabbled with a range of informed subject positions as participants in the contested colonial literary market. Born in 1825 Calcutta, Shoshee Chunder Dutt was a prolific writer who wrote on a wide range of unrelated subjects from the 'wild tribes in India' to the culture specific nuances of the Bengalis.<sup>1</sup> Quite opposed to the authors we have discussed thus far, his conversion was part of a family initiative to switch religious allegiances. His individual literary exploits have often been eclipsed by the larger collective of the Dutt family, or the first family of converts in nineteenth century Calcutta. While acknowledging the efforts of the family collective as a formidable one in the literary landscape, this chapter argues that Shoshee Chunder Dutt consciously positioned himself as a cynic<sup>2</sup> or a distanced commentator on contemporary society. The preceding chapters discussed the problems of initiating a discourse of racial difference against the common denominator of Christianity in the colonial world. This chapter complicates the position further by adding the participatory logic of colonialism as it seeks to deal with an author who was part of the British administrative machinery.

Shoshee Chunder Dutt defies easy classification in terms of allegiance and identity, as reflected in the complexities of his work. As a Bengali upper-caste Christian convert nationalist sympathizer working for the British government it was very difficult to take easy sides. His position as comprador elite with a religion that

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<sup>1</sup> *Miscellaneous Verses* (1848, Calcutta), *The Vision of Sumeru* (1878, Calcutta), *The Great Wars of India* (1884, London), *Half Hours with Nature* (1884, London), *The Wild Tribes of India* (1884, London), *Realities of Indian Life* (1885, London), *Bengaliana—a dish of rice and curry* (1892, Calcutta).

<sup>2</sup> The term cynic is often used in relation to the rhetorical tradition established by Diogenes. While I acknowledge the legacy of the term, I intend to use in a more general sense. See for example, Branham, R. B. 'Defacing the Currency: Diogenes' rhetoric and the invention of Cynicism.' Eds. R. B. Branham and M. O. Goulet-Caze. *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and its Legacy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 83-7.

is identified with the colonizer strikes a disharmonious note with the grand conceptualization of the nation. I argue that he devises a position of a distanced yet avid participant (at various levels which I discuss in the second section), which allowed him to enter debates on contemporary society and religion with a unique lens. The praxis of referentiality involved a process of selective identifications and misidentifications which became the mainstay of his interpretive authority. The failed mock-epic, the centre of this discussion, best demonstrates the intricate nature of Shoshee Chunder Dutt's association with his marginal religious identity in an era of politico-social excess.

### *The Dutt family legacy*

The Dutts of Rambagan, an industrious literary family of colonial Calcutta, were known for their preference of the colonizers' tongue. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay had advised Romesh Chunder Dutt (in extension the lot of the Dutt family)<sup>3</sup> to abandon English as the medium of literary expression for Bengali. He had warned: 'You will never live by your writing in English [...] Look at others. Your uncles Govind Chunder Dutt and Shashi Chunder and Madhusudan Dutt were the best educated men in their day. Govind Chunder and Shashi Chunder's English poems will never live. Madhusudan's Bengali poetry will live as long as the Bengali language will live'.<sup>4</sup> Bankim's prophecy had lived its tenure; Shoshee Chunder Dutt was all but forgotten by the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, Rosinka Chaudhuri implicitly seconds Meenakshi Mukherjee's charge when she contends that the Dutts, a formidable literary collective in the better half of the nineteenth century, became increasingly less relevant owing to their choice of the English language.<sup>5</sup> Both Mukherjee and Chaudhuri suggest that there was the impetus to write in the mother tongue as opposed to the language of the colonizer in the climate of nationalist fervour. Chaudhuri is of the opinion that the 'low status' that was accorded to Bengali as a language in the earlier half of the century might have prompted the Dutts to have taken up poetry writing in English in the earlier half of the nineteenth century but by the end of the nineteenth century the idealism

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that Romesh Chunder Dutt chose English for his writings on the Economic history of India but wrote several novels in Bengali.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Dutt, Kalyan C. 'Notes on Kylas Chunder Dutt, First Editor.' *The Hindu Pioneer, Nineteenth century Studies (A Quarterly Journal of the Calcutta Biographical Research Centre)*, 4 October 1973: pp. 489-496; p. 491.

<sup>5</sup> Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *An Indian for All Seasons: The Many Lives of R. C. Dutt*, Penguin Books India, 2009.

associated with the Bengali language made their poetry 'seem out of place'.<sup>6</sup> Drawing a covalence between language and nationalism (or language of nationalism) might be rather tricky given that nineteenth century print was rather successful in launching a bilingual intelligentsia.<sup>7</sup> While it can be debated that people of the South Asian subcontinent were since antiquity bilingual if not multi-lingual, it was the introduction of print and the necessity to address different target groups (both at home and in Europe) that made the colonial intelligentsia effectively take to two languages.

While this charge is also debatable given that a significant body of work that directly fed into the nationalist discourse were written and distributed in English, it is interesting to note that most of the members of the Dutt family wrote and lectured exclusively in English. In fact a significant body of work by the Dutts was published only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century; noteworthy among them were *The Dutt Family Album* (collectively written by the Dutts in 1870) and *The Ancient Legends and Ballads of Hindustan* (Toru Dutt in 1872). Shoshee Chunder Dutt began writing in the 1840s and continued to produce new works as well as hazarded the risk of publishing all his previously published works into two volumes in 1880. Some might argue that writing in English was the most obvious linguistic choice for a family educated in the Western education system and then associated with the colonial government service. But neither anglophilic tendencies nor commitments to the colonial service were in any reasonable measure indicative of such manifest assumptions. One of the contemporary Indian English poets and a student of the Hindu College, Kasiprasad Ghosh, quipped that though he composed some songs in Bengali he 'always found it easier to express my sentiment in that language than in Bengali, but whether it is because I prefer the associations, sentiments and thoughts which are to be found in English poems by those that are met with Bengali poetry, I cannot decide. I can only say that I have bestowed more time and attention upon English books than any others'.<sup>8</sup> Shoshee Chunder seems to have similar

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<sup>6</sup> Chaudhuri, Rosinka. 'The Dutt Family Album and Toru Dutt.' Ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. *A History of Indian Literature in English*. London: Hurst, 2003: pp. 57-69; p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> Anuradha Roy contends that the bhadralok intelligentsia insisted on a bilinguality to maintain a steady relationship with the two nationalisms: Bengali and Indian. Roy, Anuradha. *Nationalism as Poetic Discourse in Nineteenth-century Bengal*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 2003; p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Kasiprasad Ghosh. Calcutta, the 11th Sept. 1834 quoted in Rev. James Long of Bengal. *Handbook of Bengal Missions in Connection with the Church of England Together with an account of general Educational Efforts in North India*. Church Missionary in Calcutta and London: John Faruqar Shaw, 1848; p. 510.

answers but added that he regarded English education as the source of all rational thought.

Young Bengal is in uprightness, fidelity and truth, superior to his ancestors, he owes it entirely to the culture of European education, from which he has imbibed ideas which exist not in the storehouse of Oriental learning. A knowledge of English language is certainly not to be considered as a standard of individual excellence; but it throws open every avenue to truth and rectitude, and the best specimens of the Young Bengal are certainly to be found amongst those who cultivated it well.<sup>9</sup>

This statement might be dismissed as simply one of the many English educated men's desires in the nineteenth century and beyond to rally behind the more rewarding language of the colonial masters. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan has chosen to call these ranks of men, 'alien insiders'.<sup>10</sup> But Dutt adds a rider to his preference by making a sententious interconnection: he strings together the choice of language and morality. Language ceases to function at the level of praxis but sets to indicate ethical standards of the society, thereby instituting an epistemic privilege. This in turn grants Shohee the commission to enter the contemporary socio-political debates through the prism of Victorian morality (discussed in the latter half of the chapter).

False religion had given them a wrong impetus; misrule and oppression had attempted to crush them down. But better days have dawned on India. Tyranny has passed away, and it is only necessary to withdraw the present generation from the influence of a corrupt religion, to ensure the resuscitation of worth and intelligence. Then leave them not to their native literature. It is that literature, interwoven with the lewd fables of a miscalled religion that has perpetuated the thralldom of ignorance for so long. Better for them, better for the country, shall be the introduction of a foreign tongue. Who wants them to learn Bengalee? Their friends? Are those friends aware that even the nursery songs and tales in the language are not choice in their expressions; that profligacy of speech is learnt long before children have any idea of the notions couched in the words they use? Even the native press, established after, and in imitation of, the English press, has not yet been able to attain a respectable character; all the newspapers emanating from it, except those conducted by the missionaries, being more or less; servile, low and indecent. You cannot eradicate impurity from the language without sacrificing it altogether. Why hesitate to make the sacrifice? The partiality of Young Bengal for the English language, therefore, is only an earnest of greater improvement. If

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<sup>9</sup> 'Young Bengal; or, the Hopes of India.' Shoshee Chunder Dutt. *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*. Calcutta: F. Carbery, 1854; pp. 1-48; p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Rajan, Rajeshwari Sunder, Ed. *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1992.

indigenous stimuluses are poisons, how is he to blame for having preferred a foreign cordial?<sup>11</sup>

Dutt introduces a news axis of analysing linguistic choices where linguistic comprehension of the native tongue is reason enough to contaminate the minds of Bengalis. An ethical vacuum dislocates the position of the native Bengali author thereby disavowing the possibility of a singular linguistic nationalism. Aligning linguistic boundaries with religion introduces a methodological chasm that governs most of the writing of Shoshee Chunder Dutt. By equating civilizational ethics with linguistic choices he strikes a larger point of disengagement with the Bengali knowledge reserve. This disengagement operates on least two levels: it legitimizes his participation in the discourses of the colonizer and introduces his authority as a Christian presiding over the moral compass of Hinduism. At a larger level this prompts the divorce of Bengali identity from its linguistic base. Therefore, Dutt legitimates an alternative frame (facilitated by the colonizer's language) which does not carry an immediate moral baggage (defined by Hinduism). Setting a linguistic hierarchy against the scale of morality, Shoshee Chunder institutes his interpretive legitimacy.

Colliding knowledge practices defined by linguistic parameters are intimately intertwined with the larger politics of alignment and disengagement that the Dutt family as a collective had successfully been able to establish. Rasamoy Dutt, the founder figure of this illustrious family, was a beneficiary of the East India Company and his sons and their cousins (including Shoshee Chunder Dutt) were all educated at the Hindu College only to join the government services later. Shoshee Chunder worked at the Government Treasury, rose to the ranks of the Head Assistant at the Bengal Secretariat and was awarded the coveted title of *Rai Bahadur* for thirty-four years of dedicated service.

In the annals of Indian writing in English, the Dutt family of Rambagan figure very prominently with Greece Chunder Dutt, Aru Dutt, Toru Dutt, Hur Chunder Dutt and Oomesh Chunder Dutt having written both prose and poetry. Their popularity prompted the famous Professor Richardson of Hindu College to call them 'Rambagan nest of singing birds'.<sup>12</sup> The Dutt themselves were also

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<sup>11</sup> 'Young Bengal; or, the Hopes of India.' Shoshee Chunder Dutt. *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*. Calcutta: F. Carbery, 1854; pp. 1-48; pp. 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> Das, Harihar. *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*. London: Oxford University Press, 1921; p. 16.

interested in posing as a collective.<sup>13</sup> Their collection of poems published in 1870, *The Dutt Family Album*, contains poetry (some translated from French and German) by most of the poet members of the family. William Radice in his review of the *Selections of Bengaliana* suggests the possibility of the Dutts' urge to model themselves on the Tagores as a creative family.<sup>14</sup> However, Mary Gibson is of the opinion that the Dutts posed themselves as a collective in order to forge their new-found Christian identity.<sup>15</sup> Since the collection takes care not to mention the name of the individual authors, it is not quite easy to assign authorship to individual poems. The Album as a form was hitherto unknown to the reading public in India, and does not find many parallels even in Britain in the nineteenth century. While it might have been possible that the Dutts were merely reinforcing their choice of religion in the view of a re-invented Hindu nationalism, it is quite unlikely that they would do so by choosing to publish it from London rather than India.<sup>16</sup>

The album, rather than making a case for an action in the present, actually presents a tableau of memorable actions from the past, not necessarily as a glorious historical past which was typical of the Bengal Renaissance, but rather contains disparate accounts ranging from early Germanic poetry to translated modern French poetry. Both in form and content the album braves an attempt to partake in a larger literary continuum but its authors as colonized subjects could exact participation only via fragments of memory. Their poetry in the form of an album, a representative of factual presence and a certain symbolic ordering of memorabilia, is to register a historical presence. Interestingly enough, this presence is in the form of

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<sup>13</sup> Eunice D'Souza suggests that the Sathianadhan family of converts in Tamil Nadu were a similar collective: '[t]he Sathianadhan family, for instance, should be at least as well known as the Dutts.; partly for that reason, I titled my collection of their writings *The Sathianadhan Family Album*. My interest in them, a family of converts to Christianity, began when I discovered that almost all the members of the family were writers of one sort or another. Krupabai Sathianadhan is the only one now known, as new editions of her books have appeared. But both the men and the women wrote non-fiction, essays, diaries, short stories, "guide books", for women and folktales translated from Sanskrit and other languages such as Tamil and German.' D'Souza, Eunice. 'Recovering a Tradition, Forgotten Women's Voices.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41. 17 (2006): pp. 1642-1645.

<sup>14</sup> Radice, William. Review, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 70. 3 (2007): pp. 619-620, 620.

<sup>15</sup> 'They had, earlier brought out two volumes of youthful verse. Shoshee Chunder—who does not appear in the family collection—had published *Miscellaneous Verses* and Hur Chunder Dutt. Dutt paratexts imp. The reviewer, finally, was made uncomfortable by the fact that the Dutt's conversion had made them "ashamed of their former faith"(atheneum, no. 2254. December 30, 1870).' (Gibson 2011: 184).

<sup>16</sup> Mary Ellis Gibson suggests that it was merely the Christian piety that the Dutts wanted to foreground in their collection of poems when faced with persecution. (Gibson 2011: 213).

a collective of a family of converts. Unlike the Hindu nationalists of the day,<sup>17</sup> who were trying to formulate history by invoking a pre-modern Hindu past, the Dutts were offering a new historical alternative.<sup>18</sup> This history was also intrinsically related with literature where individual identities were sacrificed for a larger collective; in this case, the family, a microcosm of the society. The album essentially contains arranged 'evidences' that relate to a certain history, in which the Dutts claim their part through their literary narratives. As is manifest in the framing of the preface, the literary attempt is not merely desirous of seeking recognition but of forging new modes of belonging based on the common religious parameter.

The preface to the text reads:

The writers of the following pages are aware that bad poetry is intolerable and that mediocre poetry deserves perhaps even a harsher epithet. There is a glut of both in the market. But they venture on publication, not because they think, their verses good, but in the hope that their book will be regarded, in some respects, as a curiosity. They are foreigners, natives of India, of different walks of life, yet one family, in whom the ties of blood relationship have been drawn closer by the holy bond of Christian brotherhood. As foreigners educated out of England, they solicit the indulgence of British critics to poems which on these grounds alone may, it is hoped, have some title to their attention.

On the one hand, the preface promises a humble self-estimation that it is 'mediocre poetry', and on the other it hopes it can still titillate the Occidental's desire for the 'curious'. The book and the 'blood relationship' position themselves on the fence where their identities overlap with those of their British counterparts. They are at once linked with the 'holy bond of Christian Brotherhood' yet they are 'foreigners, natives of India, of different walks of life'. Although they are 'foreigners educated out of England' they wish to partake of the same knowledge network that they presume their education has given them. As discussed in the chapter on Toru Dutt, French and German were indicators of educated high British culture. Therefore the Dutts desire to translate French and Germanic literature was to prove that they were as much part of the educated elite as any other European of the

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly Dutt in his *Bengal: An Account of the Country from the Earliest Times* (1884) also starts with the standard lament for the lack of history: 'There is no readable account of Bengal that we know of. This is rather curious, as Bengal is one of the earliest English possessions in India [...] It is, moreover the cradle of much intelligence, and, at this moment, happens to be the focus from which all the political aspirations felt by the Hindus are radiating'; p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> Chaudhuri, Rosinka. 'The Politics of Poetry: An Investigation into Hindu/Muslim Representation in Nabinchandra Sen's *Palashir Yuddha*.' *Studies in History* 24. 1 (2008): pp. 1-25.

nineteenth century. This concerted attempt is like a dossier for the British public to take cognizance of the fact that literary discourses of the empire were often connected by shared history. The subject position of the collective as both within and without, as belonging to a larger Christian brotherhood and colonized foreigners, complicates easy homologies between race and religion but gives them a unique advantage of producing an immanent critique. This dialectics, albeit of selective identification and detachment, allows for an effective space for moderating a discourse of literary production in the colonizer's tongue.

### *Shoshee Chunder Dutt as the cynic*

The Dutt family not only published individual poetry and prose collections but continued publishing in contemporary newspapers and journals. Of the familial lot, Shoshee Chunder Dutt was by far the most prolific, having written on a wide range of subjects from Indian wars, Indian women, food, Purāṇas, ethnographic studies of 'wild tribes' to proto-nationalist poetry. Rather than taking unequivocal sides either with the British or the Indians; I am arguing that he often approaches issues with the eye of a cynical observer, keen on estimating a fast changing world around him. Although for most part he identifies with the larger Dutt collective, his literary endeavours pronounce the complex locations and conflicts of a Christian convert identity as both resolute and vulnerable. I shall further argue that the putative resolution of the conflicting political positions of a native Christian (as a natural ally of the colonizer) with proto-nationalist ambitions was possible when the author was de-centred but retained his interpretive authority.

The de-centring is a combined effect of the personal politics of Shoshee Chunder Dutt and his religious affiliations. Positing himself against the horizontal discursive trajectories of religion and nation comes in handy as an indulgent de-centring exercise. The critique comes from within and is not necessarily from the periphery but definitely off the centre. His vacillating position rides on his Christian identity where he could forge bonds both with the 'Hindus' as with his British masters. As is the case with his family, the various levels of identification and mis-identifications with both the British and the Indian populace at large defines his position as an author. The Janus-faced personality we encounter by his own admission might have come from the unique lifestyle that the colonial English educated gentry led where '[e]ven those whose out-of-door life approaches nearest

to the Anglo-Saxon style, live very much like old Bengalees beside the domestic hearth'.<sup>19</sup>

But unlike the other members of his family his works increasingly deal with anti-colonial politics. He was in fact very conscious about his position as a critic of the empire as a government employee. Hence in his earlier works which do not view the English in a favourable light, he has consistently used British-sounding pseudonyms such as J.A.G. Barton and Horatio Bickerstaffe Rowney. The names pronounce a very self-conscious desire on the part of the author to align him with a critical literary lineage with a sharp focus on topical political commentary. In choosing the first name as 'Horatio', he directly identifies himself with the critical often cynical tradition of Horatian Odes which were made especially popular by Samuel Johnson in the earlier century. Unlike the Juvenilian satires, the Horatian ones largely depend on wit for generating humour and are sympathetic in tone, which largely reflects on the task that Shoshee Chunder Dutt would undertake. Like his nom de plume, he fashions himself as a social commentator, his second name which sounds uncannily Dickensian indicates his propensity to often bicker. In this sense it does not ring odd that he celebrated the English language as much as he regarded with utmost disdain the permanent settlement in Bengal and the skewed taxation process in India. As a member of the government functionary he provides an immanent critique of a system that is difficult to openly defy in a language comprehensible to the colonial government. From anthropological narratives to socio-political commentary he often borrows the vocabulary of common British discourses. The colonial government was acutely conscious of the pervasive and seditious nature of the print medium and hence employed a range of checks and measures on the literary production of the day.<sup>20</sup> By severely criticizing the colonial government he invites censure but carefully avoids culpability.

In terms of the choice of language and the concomitant system of education, Shoshee Chunder was convinced of the superiority of the English system over the Indian. The key to success of the Bengali race lay in their aping the West, he claims, 'The only two groups in India in the mid-nineteenth century who are likely to

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<sup>19</sup> 'Young Bengal; or, the Hopes of India.' Shoshee Chunder Dutt. *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*. Calcutta: F. Carbery, 1854: pp. 1-48; p. 31. This idea fits in well with Dipesh Chakrabarty's formulation of Bengali domesticity in the colonial age where the persecution in the outside world led the men to guard their domestic space more fiercely.

<sup>20</sup> Darnton, Robert. 'Literary surveillance in the British raj: The contradictions of liberal imperialism.' *Book History* 4. 1 (2001): pp. 133-176.

succeed are the Parsees or the Young Bengal. These two classes are the Parsees of Bombay, and Young Bengal—both at present mostly aping their conquerors, not only in their virtues, but also in their vices; but both destined in time to work great ends, and especially to promote knowledge and enlightenment in the land'.<sup>21</sup> As Bengal had been exposed to the merits of the British system, Shoshee Chunder Dutt was convinced that as a province it was marked for enlightenment: '[w]hat the Bengalis are most advanced in, however, is their English education, which is permeating, not the higher classes only, but much below the high-class line, many of the best specimens of Young Bengal having risen from the humblest ranks of life'.<sup>22</sup>

However well versed in the language and the knowledge system of the colonizer, '[a]bsolute equality with Englishmen Young Bengal will never claim. His physical development can never be equal to his mental and intellectual development'.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, his admiration of the colonizer comes with its own safeguards. As much as he looks to the West to seek inspiration in terms of the life of everyday he ranks the 'Hindu' far better than their British counterparts. Much like Lal Behari Day, who had taken great effort to demonstrate how the peasantry in India in terms of hygiene ranked far better than the Europeans, Shoshee Chunder Dutt astutely defended the everyday cultural practice of the Hindus. Be it the adorning of the bodies of the Hindu women, the absence of the culture of drinking or eating with hands, the Hindus should rather not learn from the West.<sup>24</sup> It is in these contested narratives that Shoshee positions himself, which is most evident in his direct political interventions as his most vivid portrayal of 1857.

In the course of a conversation with the colonel in regard to the Sepoy Mutiny (or first war of independence from an Indian nationalist perspective) the bhadralok responds: 'we must leave it to the Englishman to tell the story for us, and my confidence in Englishman is so great that I have no doubt that, sooner or later, the tale will be most faithfully told'. But ironically Shoshee Chunder unlike his

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<sup>21</sup> 'Parsees, Young Bengal and the Brahmos.' in Shoshee Chunder Dutt. *India Past and Present with Minor Essays on Cognate Subjects*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1880: pp. 158-175; pp. 159-60.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>23</sup> *Indian Angles: English Verse in Colonial India from Jones to Tagore*; p. 170.

<sup>24</sup> In the context of eating with one's own hand Shoshee Chunder Dutt says: '(eating with hands) If prejudice did not prevent them from admitting it, even Europeans would not perhaps hesitate to own that the Hindu, in this respect at least, is really more cleanly than those parties (not few in number) who eat with a fork without knowing whether it has been washed or not, and consider it unnecessary trouble to wash their hands and mouth after taking meals.' 'Home-life in Bengal.' Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. *India Past and Present with Minor Essays on Cognate Subjects.*: pp. 216-264; p. 225.

fictionalized character doesn't wait for the British to write the true story. In fact he uses the templates and the reportage of the British effectively to tell his own version of the story.<sup>25</sup> One of very few of his times, he has been credited to have predicted the 'Sepoy Mutiny' which he re-christens as the 'Indian mutiny' in his prose piece *The Republic of Orissa: A Page From the Annals of the Twentieth Century* (1845).<sup>26</sup> As Alex Tickell has convincingly demonstrated this text has been incidentally complimented by his cousin, Kylas Chunder Dutt's novel on the same theme, *A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945* which was published on 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1835 in the *Journal of Belles Letters, Science and Arts*.<sup>27</sup> It uncannily misses the date of India's independence by a mere two years! After a gap of almost thirty years he would revisit the Mutiny to draw the pathetic picture of the Indian common man in a prose piece in his collected works *Shunkur, A Tale of Indian Mutiny 1857* which was published in his collected volumes in 1874. In both these narratives, one a futuristic one and the other a retrospective one, Shoshee approaches the subject with caution.

His first piece is filled with nationalist fervour wherein he actually advocates 'freedom' while the second one revisits the scene of the Mutiny as Dutt chooses to represent both the wronged sides in his narrative.<sup>28</sup> The key protagonists in the short novel are the English fugitives who seek shelter at the residence of the poor peasant Shunkur. In return for their hospitality the English soldiers decide to take turns and rape Shunkur's wife. The soldiers leave next morning with the victim taking rat poison to end her life and the protagonist of the story turning a mutineer

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<sup>25</sup> Astrid Erll calls this process remediation. 'Shunkur is a good example of remediation on various levels. The way Nana Sahib is characterized as a villain and the introduction of the rape revenge plot are striking examples of how British representations of the "Indian Mutiny" were remediated in Indian writing. Moreover, Dutt closely follows the British convention of selection and heightening; there are lengthy descriptions of the massacres at the Satichura Ghat and in the Bibighar; and even the myth of "Ulrica Wheeler" is repeated in *Shunkur*. The sheer extent of Dutt's remediation becomes evident when his description of Cawnpore massacres is compared with W. J. Shepherd's account in *The Times*.' Erll, Astrid. 'Remembering across Time, Space, and Cultures: Premediation, Remediation and the "Indian Mutiny".' Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney Eds, *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*. Berlin: De Gruyter 2009: pp. 109-38; pp. 122-123.

<sup>26</sup> Roy, Tapti. 'Disciplining the Printed Text: Colonial and Nationalist Surveillance of Bengali Literature.' Ed., Partha Chatterjee. *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*. Calcutta: Samya, 1996: pp. 30-62.

<sup>27</sup> Tickell, Alex. 'Midnight's Ancestors, Kylas Chunder Dutt and the Beginnings of Indian-English Fiction.' *Wasafiri*, 21. 3 (2006): pp. 10-14.

<sup>28</sup> Gautam Chakravarty points out that the Mutiny generated a huge amount of literary production by far surpassing other events in the historical calendar of India and most of these representations sought to take clear sides. Chakravarty, Gautam. *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

to seek justice. This layered and vicious cycle of victimization puts across a unique position that Shoshee Chunder Dutt is willing to take retrospectively.<sup>29</sup>

The nationalist jingoism and the perspective of an utterly corrupt government that is waiting to be overthrown are exchanged for a more subtle and vigilant narrative of the Indian response. While retaining the focus on the eponymous hero, carefully the rhetorical nationalist/colonialist responses are cast aside to expose a layered victimization process. While the English soldiers are portrayed in a poor light, the authentic historical figures like Nana Sahib, who appears as a glorious hero in the nationalist narratives, are depicted as degenerate and immoral. Nana Sahib is at his lecherous best even when he is in pursuit of his enemies.<sup>30</sup> A historical figure like Nana Sahib is pitted against a fictive one, that of the main protagonist, Shunkur. While the narrative is quick to balance between the negativities of both the British and the Indians, it catapults an ordinary man into history. Shunkur's rebellion against the British does not arise from any organized political vendetta but is born from his personal grudge against Mackenzie and Bernard, the twin rapists of his wife. Violating Shunkur's home (with reference to the rape of his wife), his personal preserve, induces him to partake in the larger political narrative. While the narrative is likely to be read in terms of the rebellion of the ordinary Indian subject whose sanctimonious spaces are violated by the colonial masters, it is equally important to review Shoshee Dutt's interesting take on historicities.

Like his contemporaries, Shoshee Chunder was very conscious of re-working the history of India. Ashis Nandy has suggested, that India before the introduction of the Western knowledge framework was used to a more diffused and open sense of history.<sup>31</sup> As the Indians tried to define history in terms of the Western

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<sup>29</sup> While Shoshee Dutt writes *Shunkur* which is directly related to 1857, he is quick to disown 'Republic of Orissa' which was written before 1857, but refused to be acknowledged by the author in the context of the Mutiny. 'Republic of Orissa' too has a politico-historical reference point as an actual revolt did take place in Orissa against the British in 1816-17. While even 1857 can be acceptably represented so far it is done in the form of a personal vendetta. One wonders whether it is the direct political implications of 'Republic of Orissa' that becomes the point of concern.

<sup>30</sup> Mund, Shubendhu. 'Resistance and Reasoning, Shoshee Chunder Dutt's Narration of the "Sepoy Mutiny".' Eds R. N. Rai, Anita Singh and Archana Kumar. *1857 and After, Literary Representations*. New Delhi: Pencraft International: pp. 157-166.

<sup>31</sup> Ashis Nandy insists that modernity has sought to bring ahistoricals in the domain of history. 'It will not be perhaps a gross simplification to say that the historians' history of the ahistorical—when grounded in a "proper" historical consciousness, as defined by the European Enlightenment—is usually a history of the prehistorical, the primitive, and the pre-scientific. By the way of transformative politics or cultural intervention, that history basically keeps open only one option—that of bringing the ahistoricals into history.' This process of bringing ahistoricals to history includes the key element of

civilization, they chose to re-write their history using the symbolism offered by the porous category of the *Purāṇas*. Shoshee follows a similar trait by invoking the purest of the forms of knowledge available to the Indians in terms of the Vedas and tries to explain why the Vedas were 'corrupted' by the advent of lesser forms which then extend to the Vedas. Like his Orientalist friends, he draws a historiography of decline.

This country is full of intellect. It were absurd to dispute or deny it. There is not a single heathen region on the face of the world, wherein, in its palmist tune, more proofs of vigorous intellect have been displayed than this. Great powers of mind have been evinced here even from the earliest days of antiquity; nor can they be said to have disappeared now altogether from lapse of time. They have undoubtedly been weakened.<sup>32</sup>

This decline in terms of civilization is due to a moral bankruptcy, which is evident in the vernacular knowledge practices.<sup>33</sup> Taking Victorian Protestant ethos as his point of departure, he analyses the world around him as lacking the fundamentals of civilization. To place this in context, he draws from the *Purāṇas* and other mythological narratives to demonstrate the lack of moral intent. His ideas about civilizational ethics emerge from the frames of this perceived morality which is coterminous with his linguistic choice. The journey from Hinduism to Christianity is not merely one from polytheism to monotheism but one where one travels from moral darkness to light. Overtly due to the Orientalist influence and Dutt's belief in the theory of the Aryans as the supreme race he holds the Brahmans of Antiquity in high regard while according Muslim rulers with responsibility of having destroyed the ancient culture. In his worldview, the Brahman race was the one with supreme knowledge while the Persians were 'nothing beyond politicians and soldiers'.<sup>34</sup> The accordance of premium to knowledge practices over political ambitions, chimes

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writing history. 'Once exported to the nonmodern world, historical consciousness has not only tended to absolutize the past in cultures that have lived with open-ended concepts of the past or depended on myths, legends, and epics to define their cultural selves, it has also made the historical worldview complicit with many new forms of violence, exploitation and Satanism in our times and helped rigidly civilizational, cultural and national boundaries.' Nandy, Ashis. 'Opening Address at the World History Conference.' *History and Theory*. Wesleyan University, March 25, 1994.

<sup>32</sup> Shoshee Chunder Dutt. 'Young Bengal; or, the hopes of India.' *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*. Calcutta: F. Carbery, 1854: pp. 1-48; p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> According to Sudipta Kaviraj, taking on from Kantian ethics the logic of ranking morality above other civilizational parameters seem to be a fairly common perception among the Bengali intelligentsia. Kaviraj, Sudipta. 'Literature and the Moral Imagination of modernity.' Orla-Bukowska, Anna Maria, and Krzysztof Kowalski Eds. *The Moral Fabric in Contemporary Societies*. Vol. 9. Leiden: Brill Academic Pub, 2003: pp. 263-282.

<sup>34</sup> 'The Hindus for instance, were scholars of high culture and taste from the earliest times, from the time of our first knowledge of them; but the Persians were never anything beyond soldiers and politicians.' 'Origin and Development of the Brahman Race.' Shoshee Chunder Dutt, *India Past and Present*, 1880: pp. 1-10; p. 2.

with the reinvention of the Bengali elite (bhadrak) desire to assign virtue to learning over other worldly pursuits.<sup>35</sup> Like most of his contemporaries who had converted to Christianity, he blurs the fine line between the Western knowledge framework and Christianity as a religion.<sup>36</sup> Echoing the charges of the Orientalists, he finds the Gods and especially Krishna as the most immoral of the lot.<sup>37</sup>

It means simply that the god is replete with amateness; and the *Puranas* then go on to illustrate their assertion, one of the least astounding of proofs advanced being that, as the *Vishnu Purana* has it, Bruhma attempted the chastity of his own daughter Sandhya, or, as the *Matsya Purana*, which names her Satarupa, makes out, lived with her for a hundred years.<sup>38</sup>

After Brahma it is the turn of Viṣṇu: 'Vishnu is a polygamist (Lakshmi and Satyavama), ruined Brinda a chaste wife by assuming the form of her husband Jalandhar'.<sup>39</sup>

As part of the holy trinity Shiva is not spared either and he finds: 'Siva "sedulously hunting other females are far more frequent" "his indecorous and open

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<sup>35</sup> Ranabir Samaddar notes that 'There is a line of thinking in today's cultural historiography on Bengal that extols its language, art, culture, and independent intellectual and associational heritage—beginning possibly with Young Bengal and ending with Tagore. With some variety (marking the religious, ethnic, rural, artisan-centric, and various popular-cult-centric sub-lines) admitted in this nearly two hundred year long history, this history has now its own appropriate major figures—with Ram Mohan as the beginning, Bankim Chandra as the middle point, and as the last figure Tagore, symbolising the confluence of all that was best in this long period. The essential features of this received cultural history are supposedly the following: the strong impact of romanticism on literature, hence the dominant presence of Nature and landscape in art, sensitivities, and literature, celebration of nature as life, harmony in the past and harmony of the society, by contrast the calamitous present signified by, above all, the colonial rule, and the making of a new Bengali nation based on this aesthetic feeling amidst the calamity. In this way political and historical identity came to be based on what can be grossly called affect was aestheticised.' Samaddar, Ranabir. 'Eternal Bengal.' *Scienza e Politica*. 45 (2011): pp. 63-79, 64.

<sup>36</sup> Dutt goes on to add: 'The dry bones of oriental literature would not have raised either the morality or the life of the nation. What book, including the Veds and the *Puranas*, is there in the country that could displace Bacon, Milton, and Addison, without recalling the ages of the Oriental gloom? A knowledge of the English language is certainly not to be considered as a standard of individual excellence; but it throws open every avenue to truth and rectitude, and the best specimens of the class are undoubtedly to be found among those only who have cultivated it.' Dutt (1884); p. 183. This goes well with the evangelical take on the lack of morals in Hinduism. David L. Haberman has quoted Wilberforce to highlight this point. 'The ideas of the Evangelical party can perhaps best be glimpsed in the words spoken before the British Parliament by William Wilberforce: "The Hindu divinities were absolute monsters of lust, injustice, wickedness and cruelty. In short, their religious system is one grand abomination. "' Haberman, L. David. 'On Trial: The Love of Sixteen Thousand Gopees.' *History of Religions*, 33. 1 (1993): pp. 44-70, 48.

<sup>37</sup> Gregory Barton contends that such formulations of immorality were necessary to construct an 'environmental discourse', capable of framing a version of Hinduism as the romantic other. Barton, Gregory. 'Abolishing the East: The Dated Nature of Orientalism in the Definition and Ethical Analysis of the Hindu Faith.' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. 29. 2 (2009): pp. 281-290, 286.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> Interestingly enough, K. M. Banerjea taking his cue from the Orientalists, also makes similar claims about the lack of morality of the Hindu gods and goddesses. Like Dutt he distinguishes between the Vedic and the Puranic gods. See: 'Introduction to the Narada Pancha Ratra.' Ed. Banerjea, K. M. *The Narada Pancha Ratra, In the Original Sanskrit*. Calcutta: Bishop's College Press, 1865: pp. 5-7.

dalliance with his wife as such as filled the *rishis* with amazement and horror". However, his major objections to the lack of morals seem to be limited to licentiousness and drinking.<sup>40</sup> 'Superfluous Libertinism' is the crisis of the 'present state of religion' and its ethical downturn is a result of an imitative chain reaction. The gods are morally bankrupt and as figures of reverence they are emulated by the highly regarded rishis which in turn spreads among the masses to poison the entire civilization.<sup>41</sup>

In effect he completely dismisses the moral authority of the Gods of the Hindu pantheon to rule over the Hindus. Even as he looks at the Hindu mythology with the eye of a contemporary Victorian observer he levels charges against the Brahmos for doing exactly the same.

It must be remembered, that the brumhu subha [sic] interprets all doubtful texts with the help of modern philosophy, thus frequently giving to them different constructions than Vyasa or Sankaracharjya, in their ages of limited knowledge, had the power to conceive, or the courage to adopt. Points which never struck them as important, or were left in the shade as unorthodox, according to the notions of their times, are now prominently held up; while those on which they principally confided, are often wholly set aside as too futile for an age like the present.<sup>42</sup>

This self-reflexivity is important as he engages directly with the problem of understanding a mythological past in the modern context. The Brahmos since Ram Mohan Roy had been trying to strike a conversation between the European present and the Ancient Indian past intelligible to the elite educated masses; the ones who would frequent the debating *sabhās*. Dutt also points to the fact that these appear to have been set up on the lines of the Orientalist enquiry where the Hindu glory was essential to frame the patriotic present.<sup>43</sup> But in this formulation, he introduces Christianity as the final marker that constitutes the axis of the formulation of the Brahmo discourse. Shoshee Chunder Dutt while addressing these knotted topical concerns often takes recourse to the most effusive of literary strategies—humour.

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<sup>40</sup> In another of his ironical slants he says: 'A love of food and drink proscribed by the Shastras and a morbid craving for promiscuous intercourse with females of all orders have been the chief accelerators of improvement!' 'Caste as it Exists at Present, and its Effects.' Dutt (1884): pp. 120-131; p. 131.

<sup>41</sup> Shoshee Chunder Dutt further states that '[i]n connection with some of the festivals alluded to much licentiousness was at one time practices, especially by the ascetic orders who celebrated their orgies in dark caves and retired places rendered obscurer by the shade of the umbrageous trees, where shame and decency were lost sight of in the gloom.' 'The Present State of Religion' (1884): pp. 132-144; p. 139.

<sup>42</sup> 'Vedantism and Brumhu Sabha.' Dutt (1884): pp. 49-117; p. 90.

<sup>43</sup> 'Mistaken feeling of patriotism; identifying the doctrines upheld by that society, with the proud reminiscences of Hindu glory, and anxious to set up as a plausible rival to Christianity.' Dutt (1884); p. 91.

There has been a sustained debate as to what constitutes as writing of/for the nation. Linguistic choices have come to occupy a central role in these deliberations. Shoshee Chunder Dutt, like most of his Indian contemporaries writing in English, was for a long time dismissed as a bad imitator of English poetry. Even Sisir K. Das in his magnum opus on Indian literature remarks that the Indian writings in English in the nineteenth century '[a]re interesting works, as they are an evidence of a search for new forms and themes, and some of these works show an unmistakable impact of English Romantic poetry. But none made any impact on Indian writers. These writings—in fact Indian English writings in general—remained in a neutral zone of experience, undecided about their target reader'.<sup>44</sup> Their revival in terms of scholarship has been limited to almost apologetically looking for spaces of proto-nationalism.<sup>45</sup> While establishing them as proto-nationalists has resolved issues regarding their commitment towards the nation, it has hardly granted them the rights of creative authors in their own rights.

Humour that is supposedly directly related to the mastery of the language has been largely overlooked. Most authors, if we may hazard generalization, were taken rather too 'seriously'.<sup>46</sup> Humour in the form of ironies/satire was commonplace in the Bengali literature of the day which we have observed in the first part of the dissertation. Was it possible for the English literature in India to flourish without the influence of humour? What crucial role does this brand of humour play in assessing the condition of the 'modern' nineteenth century intelligentsia? Alex Tickell talks about the prose of Shoshee Chunder Dutt being overrun by 'Latinate allusions and developing modes of political and cultural satire of eighteenth century prose'.<sup>47</sup> Even in his most serious of prose pieces *The Republic of Orissa* published in the *Saturday Evening Harakaru* in May 1845, which sketches a futuristic adivasi (tribal) uprising in Orissa against the British in 1916 due to the re-imposition of slavery in India, Dutt does not forget his humorous streak. Tickell acknowledges that 'the rebellion narrative allows Shoshee to interrogate colonial moral certainties, and includes a parody of benevolent utilitarian rhetoric in which

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<sup>44</sup> Das, Sisir Kumar. *A History of Indian Literature: 1800-1910, Western Impact, Indian Response*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1991; p. 91.

<sup>45</sup> One of the most vivid and scholarly attempts being forwarded by Rosinka Chaudhuri. *The Gentlemen Poets of Colonial Bengal*. Kolkata: Seagull, 2002.

<sup>46</sup> It might be argued that humour was also largely absent from the nineteenth century Indian writing in English and that the poets themselves were very conscious of writing serious poetry as Madhusudan Dutt has often been quoted as writing. But there have been instances of humorous pieces by Kasiprasad Ghose and the Dutt family which have been largely ignored.

<sup>47</sup> Tickell, Alex. 'Introduction.' *Selections From Bengaliiana*. Nottingham: Trent, 2005; p. 15.

an English journalist protests in India, slavery now constituted, hardly approaches the “durance vile” of a common every-day labourer’.<sup>48</sup> As we have observed, the lens of his humour is penetrative and runs across ideological lines and most interestingly it combines the sacred and the profane.

In this prose piece on the ‘Street Music in Calcutta’ Shoshee acoustically introduces his audience to the everyday of colonial Calcutta. Soon the narrow lanes and by-lanes ring with the clamour of the beggars, itinerant baul, fakir, vaishnava singers and vendors. Amidst this he picks the most ordinary of the lot, the vegetable vendor, to focus his lens on the malpractices of the Hindu society. ‘The first may pass without comment, but aloo (potatoes) and piaz (onions) selling together in the streets of an orthodox town! O Menu o Vyasa! What are we coming to? There was a time when people lost caste for eating onions; while now potatoes and onions are carried around in the same basket from door to door, and even widows and Brahmans buy the potatoes quite heedless of their unorthodox contamination’.<sup>49</sup> This is best illustrated in the title of his book: *Bengaliana: A Dish of Rice and Curry, and other Indigestible Ingredients* (1879). The two parts of the title completes his picture. Dutt coins a loan term<sup>50</sup> to suggest what it might mean to be a Bengali, and hidden in this name is the irony that the Bengalis have almost already crossed over.<sup>51</sup> But the second half of the title begins with the English stereotype of the ‘rice and curry’ but as rejoinder suggests that there are residues that linger which make them difficult to be digested. Therefore, even while assessing the Bengalis seems easy there is always something which is beyond comprehension and it is this excess that characterizes the ‘modern Bengali’.

Similarly, Shoshee’s campaign for Christianity is not equivocal. His major problem with Hinduism seems to be, apart from the usual suspects of caste and

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>50</sup> This term plays on the Bengali equivalent for Bengaliness: *bāṅgāliyānā*.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Even while is he very confident that Western education was the key to success and that the Bengalis had a natural edge over the others owing to their access to education, he is skeptical about the outcome. As he appreciates the cerebral character of the culture of the Bengali he is quick to point out its glaring deficiencies. He talks about how bengalees prefer government jobs and are unlikely to accept trading jobs like the less skilled and less intelligent lot of the Chinese emigrants. Although education has allowed the three upper castes to study together they still would not exchange their job preferences. ‘Manual trades and callings are considered less respectable than *keranydom*, on account of these prejudices. Old Bengal is of this opinion on the authority of Menu and Vyasa, which he respects. The rising generation spurn the authority, but retain the prejudice.’ ‘Young Bengal; or, the Hopes of India.’ Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*. Calcutta: F. Carbery, 1854: pp. 1-48; p. 18.

hypocrisy of the Brahmanical elite, the moral order of the Hindus and in particular the ones in Bengal. The moral universe of the Hindus is corrupt and this derives from the mythology of the Hindu pantheon. This corrupt moral order is not restricted to one social order but pervades the very inner quarters of the Hindu domestic life. The itinerant Vaishnava singer chooses the tales of 'boyhood of Krishna' or the 'makhan chora'(butter thief) [sic] to enamour his audience. But Dutt's abhorrence is reserved for his choice of subjects, not his medium. As an ardent admirer of classical Greek poetry, paying his tribute by writing *The Lays of Ancient Greece* (1878), he compares the singer to the blind bard par excellence Homer: '[t]he itinerant singer goes, Homer-like, from house to house, singing delinquencies of that little god, that the morning might be commenced auspiciously by all, with the achievements of the deity fresh in their recollections'.<sup>52</sup> Shoshee Chunder Dutt effectively switches roles between the keen observer and the participant thus negotiating his complex subject position. As a Christian convert working for the British government in the heydays of nationalist activism he was not a welcome presence within the Indian intelligentsia. On the other hand critiquing the British government while in service was not easy. Humour (with an optimum dose of self-reflexivity) as a slippery category potentially offers immunity to the author by ensuring latitude of meanings. The laughter may or may not be apparent and the constituency for this laughter remains suspect. Hence, his foray into mock-epic is coloured not only by his position as a critic, as we have observed during the course of this discussion, but also by his desire to effectively use humour as a tool to articulate complicated politico-religious affiliations.

### *The Vision of Sumeru and the epic dream*

Shoshee Chunder Dutt unlike most of his contemporaries continued to republish his works. He even had a complete set of his works published in two volumes in 1880. But the volume of poetry titled *A Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems* that he published in 1878 was exclusively meant for the British eyes. The long poem 'A Vision of Sumeru' was published earlier in 1854. The fact that he chose to republish a set of poems in 1878, suggests that he was confident of its relevance even twenty years after its first publication.

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<sup>52</sup> 'The Street Music of Calcutta.' Dutt, 1854; p. 134.

*The Vision of Sumeru* is an interesting piece of poetry which refuses to abide by any one generic parameter.<sup>53</sup> With adequate doses of Hindu mythology, it lends itself to be read as an 'equal and opposite reaction' to the colonial knowledge framework. Harish Trivedi suggests:

It was as if, on being confronted with the alien novel, the Indian writer instinctively reached for his *katha* and his *dastan*, and on coming across tragedy, for his *karma*. A true measure of the depth of the Western impact on India seems to have been what may be called the nearly equal and opposite reaction that it caused, of taking the Indian writer back to his traditional sources which had regulated Indian literature in an uninterrupted (if constantly modified) continuum right to the point of the arrival of the British, without the hiatus of any 'medieval' or 'dark' ages. Unlike in some other parts of the colonised world, such as Africa and the West Indies and, in a different way, also the white settler colonies, we in India had something traditional, substantial and no less rich of our own into which, and against which, to receive the Western impact and to cushion and even foil it. The Western influence on Indian literature was nothing if not dialectical and dialogic, which makes it perhaps as vast and complex an example as one could find anywhere in world literature not only of influence but also of reception.<sup>54</sup>

However, it has also been understood as an articulation of his Christian piety.<sup>55</sup> It is quite probable that Shoshee chose the epic as a suitable grandiose form to institute the superiority of the Christian God over the Hindu pantheon. Shoshee's sustained efforts at introducing humour, which incidentally is heightened by the impossibility of the plot itself, takes away from reading this piece of long poetry as pious Christian's rendition of unquestionable faith and urges reading it along the lines of a mock-epic.<sup>56</sup> The plot revolves around the lack of offerings for the Hindu Gods in Sumeru (the Hindu heaven) which then force them to investigate the reasons for the same. Once the Gods discover that the people now pray to a

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<sup>53</sup> Gibson observes, "A Vision of Sumeru" is caught between two religious traditions and two formal allegiances. At about two thousand lines in three cantos of irregular stanzas, the poem lies formally between a long irregular ode and an epic episode. Its formal instability mirrors fundamental thematic and even theological instabilities.' (Gibson 2011: 182).

<sup>54</sup> Trivedi, Harish. 'Colonial Influence, Postcolonial Intertextuality: Western Literature and Indian Literature.' *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 43. 2 (2007): pp. 121-133.

<sup>55</sup> Melman, Billie. *The Culture of History: English Uses of the Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Mullin, Bruce. *Miracles and the Modern Religious Imagination*. London: Yale University Press, 1996. Cohen, Deborah. *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions*. London: Yale University Press, 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Hephzibah Israel submits that satires as literary forms in the nineteenth century were common among the proponents of Christianity and their adversaries.: '[i]n the sacred context, this desire to change could translate into different outcomes—either to improve the supposed inferiority of a religious sect or to persuade its adherents to convert to the religion advocated by the satirist.' Israel, Hephzibah. 'Lowering the Gods: Satire and Popular Literary Forms in the Nineteenth-Century Tamil Context.' Eds. Monika Horstmann and Heidi Rika Maria Pauwels. *Indian Satire in the Period of First Modernity*. Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 2012: pp. 151-164; p. 151.

Christian God they seek revenge and descend on to the earth only to be reprimanded by the Christian God who reminds them of their allegiance to him.

The presence of multiple voices coupled with an abject lack of clairvoyance further deters the reading of the text as a purposeful religious endeavour. However, it can also be argued that the poem was written in earnest but lends itself to be read as bathos. It complicates the function of the poem and makes a powerful case for a failed text. This reading heavily relies on the perception of the reader and therefore lends itself to the accusation of a retrospective super-imposition. Per contra, I will try to explicate during the course of this section that the narrative frames (of the Romantic, the epic and the Christian piety), that Shoshee chooses to fuse, collide. The result is a destabilization of implicit hierarchies in both the textual and the general context.

Shoshee Chunder Dutt has been accused of writing nostalgic Romantic poetry, which does not quite match the standards set by the British poets. Both as an attempt to write an epic and a Romantic poetry, *The Vision of Sumeru* as a poem fails according to most reviewers.<sup>57</sup> In fact I shall argue for a space that Shoshee Chunder creates by writing a long poem that combines the formal elements of epic poetry (here perhaps with his own brand of cynical humour and hence the mock-epic) and the tropes of Romantic poetry.<sup>58</sup> Although lacking in formal components like consistency of metre and comprising of non-uniform stanzas, the poem is successful in using the singular most potent symbol of Romantic poetry: the vision. Romantic poetry had prized itself on recognizing the power of imagination where a scene recollected from the depths of memory or a dream could be used to trigger 'imagination' a tool powerful enough to counter their pale opponents 'fancy'.<sup>59</sup> At the very outset of the poem in its title he announces that it is a poem of great significance as it is written by a poet who is capable of designing a vision from a dream. As the title of the poem lends credibility to the subject matter the epigraph of

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<sup>57</sup> Fulford, Timothy, and Peter J. Kitson, Eds. *Romanticism and colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

<sup>58</sup> It was somewhat appropriated by his historian-litterateur nephew Romesh Chunder Dutt with his translations of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Reddy, Sheshalatha. 'Romesh Chunder Dutt's Indian-English epics and epochs.' *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 47. 2 (2012): pp. 245-263.

<sup>59</sup> In the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge differentiate between the concepts of 'fancy' and 'imagination.' Imagination as opposed to fancy is seen as a cerebral and intensely individualized act which is likely to produce a vision. Ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones. *Lyrical Ballads*. London: Routledge, 1991; p. 278.

the poem clearly introduces the reader to the lens through which the poem should be read.

The epigraph of the poem is taken from the play *Zobeide* written by Joseph Craddock in 1771,<sup>60</sup> which might have been influenced to some measure by Oliver Goldsmith. The prologue to the play is very poignant and Shoshee Chunder chooses two lines from it to introduce himself: 'Our bard into the general spirit enters, /and fits his little frigate for adventures'.<sup>61</sup> Following epic conventions, the epigraph doubles as the incantation where the bard is invoked to narrate an incident of great universal importance.

The authorship of this piece is not very clear as some editions cite Joseph Craddock, Oliver Goldsmith and Voltaire. Shoshee Chunder Dutt's cynical prospects are emboldened by his quotation from Goldsmith. Goldsmith was as well known for his sensitive portrayal of the English/Irish village life as he is for his mock-heroic pieces.<sup>62</sup> Dutt as the bard selects his inspiration carefully and employs the ironical lens of Goldsmith to full measure. The play (*Zobeide*) revolves around the power politics of the courts of Persia and Sycythia with the heroine Zobeide evolving as the kingmaker. The dedication suggests that the play sets to unravel the truth concerning the 'modern dictators'. In promising to take the readers/audience to the mythic lands of the Orient, the play quite plainly (as the paratextual material suggests) locates the ideological and political framework very much in eighteenth century Britain. The two lines quoted by Shoshee as his epigraph are preceded by these telling lines:

In these bold times, when Learning's sons explore  
The distant climate, and the savage shore:  
When wise Astronomers' to India steer,  
And quit for Venus many a brighter here;  
While Botanists, all cold and smiles and dimpling,  
Forsake the fair, and patiently—go sampling;  
When every bosom swells with won'drous scenes,  
Priests, cannibals, and *hoity-doity* queens<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Craddock, Joseph. *Zobeide, A Tragedy*. London: T. Cadell, 1771.

<sup>61</sup> Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. *A Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1878; Advertisement.

<sup>62</sup> His portrayal of rustic life in *Deserted Village* (1770) is one of most celebrated of its kind in English poetry of the eighteenth century. His mock-heroic works include his 'Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat', 'Mad Dog', and his well appreciated farce, *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773).

<sup>63</sup> Goldsmith, Oliver. *The Works of Oliver Goldsmith*. Ed; Peter Cunningham. In four volumes. Vol. I. London: John Murray, 1854; p. 117.

The adventurous detour to the promised poem is on board the 'frigate' and which is the result of the zeitgeist, learning. Learning and knowledge production are intimately related.

Oh there the natives are a dreadful race;  
The men have tails, the women paint the face.  
No doubt they're all barbarians—Yes, 'tis so;  
I'll try to make palaver with them though;  
'Tis best, however, keeping at a distance.  
Good savages, our Captain craves assistance;  
Our ship's well-stor'd;—in yonder creek we've laid her;  
His honour is no memory trader.<sup>64</sup>

The opening passage by Oliver Goldsmith introduces and pokes fun at the range of perceptions that constitute the image of the natives, while reminding the audience that there are 'good savages that help the Captain pillage'. Shoshee Chunder Dutt carefully rides on the self-reflexive and pointed humour of Goldsmith to introduce the conflict of religious affiliations in Bengal. On another level he intelligently plays on the fantastic notions that the Europeans harboured about the colonized races of the East. Hence, his poetry as shall be outlined dithers between an open resolution to poetically etch Sumeru, the abode of the Hindu Gods, and according the final word to the unnamed Christian God. Sumanta Banerjee observes that the satire of the nineteenth-century Bengali poetry was marked by a prototypical satirist 'who took on the mask of the obtuse fool who pretended to praise the British while actually laughing at them on the sly'.<sup>65</sup> Shoshee's humour owes its allegiance to a variety of sources as we have seen (Horatio, Dickens, etc.) but in this piece he borrows it from Goldsmith. Not quite conforming to the contemporary Bengali literature's brand of satire, Shoshee's poem plays on the perceived notions (as we have seen with Goldsmith) with the poet as the direct participant. The humour is not derived from the wit generated by the actions of an 'obtuse fool' but from systemic impossibilities.

While outlining the failure of the poem on the counts of its stylistic props, what has been largely ignored is the poet's desire to generate humour. Written in an epic style, mirroring the Greek epic renderings where the world of the Gods constantly engage with the world of men, the poem offers a complex narrative and apparently sets out to portray the bankruptcy of pagan life. Packed with

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>65</sup> Banerjee, Sumanta. 'The West Turned Upside Down in a Bengali Satire.' Ed. C. Vijaysree. *Writing the West, 1750-1947: Representations from Indian Languages*. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 2004: pp. 24-38, 25.

bowdlerised realism and a fervid moralism, the poem feeds on the conflict between the Christian and the pagan world unwittingly devotes much of the space and the descriptions to the Hindu pantheon.

The conflict between Christians and pagans was a common trope in the Victorian novels.<sup>66</sup> Michael Ledger-Thomas makes a case for the spurt of historical fiction following in the footsteps of Walter Scott that were interested in the 'apostolic age'. In choosing to write about the first century and not the medieval age, these fictive accounts were trying to evade a prolonged and complicated church history and instead concentrate on 'the founding events of Christianity'. Therefore, the novels could 'insist on the humanity of Jesus and the heroism of the apostles; or on the contrast between Christian love and the decrepit hedonism of the pagan world, at a time when Christianity's moral originality was under threat'.<sup>67</sup>

Dutt's poem subverts almost all the genres that it might claim to represent which strengthens the (my) claim that it can be read as a mock genre (epic). Taking to acknowledged modes of delineation of pre-modern mythology seems to be an accepted practice in the nineteenth century. Mythologies as pre-modern markers could be used as a palimpsestic device to be imbued with new meanings.<sup>68</sup> Writing a long poem, however, was the common literary practice as we see with many early Indian writers in English. Michael Madhusudan Dutt for example taking on from Tod's *Annals* had attempted to write *The Captive Ladie* (1849) (recounting the love adventures of Prithvi Raj Chauhan and Sanjogita) and a few years preceding him

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<sup>66</sup> Turner, Frank. 'Christians and Pagans in Victorian Novels.' *Roman Presences: Perceptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945*. Ed. Catherine Edwards. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999: pp. 173-187. Rhodes, Royal. *The Lion and the Cross: Early Christianity in Victorian Novels*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1995.

<sup>67</sup> Ledger-Thomas, Michael. 'First-Century Fiction in the Late Nineteenth Century.' *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 31. 1 (2009): pp. 59-72; p. 59.

<sup>68</sup> 'Generally speaking, dignified traditional genres such as *stotras/stutis* (hymns to gods), *caritas* (life narrations usually of semi-divine or model personalities) and *purāṇas* (mythological accounts for the glorification of a deity) can be used to address profane and contemporary topics and personalities. Such use implies a dislocation in the relation between the mode and object of invocation or narration. The immediate effect of such a dislocation can even on an abstract level be calculated as revealing the respective object's unworthiness of the generic frame chosen for it; simultaneously it suggests that the high genre is in some way related to certain aspirations made by those thus portrayed, and these aspirations are humbled by showing their incongruity. There is, however, also another possible effect of such dislocation that is often overlooked. Dissociating a genre designed to speak to or about gods from this target or object has repercussions on that genre as well: it harms its integrity by revealing its ultimate emptiness in reducing it to a form that can be, and is, emptied of its contents and thereupon refilled with an alien content, one it is made to serve for the purpose of the respective text.' Harder, Hans. 'Satirical *Stotras*, *Purāṇas* and *Sāstras* in Colonial South Asian Literatures'. Unpublished manuscript, 2012.

we have the most famous of them all Derozio's *The Fakeer of Jungheera and other Poems* (1823) and Kasi Prasad Ghose's *The Shair, or Minstrel* (1830).

In Dutt's mythological universe he is careful to segregate the Vedic Gods from the pouranic (from the *Purāṇ*) ones, which he regards with utter disdain, as we have observed earlier.<sup>69</sup> The layers of mythological narratives are again examined through the prism of the biblical mythology. Shoshee, like his contemporary K.M. Banerjea, tries very hard to revive the ancient past by relating it to the mythology of the Bible. In keeping with his theory of the ruining of the moral universe post the Vedas, as we approach the *Purāṇas* with too many Gods and their numerous legends accompanying them, he foregrounds the possibility of a 'purer' mythology.

It may be fully admitted that many fragments of historical and metaphysical truth, which survived the loss of a purer creed, have been blended with the wild legends that are narrated. But, unfortunately, the intolerable deal of sack has been too much for the halfpenny-worth of bread, which it is impossible to recognize in the compound.<sup>70</sup>

Sheshlatha Reddy claims, in the context of Romesh Chunder Dutt's translations of the epics a few years later, that it was primarily in order to invoke a pre-colonial past.<sup>71</sup> But Shoshee Chunder Dutt seeks to invoke a recondite past. The concept of the *Purāṇas* and the stratification of mythologies make this return problematic. Although by and large he follows the narrative of the Hindu nationalist in claiming that the despotic rule of the Muslims ruined India, he is quick to add the English to the list.

The actual power of the people was too great to be wantonly provoked; and, though despotism was the abstract character of the rule in force all over the country, it was not such despotism as the Mahomedans, and the English after them, introduced. It is nothing to say that the specimens of Hindu administration, still to be seen in the country are as bad as can well

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<sup>69</sup> 'In the Vedic Age, the Brahmuns were truth telling: apart from the legends they composed, the hymn writers stated things as they actually were. But the Pouranic writers never condescended to do so. Their statements are nothing if they were not untrue and preposterous.' 'Pouranism: or the Popular Religion.' *India Past and Present*: pp. 36-37.

<sup>70</sup> 'Pouranism: or the Popular Religion.' Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. *The Works of Shoshee Chunder Dutt: India, Past and Present*. Vol. 4. L. Reeve, 1884: pp. 45-46.

<sup>71</sup> '[T]he epics are excavated treasures that embody not the dead weight of a now inanimate object but a living, breathing, speaking voice. In transposing the Sanskrit sloka into the English trochaic octametre in his translations, Dutt measures out "India" in verse, transposing the material, metrical, and spoken form of the once-known to the once-again nation. Thus, his translations of the ancient epics simultaneously establish and blur the epochal time of a supposedly historically and geographically stable and singular entity known as "India" and in so doing illustrate the fraught category of "Modern Indian Literature" and the modern Indian nation, which depends on recovering an "authentic" pre-colonial identity to inaugurate its modernity under British colonial rule.' Reddy, Sheshlatha. 'Romesh Chunder Dutt's Indian-English epics and epochs.' *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 47. 2 (2012): pp. 245-263.

be conceived. Of course, they are so: but they are all Mahomedan imitations, not examples of Hindu rule as it existed in the past.<sup>72</sup>

The past that he invokes in relation to a disordered present is not merely pre-colonial but 'pre-Menu [sic]'. He presumes a definitive break in the processing of mythologies. In this the foreigner or the outsider plays a key role. He insists that it is because of foreign rule that such a discontinuity was made apparent.<sup>73</sup> Interestingly enough, as we had seen with most upper-caste converts in Part I Chapter 2, they heavily relied on their caste markers to express their social identity. In formulating a continuity out of the apparent ruptures in the mythology that have occurred due to the 'foreign yoke', Dutt contends that it was in fact the rigidity of the caste system that had managed to retain the 'national identity' of the Indians in the face of a repressive rule.<sup>74</sup> We find similar resonances in Brahmabandhab Upadhyay's notion of the efficacy of the varṇa system in nineteenth century India (discussed in the following chapter).

Deluge is one of the mainstays of Dutt's explanatory logic.<sup>75</sup> The veneration of the Vedas of the mountains is explained by the necessity that arose when the great deluge swept the world. Biblical narratives are interspersed with the impulse to reinstate the cult of the Aryans in order to draw a common genealogy with the European races and in effect connect the biblical world with the ancient Vedic. This cohabitation of mythologies plays against the cartographies of the modern world. Hence, '[t]he Brahmans or the devatas (they are still so called in India) dwelt in the Aryaverta, while the asoors, or ahoors, residing in Ahoorya, which may be accepted as the same with Assyria'.<sup>76</sup> The conflation of mythologies and their subsequent geographical location is visible in the ordering of spaces in the poem as well. The Gods are said to have occupied Sumeru, the heaven, which again consists of several heavens, ordered according to the status of the gods. Although, he vehemently

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<sup>72</sup> 'Government.' Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. *The Works of Shoshee Chunder Dutt: India, Past and Present*. Vol. 4. L. Reeve, 1884; p. 98.

<sup>73</sup> 'Mohamedan Rule and Its Results'(1884). 'The admission of the Hindus to the high offices, which benefitted individuals only, was not a sufficient incentive by itself to keep up among the mass of the people their ancient national spirit under a foreign yoke'; p. 118.

<sup>74</sup> 'Caste as it Exists at Present, and its Effects'(1884). 'Mahomedanism did much to break up old customs in India; but the nationality of the Hindus was preserved, to a large extent, by the municipal institutions to which we have referred, and also by restrictions of caste, which, though considerably loosened, were still tenaciously adhered to.' Dutt (1884); p. 120.

<sup>75</sup> He compares the reportage of the Deluge in the Hindu mythology with that of Biblical Genesis. 'Without being irreverent, we may fancy that we find traces of it in the pages of the Bible. (Genesis iv. 20-22).' 'Pouranism: or the Popular Religion.' Dutt(1884); p. 75.

<sup>76</sup> 'Origin and Development of the Brahman Race.' (1854); p. 4.

rejects Purāṇic mythology, which rather than being contributory to the Vedic pantheon has debased it, he concedes that it contains exquisite poetry.<sup>77</sup> As argued in Part I Chapter 3, Dutt's revival is noticeably as literature or exquisite poetry. He is so enthralled by the poetry of this mythology that his central plot involves characters from the Purāṇic mythology and not the Vedas. It could also be argued that he considered Vedas to be sacrosanct which cannot be tampered with unlike the Purāṇic interludes which was more localized and hence prone to appropriations. In his essay on the religion he gives a rather poetic and graphic description of how Sumeru would appear.<sup>78</sup> Given the preference of the nineteenth century authors for Dante, most prominent among them being Madhusudan Dutt, it is no surprise that Shoshee Chunder Dutt finds the descriptions of heaven and hell the most poignant of the lot. The partial treatment of the heaven and hell in the poem clearly outweighs the attempts of Dutt to portray the Hindu Gods in a bad light. Reminiscent of Milton's grand description of heaven and the subsequent fall of the angels, the description of Sumeru matches the epic scale of the poem.<sup>79</sup> The poem opens with a striking introduction of heaven,

Where, rock o'er rock sublimely piled,  
Sumeru braves the sky,  
Screen'd in the bosom of the clouds,  
An emerald dome uprises high,  
Based on the adamantine wild,  
Which many an amorous flower enshrouds

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<sup>77</sup> 'The Present State of Religion.' Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. *The Modern World*. W. Blackwood & Sons, 1876: pp. 132-175; p. 142.

<sup>78</sup> 'The descriptions of heaven and hell, as given by the Shastras, are exceedingly poetical. The heavens to reward the virtuous are of different degrees of excellence, according to the virtues which have to be rewarded. They are all situated on Sumeru, the general residence of the gods, which rises from the earth in the form of an inverted cone, broader at the top than at the bottom. According to some Puranas the whole of the mountain is of solid gold, and yet of many colours, the east being white, the west brown, the north red, and the south yellow. But other Puranas mention that the east only is of gold, the west of silver, the north of copper, and the south of iron. Only one river, dividing itself into four branches, waters this paradise, and is called mandacini, on the earth named Gunga. The different heavens are situated on different peaks of Sumeru, the purest being Ilavatta, the heaven of Bruhma, which is described as excelling all others in splendour and magnificence. The next to it is Bycant, the heaven of Vishnu, which is fully equalled by Kailasa, the heaven of Siva. There are twenty-one other heavens belonging to the minor deities; but these are of less height and excellence than the courts of the triad. The pleasures of these heavens are wholly sensual, consisting of excellent food, the dance and song of heavenly courtesans, the fragrance of heavenly flowers, and other enjoyments which it is not permitted to eye, ear, and heart of man to anticipate.' 'The Present State of Religion.' Dutt (1884): pp. 132-175; p. 143.

<sup>79</sup> Shoshee Chunder was particularly fascinated by the Hindu conception of the heaven as he turns to it even in his collection on Bengaliana in a short piece titled 'A Run to Sumeru.' In this small prose piece the author is taken to Sumeru through 'narrow alleys, past wine shops and drains and through an "ugly" staircase to behold the wonder of the mountaneous paradise.' Like his epic poem, this short essay concentrates on highlighting the moral decrepitude of the Hindu Gods with a special focus on the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. *Bengaliana, A Dish of Rice, Curry and Other Indigestible Ingredients*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co, 1879 ; p. 387.

Most lovingly.<sup>80</sup>

But these majestic descriptions come with riders by the poet where he comments on the character of the individual Gods either in the text proper or in the footnotes.<sup>81</sup> It is almost as if the central characters or the protagonists occupy less importance than their location. There is a tension between locale that absorbs the poetry of the mythology and the protagonists of Dutt's narrative. The grand (sometimes detached) engagement with invoking Gods might offer an inter-textual tribute to the Orientalist poetry in the first half of the nineteenth century. Of particular interest is Sir William Jones's poetry written as hymns. Preceding his hymns there was a long prefatory outline of the position and activities of the Gods, which Shoshee categorically avoids. In keeping with the serious (not necessarily devotional) invocation of Jones, Shoshee painstakingly introduces the main characters of long poem, the Gods.<sup>82</sup> Jones (writing Pindaric and Nemaen Odes) like Shoshee, dwelled as much on the Gods as their locales. Shoshee's doubtful intention is couched in the scaffolding of an Orientalist rendition of Indian mythology. While

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<sup>80</sup> Shoshee Chunder Dutt. *A Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems*. Calcutta: Thacker Spink and Co., 1878; p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> It is again physical love that invites the ire of Dutt. For example when he introduces Kailasa, the abode of Shiva he writes a footnote about Parvati: 'Gauri, Uma, Parvati are the several names of Siva's wife, and the Puranas represent the husband and wife as always making love to each other.' *A Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems*; p. 6. Even as he exposes his reservation about their physical love, their lovemaking is full of poetry:

Her glowing cheek was on his breast,  
And he on her with fondness hung;  
Their hands in mutual love comprest  
As ne'er can be express'd in song;  
The zephyr toy'd, the warbling bird  
Tuned there unto his silent mate,  
And perfumes breath'd as leaves were stirr'd;  
Luxuriant leaves, unpruned, elate,  
and wanton grown on branches high:  
when Siva mark'd the coming fleet,  
and curbing straight the lover's sigh,  
Pavana bold he thus did greet—

*A Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems*; p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> For example, the first hymn 'To Pracriti'[sic] is 'To Durga.' It typically vacillates between the beauty of the abode of the goddess and the characteristics of the Goddess herself:

From thee begins the solemn air,  
Adorned Ganesa; next, thy sire we praise  
(Him from whose clustering hair  
A new born crescent shapes propitious rays,  
Fair as Ganga's curling foam),  
Dread Iswara; who loved o'er awful mountains,  
Rapp's in the prescience deep, to roam,  
But chiefly those, whence holy rivers gush,  
Bright from their secret fountains,  
And o'er the realm of Brahma rush.

Jones, William. 'To Durga.' *The British Poets, Including Translations*. Chiswick: C. Wittingham, 1822: pp. 163-172; p. 163.

adopting markers of Orientalist poetry (for example, some comparative Greek references), both in tone and in content he defies the textual authority of the same.

This is heightened by the fact that Dutt's protagonists do not consist of all the prominent Gods but popular gods of the Purāṇaic pantheon and fairly localized. Although the poem claims to unite all the Gods of the Hindus under one banner it highlights only a few localized Gods. Kali (*Kālī*) for example, one of the most feared and revered goddesses made popular (especially in Bengal) in the second half of the nineteenth century, occupies a prominent space.<sup>83</sup> Like the usual description of Kali in the nineteenth century as a blood thirsty goddess of the thugs, Shoshee's Kali matches the description in 'vulgarity'.<sup>84</sup> In the very beginning of the poem in a footnote Dutt mentions that Sumeru is the heaven described in the Purāṇas. He assiduously mentions his sources in the form of the Purāṇas and often mentions some Orientalist scholars with some stray references to literary debts like H.M. Parker's 'Draught of Immortality'.

There are two apparently contradictory impulses in the poem that to the reader seem impossible to reconcile. On the one hand the poem promises a vision with God appearing at the end in a solemn fashion to save the world, on the other hand the central plot of the poem is pregnant with irony that generates humour. Dutt's poem also relies on the sagacity of the received notions of the Hindu heaven and the gods to ensure that any departure or inversion of this order generates humour. The solemn tone of the last few stanzas and the waking up from the dream with a sense of impossibility is countered by the humour that the beginning of the plot generates.

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<sup>83</sup> Banerjee, Sumanta. *Logic in a Popular Form: Essays on Popular Religion in Bengal*. Kolkata: Seagull, 2002.

<sup>84</sup> The blood yet dripping from her hand,  
With large-wing'd vultures on the wake  
Of eager beak and ruffled breast,  
And greedy dogs and jackals fierce  
Upon her conquest dire to make  
Their hellish feast:  
Now shouted she, now wildly danced,  
And when of yore she madly trod  
Her lord in opiate dreams entranced,  
Strech'd on the vulgar clod.

*A Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems*. Calcutta: Thacker Spink and Co., 1878. Sumanta Banerjee relates the subaltern origins of the goddess which were later appropriated into the Hindu pantheon proper only to be held in utter disdain by an elite section of the bhadralok. Banerjee, Sumanta. 'Bogey of the Bawdy: Changing Concept of "Obscenity" in 19th Century Bengali Culture.' *Economic and Political Weekly* (1987): pp. 1197-1206. This image of Kali as obscene and grotesque was later overturned when Ramakrishna Paramahansa domesticated the goddess and she became a national symbol. Sarkar, Tanika. 'Nationalist iconography: Image of women in 19th century Bengali literature.' *Economic and Political Weekly* (1987): pp. 2011-2015.

The plot of the poem is fairly simple and follows the route of a generation of poetry and prose which narrate the descent of the Gods into the world of men for purposes of inspection and intervention.<sup>85</sup> Unlike other poems of its creed, this poem situates the crisis not in the world of men but in the world of Gods and Goddesses.<sup>86</sup> But Dutt inverts the frame and the plot which immediately generates humour. It chronicles the possibility of the gods having to abandon their 'wanton sports and luscious fare' to descend to take charge of the mortal world. Brumha [sic] summons all the Gods and Goddesses to his own heaven and in his address underlines the fact that the Devatas (Gods) might be supreme in their own spaces but their mastery is not established merely by defeating the Asooras [sic] (Demons). Instead it lies in the authority they command over the world of men.

We live as then, as proud we be,  
Still relish we the taste of blood;  
How then dares man, with offering's meet,  
And breathing incense, and fair flowers,  
Neglect our favour's to repay?<sup>87</sup>

All the gods eventually realize and complain about how their prayers are not delivered and their offerings are neglected. Pavana, the God of the wind is elected to be sent to the mortal world to start an enquiry. The danger that they suspect is:

Heed me, ye gods, these words of mine,  
I speak them not from false alarms,  
Of danger true I caution ye;  
Your dues and mine are all near forgot,  
Our favours men remember not,  
At other shrines they kneel,  
Perchance to Gods of foreign birth,  
Some alien enemy.<sup>88</sup>

Here, he directly addresses the question of Christianity's stature as a foreign presence, of an 'alien enemy'. It definitely relates to wishful thinking and quite against the actual situation where Christianity had failed to become a popular

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. Harder, Hans. 'Representations of Urbanity in Modern South Asian Vernacular Literature and Film.' Lecture delivered at Würzburg, 19 June 2012. Harder, Hans. 'Misplaced gods and new Purāṇic heroes: topsy-turvy counter-mythology in modern South Asian literatures.' Lecture delivered at ECSAS 2012, 26. 07. 2012.

<sup>86</sup> Hans Harder remarks on the abundance of 'failed' texts in the nineteenth century which had familiar tropes of participation of the humane Gods in the world of men. In the other poems for example, the gods come to inspect the state of the world in the time of the *kaliyuga* (or the ethical abyss in the cyclical time frame of the Hindus). Harder, Hans. 'Transcultural Mock History from India? Ramavatar Sharma's puzzling *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* of 1912-13.' Annual Conference of the Cluster of Excellence 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context': Flows of Images and Media, 7-9 October 2009, University of Heidelberg, in Panel 2: 'Heavenly Bodies.'

<sup>87</sup> Dutt, *A Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems*: pp. 11-12.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

religion in India. But as he relates that the central problem lies with the outsider, or the *mlechha*<sup>89</sup>:

Till I could only guess but one:  
The Mlech'chas, who with friendly mask  
Our wealth and substance all consume,  
And profit by our loss,  
Our sacred gods defy, and call  
Upon their hearers blunt to join  
With lying words their dread impiety.  
They worship, fools, a wooden cross;  
And other fools, by folly led,  
Or drawn by foul insidious arts,  
In all the blindness of their hearts,  
Their barbarous rites are choosing,  
Renouncing e'en their father's creed,<sup>90</sup>

While Shoshee was very concerned about alien political power, here he in fact associates the alien political power, that forces men to part with their 'father's creed', with religious authority. And when the God finally appears to assert his authority over the creed of Hindu gods he is but a fleeting presence:

Unseen that glorious form before,  
Unknown from whence and how he came,  
His shinning body struck dismay!<sup>91</sup>

As the Hindu gods and the pantheon takes precedence both in terms of the dramatic action and the space that is provided to them in the course of the long poem, Shoshee Chunder Dutt's faith in Christianity seems nearly superimposed. The Hindu gods, ready in their armour for war, descend on the earth to engage in a war with the new God but the key dramatic action never takes place. The reader is almost disappointed when the Christian god disarms the band of the Hindu gods and delivers his punishment for having disobeyed him. And the gods of Sumeru are punished for their botched rebellion and sent 'amidst the funeral screams of hell' as:

Jehovah will no longer bear  
Your lawless presence here;  
For he sole king must ever reign!<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> It find parallels in his ballad which is evidently inspired by Henry Derozio:

My fallen country! On thy brow  
The ruthless tyrants have engraved  
Thy shame,  
and thy haughty grandeur low;  
yet even thus, and even so  
I love to lisp thy name.

Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. *Stray leaves; or Essays, Poems, and Tales*. Vol. 1. Calcutta: D'Rozario, 1864; p. 248.

<sup>90</sup> *A Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems*; p. 31.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Interestingly enough, the Christian God is not the benevolent peace loving God of the New Testament but the wrathful one of the Old Testament. Jehova's momentous presence is soon overshadowed by long passages that lament the absence of the gods in their ancient abode. To quote one example:

On bleak Vycant no arche'd bower  
A shed to Vishnu now affords,  
Umbrageous and obscure;  
Nor lakshmi loiters there her prime,  
In breathing beauty bathed.

These evocative passages are countered by a seemingly laudatory passage which is unable to counter the poetry that has been showered on the gods of the Hindu pantheon:

My dream is o'er, and past their reign  
From dark Himavan's shaggy brow;  
And every art of man once more  
Their ancient service to restore  
In fruitless and now in vain.  
Glory on earth! Jehovah's sway  
Alone endureth now!  
Alone it passeth not away!<sup>93</sup>

*A Vision of Sumeru* exposes the complex position that Shoshee as an author occupies. As the title of the play indicates that the Vision that the poet has is of Sumeru and not the Christian heaven. The poem supposedly about Christian piety accords most of the poetic raptures to the titular protagonists or the inhabitants of Sumeru, but in the end salvages the Christian god by allowing him to punish the amoral brood of Hindu gods. The tension between the two sets of religions takes place in his dream indicating his subconscious. While the dream at one level corresponds to the romantic concept of an empowered vision, at another level it is able to symbolically contrast frames of religious perception. Shoshee's inability to convincingly establish Christendom even in his dreams is reflective of his brand of self-reflexive writing. As a cynic he enters the frame by dissecting with clinical precision the debauchery of the Hindu Gods, and on the other level has to evoke Jehovah to subsume the Hindu religious practices into the Christian fold.

The epic or attempted mock-epic fails at least in two instances<sup>94</sup>: first, the resolution to the dramatic tension that is built through the span of the long poem is

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>94</sup> Here I tend to use the term failed in the sense that Hans Harder has applied it to evaluate experimental texts in the colonial India. 'Transcultural Mock History from India? Ramavatar Sharma's

abrupt and second the conflicting nature of the tone of the poem. The absurdity of the plot and the humour that is generated is suddenly confronted with a serious message of the victory of Christianity at the end. The failure of the epic or the mock-epic brings to the fore the entangled nature of shared practices. Failure of the text is an indication of two frames of reference colliding.

In this case the two mythological frames occupy different temporalities and cannot cohabit. Was he conscious of this failure? Did he therefore use Jehovah instead of the benevolent Christian God of the New Testament? This leads us to the question of the relationship between the cynic and humour. As a cynic his rhetoric hocks into domains which might be appropriated even while it is being dismissed using humour. At this juncture the latent praxis of a failed text reinstates the cynic as the authoritative figure of the poem.

This text is based on a supreme dramatic irony that the de-centred Romantic subject is not in control of his dreams. His text is marked by a heteroglossia where several voices emerge to confront and contradict each other resulting in a semiotic surplus. Both within the text and outside, the collisions highlight the problematic of any easy association.

The problem also stems from the fact that the Christian converts in terms of social prestige were not marginal characters. The crisis and advantage of reading a failed text lies in the fact that it rids the reader of any formalistic expectations. In this case the failure is at least at three levels linguistic, formalistic and epistemic. The linguistic failure speaks of a mobility of disempowerment where the Bengali sources in the mythological narrative force their way through the English text. The formal level is also reflective of the knowledge paradigm as it seeks to incorporate the Indian epic with the Romantic and the Christian spiritual in the English language.<sup>95</sup> The formalistic incompatibility customarily calls upon the prospect of an incomplete narrative. At the epistemic level the regime of knowledge practices collide without

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puzzling *Mudgarānand'caritāvalī* of 1912-13.' Annual Conference of the Cluster of Excellence 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context': *Flows of Images and Media*, 7-9 October 2009, University of Heidelberg, in Panel 2: 'Heavenly Bodies.'

<sup>95</sup> '[D]uring the Romantic period, developments in literary criticism, and particularly those concerning imaginative sympathy, were responsible for driving Orientalist poetry into ever more Westernised forms. Strict critical parameters governed what was and was not aesthetically acceptable in poetry, chief among which was the demand that the literary work engage sympathetically with the reader; a nostrum of Augustan, Romantic and even Utilitarian criticism alike.' Rudd, Andrew. "'Oriental' and 'Orientalist' Poetry: The Debate in Literary Criticism in the Romantic Period.' *Romanticism*, 13. 1 (2007): pp. 53-62, 54.

any resolute action. Failure at multiple levels not only reaffirms contrary currents in the footprints of colonial knowledge network but exposes the indigenous particularity of the Christian identity in colonial Bengal and their constant attempts to find interpretive authority. In the chapter we further develop on the issue of interpretive authority of the upper-caste Christian converts as we debate the efficacy of the categories of hyphenated identities. Brahmabandhab differs on many counts from Shoshee (in terms of profession, religious views, etc.) but their common point of engagement with literature I argue is their desire to negotiate new narrative authorities.

## Chapter Six

### *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay and the Festivities of the Colonial Everyday*

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Closing the discussion on individual authors with Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) can be justified both in terms of chronology and themes. In successional terms, he was active in the late nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century, a period of intensive creativity and politico-religious activism. Thematically, he problematizes some of the accepted tenets of conversion and Christianity in colonial India. Brahmabandhab adds to the complexity of the subject-positions we have discussed thus far by publicly proclaiming a hyphenated Hindu-Catholic religious identity.

At this stage a small detour into his life history is necessary to fathom the social contingencies of his existence as a Hindu-Catholic. Brahmabandhab (Bhabani Charan Banerjee) was born in a Bengali kulin Brahmin family in Hoera village near Khonan in Bardhaman district of West Bengal in 1861. Hailing from a Brahmin family and trained in the new Western education system, his conversion to Brahmoism and subsequently to Christianity<sup>1</sup> could be explained as a phenomenon of fulfilment aesthetics (discussed in the chapter on K.M. Banerjea).<sup>2</sup> But his inter-sect conversion—the Anglican to the Catholic—displaces the seamless linkage

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<sup>1</sup> His humble dwelling and upbringing in the village has prompted most of biographers to lodge an informed guess (which Sudhir Chandra contends in his review) that he could only have received his early lessons in Christianity from his famous revolutionary uncle Kalicharan Bannerjee, a Christian convert. As a young student, he was attracted by the passionate speeches of the nationalist revolutionaries and was certain that India needed militant nationalism to challenge the British colonial forces. Soon he was to make a daring attempt to join the forces of the Rajah of Gwalior to fight the British. His initial fascination with an armed struggle combined with the insistence on physical prowess to redeem the Bengali race remained with him throughout his life.

<sup>2</sup> In the larger evangelical project, conversion to Christianity is seen as a telos. Robin Boyd outlines the dimension of the telos as follows: 'That Truth—working not only in word, symbol and worship, but in justice, peace and the right use of the environment, and above all in love—points towards the advent of what Tennyson described as

The one, far off, divine event  
to which the whole creation moves.

Jesus' word for that event, as translated into Greek by the writer of Matthew's gospel—is simply *telos*. And the verb the evangelists use not merely for the achievement of that event but also for the struggle to achieve it, is *teleioun*, which in various contexts occurs seven times in the Gospels.' While inter-faith conversions can be easily accommodated in these schemes, inter-sect conversions or hyphenated identities are deeply problematic. Boyd, Robin. 'Which God? Questions on the Future of Interfaith Relations—In the End.' *The Expository Times*, 123. 6: pp. 261–271; p. 262.

between Christianity and a spiritual telos. After a spate of three conversions, he finally declared himself a Hindu-Catholic *sannyāsī*<sup>3</sup> in 1891.

Considerable attention has been paid to the political dimensions of his Hindu-Catholic identity. Although this was indeed a curious case of yoking together of two identities, it was by no means an impossibility. I suggest in this chapter that the search for his narrative authority as a Hindu-Catholic is intimately linked to his bilingual literary identity.<sup>4</sup>

To execute this purpose, this chapter exposes the complexities of a bilingual literatis' articulation of religio-socio-cultural imageries through lesser-known Bengali writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. Meant to address different sets of audiences and published simultaneously, his English and Bengali writings varied both in tone and content. Unlike his English prose pieces, his Bengali writings customarily take recourse to humour. Writing in a jocular vein emplaces contradictions at the centre of his articulations, berating the possibility of suppressing his Hindu-Catholic identity. As a rhetorical device, humour effectively allows constant shifts in the subject positions of the narratorial figure, thereby facilitating varied semantic entitlements.

In the first section, I try to examine the complexities that emanate from a hyphenated religious identity (that of a Hindu-Catholic). The subsequent section will specifically highlight literary interventions of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay in re-inventing the religious idioms of the Bengalis.

### *Accommodating Upadhyay and his politics*

As a man who had converted religiously thrice in his life, Brahmabandhab not only challenges the stereotypical ideas about conversion but introduces the idea of a hyphenated identity.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly what goes unnoticed for most measure is the

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<sup>3</sup> *Sannyāsī* is the Sanskrit term for a monk. It usually relates to a person who has renounced the material world for an austere spiritual life. In the late nineteenth and twentieth century the figure of the *sannyāsī* was re-invented to produce a masculine self-effacing nationalist ideal.

<sup>4</sup> An important omission is his contributions to literature. His literary activities include the editing of *Sophia* (January 1894-March 1899), a monthly Catholic journal; *Sophia* (June 16, 1900-December 8, 1900), a weekly paper; *the Twentieth Century* (January 1901-December 1901), a monthly magazine. In November 1904 he began publishing an influential Bengali daily called *Sandhyā* (1904-1907) and in March 1907 a Bengali weekly called *Svarāj*.

<sup>5</sup> Gyanendra Pandey traces the problematics of hyphenated identities—albeit as Indian Muslim, Indian Jews, Indian Christians, etc.—to the formation of the category of minority religious identities in India in the wake of partition. Pandey, Gyanendra. 'Can a Muslim be an Indian?' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41. 4 (1999): pp. 608-629. Timothy Stephen Dobe takes the example of Sundar Singh

placement of the hyphen between the contending categories of Hindu and Catholic as oppositional markers against which other attributes (like *sannyasī*, ‘militant nationalist’<sup>6</sup>) were plotted. The knotted term comes with its own hierarchical structure as the Hindu part of it takes precedence over the Catholic.<sup>7</sup> This is manifested in complex mechanisms, as I shall elaborate in the course of the chapter. In an age defined by the symbolic relationship between Hinduism and the imagining of a nation, this hyphenated identity generated both unique possibilities and problems of accommodation in the histories of the Indian church and the nationalist movement. For one, the Hindu identity has assisted the appropriation of Upadhyay in the post-colonial nationalist rhetoric of India.

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay’s post-independence apotheosis as a crusader for indigenous Christianity is fraught with contradictions.<sup>8</sup> Bengal in particular and India at large, perceived Christianity as an alien import from the beginning of the colonial rule in the subcontinent that stretched up to India’s independence (refer to Part I Chapter 1). Immediately after independence, a ‘politically’ secular India witnessed an overhauling of nationalist politics. Ironically, Hindu national identity emerged as a dominant ideology in modern secular India. The Hindutva (far-right) movement<sup>9</sup>, which gained considerable political momentum in the last quarter of the twentieth century, was instrumental in bowdlerizing an overarching Hindu

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to suggest that the monolithic image of a missionary is a construct and that missionaries as *sannyāsīs* were increasingly becoming a cognizable force of indigenization of Christianity in early twentieth century India. Dobe, Timothy Stephen. ‘Flaunting the Secret: Lineage Tales of Christian Sannyasis and Missionaries.’ *History of Religions*, 49. 3 (2010): pp. 254-299.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see: Chowdhury, Indira. *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Upadhyay understands the term Hindu in all its complexity. In the essay ‘The Determination of the Hindu jāti’ (*Hindu jātir ekaṇiṣṭhatā*) Brahmabandhab maintains that there is a difference in the approach to a problem by the Hindus and the Europeans. This is not necessarily linked to the religion. He exposes a chasm between the loose identity of the Hindu as a *communitas* and that of a dogmatic religion: “many confuse Hindu-thought with Hindu-religion, as one conflates the identities of European thought and the prevalent European religion”. Ghos, Bāridbaran. *Brahmabāndhab upādhyāyer racanā samgraha*, Kalikātā: Kalej śrīṭ pāblikeśān, 1987; p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Aurobindo, Bipin Chandra and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay extend the scope of revolution as ‘religion’ while using Hindu imagery is discussed in, Heehs, Peter ‘Revolutionary Terrorism in British Bengal.’ Eds. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Norton. *Terror and the Postcolonial: A Concise Companion*. Hong Kong: Wiley Blackwell, 2010: pp. 153-176.

<sup>9</sup> Sumit Sarkar nonetheless maintains that the Hindutva right wing in India has been particularly weary of Christians and Christianity in post-independence India because they chose to side with the leftist movements. Sarkar, Sumit. ‘Conversions and Politics of Hindu Right.’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34. 26 (1999): pp. 1691-1700. Uma Chakravarti observes that the late 1980s saw the consolidation of the right wing politics in the popular media with the reinvention of the India’s glorious past by stoking the somnambulant Brahmanic mythological past. Chakravarti, Uma. ‘Saffroning the Past: Of Myths, Histories and Right-Wing Agenda.’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33. 5 (1998): pp. 225-232. Engineer, Asghar Ali contends that the Babri Masjid demolition became a symbol for the consolidation of the fractionalized Hindu polity in India. Engineer, Asgharali. *Babri-Masjid Ramjanambhoomi Controversy*. New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 2000.

nationalistic ethos.<sup>10</sup> Upadhyay's brand of nationalism, filled with militant Hindu rhetoric, appears to have been a natural predecessor. Ashis Nandy argues that except Brahmabandhab's conversion, the tenets of a vigorous Hindu nationalist identity in post-independence India were a realistic approximation of his ideals.<sup>11</sup>

Although he received little support from the Church during his lifetime and had to stop his theological writing in 1904, Upadhyay was later successively resurrected in post-independence India in the name of Indian Christianity.<sup>12</sup> The concerted attempt in post-colonial India to establish Brahmabandhab Upadhyay as the crucial link between Indian Christianity and a robust nationalist movement is therefore quite obvious.<sup>13</sup> I suggest that an inherent contradiction makes this appropriation politically viable, albeit via a parallax. In the climate of Hindu symbolic excess, Upadhyay, with his complex religio-political position, seems to have served as a likely bridge between the politics of a minority religious identity (that often sets itself against the common other, 'Islam') and a symbolic Hindu

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<sup>10</sup> For an overview of the how Hindutva came to define political choices in post-Independence India see: Blom Hansen, Thomas. *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999. Hindutva violence and politics in the recent past have targeted both the proselytizing authorities and the converts. See for example, Zavos, John. 'Conversion and the Assertive Margins: an Analysis of Hindu Nationalist Discourse and the Recent Attacks on Indian Christians.' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 24. 2 (2001): pp. 73-89.

<sup>11</sup> '[L]et me recall here a friendly exchange I last year had with Ashis Nandy. As we got talking about upper caste converts to Christianity he said: "You know Sudhir, but for his conversions these Hindu fundamentalists would have hailed Brahmabandhab as the father of Hindu nationalism. „[...] 'Ashis had written 'Many scholars, like Sudhir Chandra, not knowing that I am a Christian, accuse me of sympathizing with Hindu fundamentalists.' Chandra, Sudhir. 'A Figure of Paradox. " *Social Scientist*, 29. 3/4 (2001): pp. 89-97.

<sup>12</sup> The Church authorities were particularly uncomfortable with Upadhyay's mixed theological stance. For example, see, Aleaz, K. P. 'The Theological Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya Re-Examined.' *The Indian Journal of Theology*, 28. 2 (1979): pp. 55-77. To quote James Massey: 'Prior to Vatican Council II, in India a Roman Catholic convert Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, who came from a Bengali priestly caste and became Christian in February 1891, had sown the seed of inter-religious dialogue by declaring: "By birth we are Hindus [...] by virtue of our sacramental rebirth, we are Catholics". Upadhyay's approach later in some form was followed by other Catholic scholars, which included P. Johannes, G. Dandoy, V. Courtouis, R. Antoine; Fallon, J. Monchain and Swami Abhishiktananda. There were numbers of consultations and seminars also that took place, among which the most important, the All India Seminar were held in Bangalore during 1969; the International Theological Conference on Evangelisation, Dialogue and Development in Nagpur during 1971; All India Consultation on Evangelisation in Patna during 1971 and finally the General Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference in India (C. B. C. I. ) in 1974 at Calcutta, gave a call to the Church in India to be pioneer in inter-religious dialogue, because it is in the response of Christian faith to God's saving presence in other religious traditions and the expression of the firm hope of their fulfilment in Christ.' Massey, James. 'Inter-Religious Dialogue in India with Special Reference to Islam: Positions, Experiences and Reflections.' *Journal für Religionskultur*. 10 (1997): pp. 1-17, 3.

<sup>13</sup> However, it should be noted that there was a concerted attempt to look for a patriotic Christian identity much before the 1990s. For example see: Thomas, George. *Christian Indians and Indian Nationalism 1885-1950*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1979. John C. B. Webster notes that although the cultural and social disruptions/dislocations occasioned by conversion to Christianity have received significant attention, little has been done to trace the involvement of the Christians in the national movement. Webster, John C. B. 'Christian History as Indian Social History.' Ed. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya. New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 2011: pp. 159-198.

nationalist ethos.<sup>14</sup> With the exception that the meta-discourse of the nation and its subterranean religiosity is effectively belied by the symbol of a Christian *sannyāsi*, with claims to the Hindu-national selfdom. Therefore, to accord Brahmabandhab an enshrined space, it was equally important to frame an anodyne image, in the process emptying it of its non-conformist values.

To cite a recent example, The Vidyajyoti College of Theology, a well-known Christian studies institute based in Bangalore, introduces him as a 'patriot' and a theologian who had demanded 'full independence', 'at a time when "home rule" was still the goal of most freedom fighters'.<sup>15</sup> The further aim of the institute is 'to reclaim this figure for our history of the freedom struggle and inter-religious thought'. Theological confusions are traded for an unsullied image of an acceptable national hero. To quote the concept note of a conference held to commemorate the birth centenary of Upadhyay at Vidyajyoti College on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Jan, 2007:

The indigenization of the Church and its theology is a burning issue, the question of patriotism seen from the perspectives of the Hindu and Brahminical identity has not disappeared in secular free India, and if we would not now speak of a 'Hindu-Christian' because the Hindutva movement has changed the terms of reference, and the implications of the word 'Hindu', still the role of 'Indianness' in the Christian believer in the country has to be faced. And the Dalit culture, for all its claims to represent a different stream of the Indian reality, cannot deny its historical links with the Sanskritic tradition or the impact it has had on the Indian identity.<sup>16</sup>

Crucial to the appropriation of Upadhyay as the representative of a brand of indigenous Christianity<sup>17</sup> was his lineage to the high Sanskritic tradition (to which

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<sup>14</sup> Nandy, Ashis, 'The Demonic and the Seductive in Religious Nationalism: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and the Rites of Exorcism in Secularizing South Asia.' *South Asia Institute Working Papers*, Heidelberg, Feb. 2009.

<sup>15</sup> 'The 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2007 will mark the hundredth year of the martyrdom of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, born in 1867 as Bhavanicaran Bandyopadhyay (anglicized as Banerji), a significant figure in the struggle against colonialism that took shape in Bengal in the first decade of the twentieth century. He deserves the title of "martyr" as he died as a prisoner of the British power, his death being the result of a tetanus infection subsequent on a hernia operation undergone during his court trial. At this trial, after owning "the entire responsibility" for the publication of the incriminated articles, he declared: "I do not want to take part in this trial because I do not believe that in carrying out my humble share of the God-appointed mission of Svaraj, I am in any way accountable to the alien people who happen to rule over us and whose interest is and must necessarily be in the way of our national development".' <http://vidyajyoti.in/?tag=brahmabandhab-upadhyay>. Accessed on 4. 12. 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Gispert-Sauch, G. 'Report of the Seminar on Brahmabandhab Upadhyay.' *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, 10 (2007): pp. 57-59; p. 59.

<sup>17</sup> His best known contribution to Indian Christianity seems to be his conceptualization of God as Sac-cid-ananda (being, consciousness, bliss) and was incidentally a concept that was first suggested by Keshab Chandra Sen of the Brahma Samaj. Whaling, Frank. 'The Trinity and the Structure of Religious Life: An Indian Contribution to Wider Christian Theology.' *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 32. 4 (1979): pp. 359-369; p. 363.

the dalit culture<sup>18</sup> has to pay obeisance in the name of continuous Indian tradition).<sup>19</sup> This relationship is made obvious by re-instating his caste identity: 'The movement towards inculturation was taken up in the twentieth century, first of all by the great Brahmin convert Brahmabandhab Upadhyay'.<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly enough, Brahmabandhab himself sought to organize a Christian religious compass around Sanskrit (for example, the hymns that he wrote in Sanskrit and his translation of his baptismal name Theophilus as Brahmabandhab). Strategic codification of a linguistic order comes with its own set of problems, specifically in the context of religious identities in the late nineteenth-century Bengal which shall be discussed in relation to his literary endeavours in the successive sections. Clearly, his association with a high Sanskritic tradition in terms of interpreting indigenous forms of Christianity is seen to have resolved the dialectics of finding a true Indian lineage for Christianity in India.<sup>21</sup>

Upadhyay also finds a place in nationalist histories as a firebrand nationalist. Upadhyay, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Aurobindo Ghose have been accused of frequently using 'religious imagery in their writings and sometimes speaking of the movement as "religion"'.<sup>22</sup> Sumit Sarkar places Brahmabandhab as an A-lister of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal.<sup>23</sup> Credit has also been accorded to his rather polemic political pamphlets with significant omissions of religious politics.<sup>24</sup> It can be argued

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<sup>18</sup> However, it should be noted that all dalit movements in India were not necessarily anti-brahminical in its complete sense. Bergunder finds that some dalit movements that also sought 'subaltern reinterpretation of the Aryan migration theory' in the process staking claims in the Brahminical traditions. Bergunder, Michael. 'Contested Past, Anti-Brahminical and Hindu Nationalist Reconstructions of Indian Prehistory.' *Historiographia Linguistica*, 21. 1 (2004): pp. 59-104; p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> Painadath, Sebastian, and Jacob Parappally, Eds. *A Hindu-Catholic: Brahmabandhab Upadhyay's Significance for Indian Christian Theology: the 30th Annual Meeting of the Indian Theological Association, 21-25 April, 2007, Bangalore*. Asian Trading Corp., 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Teasdale, Wayne and Bede Griffiths. *An Introduction to His Interspiritual Thought*. Woodstock, VT: Skylightpaths, 2003; p. ix. It is important to note that Upadhyay was very conscious of his Brahmin identity and advocated the varna system. See his essay 'Varṇāśramadharmā' (*Upādhyāy* 1987: 30-49).

<sup>21</sup> To cite an example: 'Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya (1861-1907) was the first Indian Catholic to develop a theological synthesis of Christianity and Hinduism. "By using the categories of Indian philosophy, he interpreted the Trinity in terms of the absolute *Brahman*, expressed by *Sat* (being; Father), *Cit* (consciousness; Son) and *Ananda* (beatitude; Holy Spirit). Upadhyaya developed a contextual theology, replacing Thomistic Aristotelian categories with the Indian philosophy.'" Gamberini, S. J. Paolo. 'The Concept of "Person": A Dialogue with Contemporary Asian Theology.' *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 76. 3 (2011): pp. 259-277; p. 262.

<sup>22</sup> Heehs, Peter. 'Revolutionary Terrorism in British Bengal.' Eds. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton, *Terror and the Postcolonial*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010: pp. 153-174; p. 160.

<sup>23</sup> Sarkar, Sumit. *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908*. New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973.

<sup>24</sup> 'The political pamphlet has received little attention from historians, who have chosen instead to concentrate on less ephemeral literary forms. Yet the political pamphlet emerged as an extraordinarily important political force during this period of political flux, when events moved rapidly and different

that the religious and political spheres of an individual could well be insulated categories and need not necessarily influence each other. But as we shall see in the course of our discussion, the religious and the nationalist closely intersected each other in the course of Upadhyay's life. Often to deal with this problem, politics of accommodation took recourse to morality.

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (whom David Kopf has referred to as a 'pioneer revolutionary nationalist') exemplifies the interiorization and growing depth of morality which are inherent in the ascetic's preoccupation with and training of his mental processes. With the development of mysticism in India the focus of attention and importance shifts from external acts and their results to attitudes of mind and character, virtually amounting to a transformation from magic to morality [...] A modern Hindu version of this ideal is exemplified in a patriotic prayer of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (A.D. 1861-1907) 'O Mother! let us be born again and again in India till your chains fall off'.<sup>25</sup>

Gelblum's reading quoted above is reminiscent of the fact that Upadhyay's appropriation in the cult of nationalism comes as the corollary to the crisis of moral continence in the late colonial India. Furthermore, as Ashis Nandy has pointed out, this moral integrity was ensconced in a fiery Hindu rhetoric that was very difficult to escape, in the nationalistic politics of the day.<sup>26</sup>

The rhetoric of the overarching framework of the Hindu militant nationalism could still incorporate the Brahmos (notably Bipin Chandra Pal), but including a Catholic becomes a vexed issue. The only mode of appropriating and resolving the assumed contradiction seems to be his faith in the Vedas (the common point of contact between the Unitarians, Hindu revivalists and the Brahmos). Rabindranath Tagore, who is believed to have modelled his eponymous hero 'Gora' on Upadhyay,

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groups competed among themselves to ascribe meaning to these changes; political pamphlets, which have been described as the "most direct and immediate form that the printed word can take" (Chisick 1993, 150), serve as a critically important source of information regarding contemporary political opinion. The pamphlets, which usually appeared close on the heels of important political events, tell us how different political actors understood and interpreted these events and how they aimed to intervene to influence their course.' Sanyal, Sukla. 'Legitimizing Violence: Seditious Propaganda and Revolutionary Pamphlets in Bengal, 1908–1918.' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 67. 3 (2008): pp. 759- 787, 765.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in W. T. de Bary, and others (comp.), *Sources of Indian tradition*, New York, 1958: pp. 737-8. Gelblum, Tuvia. 'India's philosophies—whose presuppositions?' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 28. 2 (June 1965): pp. 308-318.

<sup>26</sup> 'Beginning with the converts, their old identity is not erased; rather, the new one is overwritten on it. They often undergo much role strain and stress in their new situation, which may show up in unanticipated and critical ways. Conversion may even involve a reorganisation of personality that could be quite radical. New entrants are often marginal persons who represent alternative perspectives on, and a critique of, the old traditions they have left, as well as the new ones to which they commit themselves. This is precisely the complex transition they must negotiate, whether conversion happens in an assimilative or an oppositional context.' Heredia, Rudolf C. 'Interrogations from the Margins: Conversion as Critique.' *History and Sociology of South Asia* 5: 83 (2011): pp. 83-102; p. 88.

confines himself to the meta-paradox and describes him as ‘a Roman Catholic ascetic yet a Vedantin—spirited, fearless, self-denying, learned and uncommonly influential’.<sup>27</sup> Supposed incongruity, featured in Rabindranath’s reading, has since been the preferred evaluative ethics employed to read Brahmabandhab Upadhyay.

Readings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay have also been overshadowed by the perception of antithetical religious identities—given their supposed political affiliations [Hindu—national, Christian—colonial] were not natural allies—yoked together. The construed antimonies result from the understanding of compartmentalized religious identities separated by strict socio-cultural markers. Although such public proclamations of hyphenated identities were rare, I suggest that binaries were not uncommon in an age of intense socio-political upheaval. I use binaries as analytical categories which are not necessarily composed of contradictions. Instead, these binaries operate by continuous processes of identifications and misidentifications (which are incidentally common to all the convert authors).

In the late nineteenth-century religious universalism was attempting to redefine Hindu identity and Upadhyay’s brand of *sannyāsīdom* in this regard becomes an interesting entry point.<sup>28</sup> A careful study of Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore, the three prominent *sannyāsī* figures in colonial Bengal, reveals that the forged continuity (based on the principle of a spiritual universalism) largely muted the possibility of converting to Christianity either as a mark of rebellion (cf. Krishnamohan Banerjea) or as an attempt to begin dialogues on an equal footing with the modern West. Problematically, the monistic tendencies that came to represent a resurgent Hinduism by combining religion with a subterranean national ethos relied heavily on eliminating dissent. As Richard King has pointed out, the ‘central problem of representation of Hindu traditions in the modern world is namely the prevailing Christocentrism’.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Fernando, Leonard and G. Gispert-Sauch. *Two Thousand Years of Faith, Christianity in India*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2004; p. 247.

<sup>28</sup> The unambiguous position of Tagore vis-à-vis nationalism has also found takers in recent criticism. Collins, Michael. *Empire, Nationalism and the Postcolonial World: Rabindranath Tagore’s Writings on History, Politics and Society*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> King, Richard. ‘Colonialism, Hinduism and the Discourse of Religion.’ Bloch, E., Keppens, M. and Hegde, R. Eds. *Rethinking Religion in India: The Colonial Construction of Hinduism*. Series: Routledge South Asian religion series (4). London: Routledge, 2010: pp. 95-113.

The new monistic conceptualizations took recourse to Christocentrism, and in particular, adopted heavily from protestant Christian ethics. Therefore, the space for upper-caste intelligentsia to experiment with religious choices as a mark of social rebellion was effectively usurped by a meta-discourse of a fluid religiosity.<sup>30</sup> This was widely felt in the literature that Bipin Chandra Pal associates with 'New Nationalism' which began to take shape between 1870-1880.<sup>31</sup> The relationship between a Christian *sannyāsī* and his nationalist affiliations was perhaps the introduction of a new resolution of the crisis of faith and multiform monistic identities became part of the emerging trend of protean religiosities.

Baridbaran Ghosh in the introduction to Upadhyay's collection of essays, states that if one was to identify a nationalist ascetic, a guardian of Indian tradition, a thinking national educationist, a dependable freedom fighter, a resilient religious leader and a true litterateur, the obvious choice would be Brahmabandhab.<sup>32</sup> This rather protracted list of attributes leads us to the key phrase that Julius Lipner associates with Upadhyay. In the opening lines of the biography of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Lipner rhetorically identifies him as a 'figure of paradox'<sup>33</sup> who defies any neat 'pigeon-holing':

Upadhyay resists neat pigeon-holing. It is difficult to make sense of him in terms of the disjunctive categories usually employed to interpret the social, religious and political phenomena of nineteenth century India. Was he a Hindu or a Christian? Surely he couldn't be both! Was he a reformer or a revivalist of Hinduism, of Christianity? He was tried for sedition, so was he a political extremist? One of 'us' or one of 'them'?<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Instead of arguing for religion versus modernism it is perhaps safer to take the position that Guichard offers. He says, 'In some instances, religion reinforces nationalism whereas in others it undermines it, but the idea that nationalism could replace religion seems to have lost favour at the same time as theories of modernization. Nowadays, I would rather argue that one strengthens the other. Moreover, I agree with Anthony Smith that all nationalist discourses have a significant religious component as nationalism is based on cultural and historical elements in which the influence of religion is always present.' Guichard, Sylvie. *The Construction of History and Nationalism in India, Textbooks, Controversies and Politics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010; p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> Pal, Bipin Chandra. 'The Birth of Our New Nationalism.' *Memories of My Life and Times*. Calcutta: Bipin Chandra Pal Institute, 1973: pp. 183-200.

<sup>32</sup> (Upādhyāy 1987: i)

<sup>33</sup> It might be unfair to point to Lipner as the only one to have read Brahmabandhab as 'a figure of paradox.' Nicholas Lash, to cite an example, had effectively used paradox as a tool for enquiry. To quote him: 'Before turning there, however, consider this nice nest of paradoxes. In 1902, a Roman Catholic Bengali Brahmin, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, lecturing in England, announced that, because Indians have 'been taught in various ways by English teachers that there is no life of God apart from nature' and that 'God and world make up one organism', therefore 'English education stands as the first and foremost stumbling block' in the way of Christianity's reception in India. Lash, Nicholas. *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Lipner, Julius. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay: The Life and Thought of a Revolutionary*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.

In Julius Lipner's detailed biography, Brahmabandhab is read as a national hero and ascribes the conversions as routes that Upadhyay took to philosophically or spiritually supplement his über masculine nationalist calling.<sup>35</sup> To support his claim, Lipner points to Upadhyay's multiple attempts to join the 'independent' army of the Raja of Gwalior in order to pose a military challenge to the British. The pursuit of the true faith becomes a quest for the true nation-state. There are merits in understanding the paradox against the inescapable discourse of nationalism. Such dyadic relationships between apparent irresolute categories were not uncommon in an age of intense political mobilizations. I shall take up at least two such binaries in the course of my discussion: 'home' and 'bilet', English and the vernacular. I suggest that working with these binaries (not necessarily independent of each other) helped the Hindu-Catholic fashion his narrative legitimacy.

Employing his multiple conversions as a point of entry, we could begin to explore such binaries. His series of conversions, most unfortunately, shifts the emphasis away from the acts of conversion. In a way it de-values these acts of conversion in the larger context of a quest of understanding the destabilized cultural ethos, plagued by multiple crises of faith (cf. Part I Chapter 1). Some like Lynn Zastoupil identified this crisis of faith as a pervasive anathema of the modern Europe that had found resonances in the East in the process of its de-localization.<sup>36</sup> He places Rammohan Roy at the centre of his analysis to trace how 'modern' Britons, in interaction with Roy, found alternative sources to their identity. In other words, switching of religious identities or alternative religion provided a ticket to resolving the identity crises at the face of insurmountable contradictions and conflicts generated by colonization at both ends. Read in these terms, Upadhyay's religious affiliation could be deciphered (in terms of Talal Asad) as one which 'has come to be formed as a concept and practice in the modern West'.<sup>37</sup> So more than spiritual choices, religious identities come to identify a tension between localization and de-localization of religion. In the case of Brahmabandhab, this is set by a series of locations and dislocations as I shall elaborate.

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<sup>35</sup> Taking on from the ideological high-ground of the hermits who abandon all material, personal and social attachments for the service to the nation, the figure of the *sannyāsī* seems to have gained currency in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The most powerful of the representation is in Swami Vivekananda who created an entire network of *sannyāsīs* modelled on the lines of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath* (1882).

<sup>36</sup> Zastoupil, Lynn. 'Defining Christians, Making Britons: Rammohun Roy and the Unitarians.' *Victorian Studies* 44. 2 (2002): pp. 215-243.

<sup>37</sup> Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993; p. 18.

The relationship between home and 'bilet' is a binary that Upadhyay explores in his mother tongue. In this regard, Upadhyay, a Christian-*sannyāsī* who travelled and extensively lectured in England, functions as a localized yet international symbol of self-denial (emblematic of sacrifice). He carefully documented his experiences in Europe which were serialized in the Hindu conservative *Baṅgabāsī* magazine between 1902-03 in three parts as *bilāt-yātri sannyāsīr ciṭhi*, *bilāt-prabāsi sannyāsīr ciṭhi* and *bilāt-pherat sannyāsīr ciṭhi*. The journey to Europe from the subcontinent in the nineteenth century has often been read as a much desired mimetic act on the part of the colonized.<sup>38</sup> In this context the concept and practice of religion as rhetoric of apologetics and of cultural defence needs to be read with caution. This understanding could have been justified if conversion was to be taken as a high point of reflexive action where the point of conversion assumed the prominence of an 'event'. But a sense of constant shifts in terms of belief systems complicates the positions of both the mystic East and its sustained sense of mimicry as a response to the contending religious systems. Upadhyay's triple-conversion in this sense opens the debate of religious accommodation which is divorced from the principles of territorial affiliations. For one, he chooses to convert to Catholicism, abandoning the Anglican Church. Unlike his contemporaries who advocated provincial nationalism, Brahmabandhab for most part of his life travelled throughout India.<sup>39</sup> He began with the endeavour to join the forces of the Gwalior Maharaj and he spent his professional life at Sindh.

Upadhyay's desire to travel across Europe that began with a pilgrimage to the Catholic shrines in Italy is another case in point.<sup>40</sup> Pilgrimages were perhaps the

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<sup>38</sup> Bhabha defines mimicry as an action always in excess: 'The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry, is thus, the sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both "normalized" knowledges and disciplinary powers.' Bhabha, Homi. 'Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse.' October 28 (1984): pp. 125-133.

<sup>39</sup> For a detailed analysis on pluriform nationalisms see, Nag, Sajal. 'Multiplication of Nations? Political Economy of Sub-Nationalism in India.' *Economic and Political Weekly* (1993): pp. 1521-1532.

<sup>40</sup> A significant amount of historical literature suggests that the character and organization of pilgrimages in nineteenth century colonial India had changed concepts of religiosity, spatiality and travel. Madhura Desai notes, '[i]n the mid-nineteenth century the city [Benares] underwent a religious and cultural resurrection as elites from across the subcontinent invested in temples, ritual sites, and charitable institutions. The Brahmin priests wrote guidebooks and created maps to represent the Hindu pilgrimage sites that they painstakingly rediscovered on the basis of medieval Sanskrit texts.' Desai, Madhuri. 'In Search of the Sacred and the Antique of colonial India.' Eds. Rajagopalan, Mrinalini and Madhuri Desai. *Colonial Frames, Nationalist Histories, Imperial Legacies, Architecture and Modernity*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2012: pp. 47-71; p. 57.

earliest and commonest types of travel in India that involved the rich and the poor alike.<sup>41</sup> Nineteenth century brought with itself changing patterns of travels that affected the concepts of pilgrimages as well. The other form of travel particularly familiar during the colonial period was the journey to the colonial metropole (London). With colonial modernity, travel increasingly became a self-conscious act worthy of narration.<sup>42</sup> These travelogues outlined a typical voyage: '[t]he passage to England charted in the texts iterates a set pattern of geographical and spatial movement, from Calcutta to Bombay or Madras, then via Colombo to Aden, through the Suez Canal to Port Said and Alexandria, then on to Malta or Marseilles, Gibraltar, Plymouth, and London'.<sup>43</sup>

Brahmabandhab's tour threatens to combine both the categories of pilgrimage and colonized's journey to the heart of the empire. Despite following the charted route for the most part in Europe, Upadhyay takes a detour to visit Rome, the locus of his pilgrimage. Paradoxically, Upadhyay's Catholic *sannyāsī* persona is traded for a bewildered art enthusiast's gaze when he reaches Rome, as he appreciates creations of the great renaissance masters (Raphael in particular). He couples his admiration of renaissance art in Rome with a critical appreciation of contemporary art in Europe.<sup>44</sup> However, his description of high art and pious symbolism are soon overtaken as he delves into the political conflict between the Pope (as representative) and the Italian king.<sup>45</sup> He disturbs the unsullied image of the Pope to reveal that the papal palatial residence was in fact usurped from the king. Consequently, his pilgrimage displaces the location of the spiritual nucleus of

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<sup>41</sup> Natasha Eaton recommends understanding 'travel capitalism' in terms of 'economy of wonders: '[t]he historiography on eighteenth and nineteenth century Indian travellers' experiences in relation to the sacred is dominated by a concern with déjà vu, not so much a journey into the unknown as confirmation of what was known about or desired from England due to travel capitalism (whose emergence intersected with nineteenth century Indian experimentations with the genre of autobiography and its production of life). For these eighteenth century visitors, I suggest that travel is primarily constructed as an economy of wonders and sacred surrounding intercultural sites encompassing Benaras, Calcutta, Mecca, Baghdad, Constantinople, Paris and London.' Eaton, Natasha. 'Tourism, occupancy and visibility in north India, c. 1750-1858.' Eds. Leibsohn, Dana and Jeanette Favrot Peterson. *Seeing Across Cultures in the Early Modern World*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2012: pp. 213-236; p. 218.

<sup>42</sup> Desai, Madhuri. 'In Search of the Sacred and Antique in Colonial India.' Eds. Mrinalini Rajagopalan and Madhuri Desai. *Colonial Frames, Nationalist Histories: Imperial Legacies, Architecture and Modernity*, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012: pp. 47-72; p. 47.

<sup>43</sup> Gupta, Jayati. 'Modernity and the Global "Hindoo": The Concept of the Grand Tour in Colonial India.' *The Global South* 2. 1 (2008): pp. 59-70; p. 66.

<sup>44</sup> 'āj'kāl iuoper chabi ākibār ḍhaṃ bad'liyā geche. maṅgal'bhāber leś'mātra nāi, kebal ruper chatā ghatā. upāsya mūrti sakaler'o airūp daśā ghaṭiyāche. Upādhyāy, Brahmabāndhab. Ed. Suman Bhaumik, *Brahmabāndhab Upādhyāy, tyāgī jībān, tejī jabān*. Kalikātā: Sutānuṭi Bā'melā, 2011; p. 86.

<sup>45</sup> Poper saṅge ār itālir rājār saṅge ekhan ghor bibād. (Upādhyāy 2011: 87).

Catholicism from Rome. These effects are heightened as the spiritual displacement is reproduced as somatic ramifications. Upadhyay's pilgrimage concludes not with an epiphany or spiritual advancement but almost as an anticlimax, with a backache.<sup>46</sup> I read it as a symbolic image where bearing the load of the Catholic identity on the Hindu becomes untenable in Europe.

Ironically, it is clear that Brahmabandhab's venture into *bilet* was to primarily address his Hindu self.<sup>47</sup> His alterity in Europe was etched in terms of his skin colour, lifestyle, manners and above all his *sannyāsī* persona. Armed with an English education Upadhyay leverages his alterities to frame the superiority of the Hindu way of life over the British. His frequent descriptions as a traveller are punctuated by long discourses on the superior spiritual core of the Hindu jāti.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly enough, the sanctity of his claims lie not in Calcutta but in the eager applause of his British audience.<sup>49</sup>

Consequently, the order of frames in the account of a foreign voyage is doubly displaced. The bewilderment reserved for the colonial megapolis, London (also the seat of Protestant evangelical propaganda), is substituted with Renaissance Catholic Rome. The Christian concept of a pilgrimage is overturned by an elliptical conversation between Hindu religious art and European modern art movements. Upadhyay does not follow either the dictates of an Indian pilgrimage or that of a charted journey through Europe. His pilgrimage to the centre of Catholic Christendom creates the space for several valid interpretations to emerge. Chief among them is unsettling the position of the traveller as a fixed social node. Alteration of referents also allows him to counter the value-loaded images of a *sannyāsī* as an epitome of mortal renunciation. Interestingly, Upadhyay's own contradictory responses to self-control challenge these ideas of a unitary conception of *sannyāsī*. Challenging the self-effacing notion of a *sannyāsī*, he in fact claims that his ascetic lifestyle was an impediment to his travels in Europe.

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<sup>46</sup> Romer debālay dekhār par āmār komarer byāthā atyanta beṛe uṭhila. (Upādhyāy 2011: 87).

<sup>47</sup> Simonti Sen, reads this collection of essays as the colonized elite male's self-assertion in the form of rejection of the Western system as returning the gaze. The subsequent critiques that he offers of the West are read as part of the rhetoric of 'romantic protest that premised itself on the idealization of a close communal living' and therefore, 'travellers' assertions regarding an "Eastern way" always remained as punctuations that tended to fracture but not really negate their overall perception and admiration for the "achieving West". Sen, Simonti. *Travels to Europe: self and other in Bengali Travel Narratives, 1870-1910*. Vol. 9. Orient Blackswan, 2005; p. 178.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, (Upādhyāy 2011: 106, 101, 96, 105).

<sup>49</sup> Chelebelā Kalikātār rāstāy anek duṇo hāt'tāli kheyechi. Tabe bāṅgālī āṛ imreji hāt'tālite anek bhed. (Upādhyāy 2011: 84).

It is most evident in his reactions to sensual pleasures. The physical intimacy of a young couple in public was a sore for his eyes in England.<sup>50</sup> However, this abhorrence for sensual pleasure is contrasted with his repeated hyperbolic craving for Bengali food.<sup>51</sup> As a proclaimed vegetarian, his diet in Europe was limited to boiled potatoes and cauliflower as he continued to crave for spicy curries.<sup>52</sup> At the heart of *bilet*<sup>53</sup> he finds ample sources of worldly attraction, including forbidden meat. He admits that he is extremely attracted to these enchanting displays of food, clothing and technology but is unable to partake of its bounty because of his status as a *sannyāsī*.<sup>54</sup> Amusing as it may sound, his return from *bilet* is marked by the relief he finds in pure Bengali food.<sup>55</sup>

These contradictions in terms of expectations from certain categories, in this case the universalized image of the Indian figure of the monk and his identity as a Catholic lead us to examine these in their specific linguistic context. I suggest that these identifications and misidentifications are possible in Upadhyay's treatment of

<sup>50</sup> Lipner interestingly attributes Upadhyay's distaste for sensuality as an offshoot of his Victorian Catholic morality. He cites Upadhyay's interpretation of mythology as a case in point. To quote Upadhyay: '[t]here are plenty of contradictory and obscene stories of the wildest description regarding Brahma, Vishnu and Siva who make up the Hindu triad [...] The unholy character of the Trimurti [=Triad] is notorious [...] Compare with this medley of fancies the clear and definite teaching of Christianity regarding the Holy Trinity, blessed forever and ever [...] To identify the Holy Trinity with the fanciful Trimurti is to identify light with darkness.' 'Trinity and Trimurti.' *Sophia* (1897). (Quoted in Lipner 1999: 148).

<sup>51</sup> Ei yugal murtir hāb·bhāb· byabahār dekhiyā āmi ta ekebāre āraṣṭa. yubak mājhe mājhe yubatir mukh rumāl diyā muchāiyā diteche—pāche ka'lar kālīmā lāge—kakhān'o bā sūrā ḍhāliyā pān kare—ār kata ye kathā, kata ye bhaṅgimā—barṇanāy kūlaiyā uṭhā dāy. gāribharā bhadrālok. Tāhāra orūp ācaraṅ dekhe bhrukṣep'o karila nā—yena oṭā sacarācar haṅge thāke. Kintu āmār prān'tā hāp·hāp· karitechila. (Upādhyāy 2011: 83).

<sup>52</sup> Yāhā iṃrejer bilāyet· bā deś·deśāntar ghurechi—bideś bale kona kaṣṭa kakhāna anubhab kari nāi. Kintu ebār sannyāsīgiri ghuriye diyeche. Keval ālu- seddha ār kapi- seddha kheye kheye bighni haṅge geche. Mane haṅge deśe chuṭe yāy, āe ek'tā jhāl'jhāl tar'kāri o tētul- cherār ṭak kheye jibh'tāke sāniye ni, ek'tu surā ār māṃsa grahaṅ kar'te ekhān'kār bandhurā khub pīrāpīrī karen kintu āmi rāji nahi! ār ya kari nā kari—āmiṣ, madirā o iṃreji pośāk ekānta paribārjanīya (Upādhyāy 2011: 91).

<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to note that Brahmabandhab was very conscious of the physical space denoted by the term bilāt. Bilāt kathāṭār māne keha keha bodh haṅge jānen nā. bilāyet· śābde pārsīte svadeś bā bāri bujhāy. Yāhā iṃrejer bilāyet bā deś tāhāke ām'rā bilāt· bā bilet bali. Upādhyāy (2011); p. 91. These notions might have been predetermined by the knowledge systems. Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay deliberates upon how textual interventions in the form of literature about Europe reduced the marvellous aspect of the Western Civilization into a case of *déjà vu* for the elite Indians who had travelled to England. The association with England invoked misidentification with a familiar space (which was conceived through ample reading of books from England). Mukhopadhyay, Bhaskar. "Writing home, writing travel: The poetics and politics of dwelling in Bengali modernity." *Comparative studies in society and history* 44. 2 (2002): 293-318.

<sup>54</sup> Mācher dokān sājana dekhile mane haṅge yena rūper bājāre esechi. Mācher dokāne māch sājiye rekheche—yena phuler kātār. Khub niśvās nā tānile gandha pāoyā yāy nā. Ata kathāy kāj ki—baṅga baṅga akhādyā māṃsa emani sājiyeche ye, hindur chele hoṅge du'cār bār najar nā diye thākā muśkil. (Upādhyāy 2011: 92).

<sup>55</sup> In fact food prompts him to write poetry:

Sāj'ne śāk bale āmi sakal śāker helā/ āmār ḍāk paṅge keval ṭānāṭānir belā. (Upādhyāy 2011: 126)

the same in Bengali. His Bengali prose accommodates such contradictions with wry humour. The author here is a participant and a target of the humour itself.<sup>56</sup> This often takes away the spirit from caustic criticisms that he offers. The English language texts however play to the tune of the rational/detached self, where the author reigns supreme. One wonders if it indicates creation of an economy of identities capable of overriding the specific generic expectations from a linguistic culture.

### *Re-inventing the religious everyday*

Upadhyay's rather prolific oeuvre—spread over English, Bengali and Sanskrit—often refuses to be stowed into neat compartments. Nonetheless his linguistic choices to a large measure tend to identify with his political engagements.

His most celebrated hymn in Sanskrit<sup>57</sup> (and translated into English) familiarizes a territory that in its very essence is dislocated. At one level the hymn talks to a Sanskrit literate audience (if we might take the liberty of calling it high culture) and tantalizingly plays to the tune of the Bengal Renaissance. At another level it is intended for the masses. It immediately reminds us of Madhusudan Dutt's attempt to write a Sanskrit hymn commemorating his baptism. Both for Dutt and for Upadhyay, Sanskrit high-culture remains the operative language of religious worship. Here, Upadhyay and Dutt both use Brahmanical paradigms to legitimize their upper-caste stakes in Christianity. However, it is value-added aspect of English language, to borrow Bernard Cohen's term as the language of command, which comes to bolster the claims of Sanskrit.<sup>58</sup> The hymn<sup>59</sup> appears in the monthly *Sophia* (October 1898).

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<sup>56</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj contends that modernity imposed the necessity of historical self-reflection and which was best displayed in humorous traditions of the nineteenth century. Kaviraj, Sudipta. 'Laughter and Subjectivity: The Self-Ironical Tradition of Bengali Literature.' *Modern Asian Studies*, 34, 2 (2000): pp. 379-406.

<sup>57</sup> Pertinent to this discussion is the popularity of 'Church Sanskrit' (to borrow Robert Fox Young's term) in Bengal. Following in the footsteps of a number of inter faith dialogues (mostly Hinduism in relation to Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism etc.) the church in Bengal tapped into a well formed hermeneutic vocabulary in the nineteenth century. Fox Young, Robert. *Resistant Hinduism, Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth-Century India*. Brill: Leiden, 1981; p. 67.

<sup>58</sup> Cohen, Bernard. 'The Command of Language and the Language of Command.' in *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985.

<sup>59</sup> In stark contrast stand the hymns written by Krishna Pal, one of the earliest converts to Christianity in Sreerampore (incidentally converted on the banks of the Ganges December 28· 1800).

To quote the first stanza:

O thou, my soul, forget no more  
The friend who all thy sorrows bore;  
Let every idol be forgot;

I worship [the one who is] Being, Knowledge, Bliss  
 The Highest Goal, whom ascetics yearn for but the wordly dismiss.  
 [Refrain]  
 The Supreme, Ancient, Higher than the high,  
 [who is] Fullness, Wholeness, Beyond yet nigh.  
 The pure threesome, unrelated wisdom, Hard to comprehend.  
 The father, the Impeller, Highest Lord, Unborn,  
 The Seedless Seed of the tree of being.  
 The Universal cause, who a watched-over creation doth end.<sup>60</sup>

Interestingly, the archaic quality of the translation is perhaps deliberate, to render a Sanskritic effect.<sup>61</sup> If Sanskrit comes to legitimise his religious authority, his English and Bengali essays derive their narrative authority from his rather polemical politics. More often than not written simultaneously, his English and Bengali writings differ consistently in both style and content. Interestingly enough, following the journalistic practices of the nineteenth-century, his preferred form in both these languages remain the short essay. I reckon that it is in Bengali that Upadhyay sought to legitimize his Hindu-Catholic identity.

Armed with copious footnotes and terse prose, Upadhyay's short essays in English meet the stylistic expectations of the western academic practices as well as the colonial administrative machinery. To borrow Homi Bhabha's term, his 'forked tongue' is indicative of this complexity of ordering of linguistic spaces by the new Western educated bilingual elite.<sup>62</sup> John Oliver Perry observed that the Indians writing in English psychologically associate the language to be a vehicle of addressing 'the imperial British presence, directly or indirectly, within their own ranks and consciousness as well as outside them'.<sup>63</sup> While most of it can be attributed to the English education that he received, Shefali Chandra highlights that English writing in nineteenth century colonial India initiated 'new constituencies of privilege and desire' and the beneficiaries of the same were the upper-class elite

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But, o my soul, forget Him not.

Quoted in 'Krishna Pal, The First Hindoo Convert.' Ed. Dowling, John. *The Judson Offering Intended as a Token of Christian Sympath with the Living and a Memento of Christian Affection for the Dead*. Lewis and Colby: New York, 1849; p. 51.

<sup>60</sup> Lipner, Julius. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, The Life and Thought of a Revolutionary*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999; p. 201.

<sup>61</sup> Language and religion share an uneasy balance in India. As Rajeshwari B. Pandharipande points out, the vernacular codes of Christianity in India was defined not just by inclusions but by exclusions. In the context of the current discussion this argument could be extended to state how Sanskrit was prioritized over other Islamic variants of high languages. Pandharipande, Rajeshwari V. 'Language of Religion.' Eds. Braj B. Kachru, Yamuna Kachru and S. N. Sridhar. *Language in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: pp. 407-426; p. 409.

<sup>62</sup> Baker, W. "'Gender and Bilingual' Creativity.' *World Englishes*, 20 (2001): pp. 321-339.

<sup>63</sup> Perry, John Oliver. 'Indigenous authorities for Indian English Poetry.' *Journal of South Asian Literature*. 26. 1/2 (1991): pp. 198-228; p. 198.

males.<sup>64</sup> The ordering of these linguistic constituencies, the compulsions of the literary market cannot be ignored.<sup>65</sup>

In sharp contrast to his English pieces, Upadhyay's essays in Bengali prefer the humourous over the serious.<sup>66</sup> The tone and the tenor of the English essays remain formal and detached<sup>67</sup> while the Bengali essays rely on topical references and wit to engage in a dialogue with the intended readers.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, the strategic codification of his Bengali writings as patois remains to be debated as Upadhyay vacillates between the highbrow sanskritised *sadhu bhāṣā* and the more demotic *calit bhāṣā*.

Part I Chapter 1 has outlined that humour has to be understood in relation to normativities. One can well argue that it is a double edged sword that on the one hand might endorse normativity but on the other critique it. It is at these twin levels that we find Upadhyay looking to legitimize his Hindu-Catholic identity. His humour is equally reliant on systemic imperatives like cultural codes (dress, social behaviour, food, etc.) as well as their reflections in linguistic particularities. For instance, he compares spirituality of the Indians with worldliness or materiality of the British. He draws a syllogism between these two variants of life with particular

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<sup>64</sup> Chandra, Shefali. 'Mimicry, Masculinity, and the Mystique of Indian English: Western India 1870-1900.' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 68. 1 (2009): pp. 199-225.

<sup>65</sup> Francesca Orsini in the context of north India proposes a conflation model for looking at multilingual literary spaces. Orsini, Francesca. 'How to do multilingual literary history? Lessons from fifteenth-and sixteenth-century north India.' *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 49. 2 (2012): pp. 225-246.

<sup>66</sup> 'Why has not modern India produced original thinkers? Because of our foreign way of thinking. It is said, "never write poems or cut jokes in a foreign tongue". [...] whether it be the domain of religion or of politics or of literature we think as Europeans and write or speak like Indians.' (Upadhyay 2002: 111).

<sup>67</sup> Interestingly enough, around the same time in Britain, the native babus were criticized for their mock serious tone. One of the particularly popular examples is the satire by F. Antsey, *Baboo Jabberjee*, B. A. To quote from the introductory letter from Baboo Jabberjee to the honourable Punch, '[s]ince my sojourn here, I have accomplished the laborious perusal of your transcendent and tip-top periodical, and, hoity toity! I am like a duck in thunder with admiring wonderment at the drollishness and jocosity with which your paper is ready to burst in its pictorial department. But, alack! when I turn my critical attention to the literary contents, I am met with a lamentable deficiency and no great shakes, for I note there the fly in the ointment and *hiatus valde deflendus*—to wit the utter absenteeism of a correct and classical style in English composition.' Antsey, F. *Baboo Jabberjee*, B. A. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1897.

<sup>68</sup> Uma Kalpagam contends that much of the formality regarding the use of the English language derived from the fact that English was the language of governance. Kalpagam, Uma. 'Colonial Governmentality and the Public Sphere in India.' *Journal of Historical Sociology* 15. 1 (2002): pp. 35-58.

cultural practices: the Indians eat on a banana leaf and the British on the table but merely putting a banana leaf on a table is irrational.<sup>69</sup>

Often repetitions offer a sonorous tone (which fiercely resists attempts at translation) that immediately signals a non-serious attitude (this technique has been popular with the satirists of the day). Humour also emerges as a language of collective entitlement. Having said that Brahmabandhab sought to create semantic entitlements, a clarification is in order. Brahmabandhab's Bengali texts are not entirely closed to the English language. On the contrary, his Bengali terminologies are frequently accompanied by their translation in parentheses. In particular, he translates words that he has borrowed from the West, for example, *Baināsikerā* (Nihilist), *sāmājīk sām̄yabādīrā* (socialist), thereby consciously drawing equivalences. He frequently takes turns to include the English names of places as well, *sujejer* (Suez), *jenojā* (Genoa) but does not take the trouble of providing the Roman lettered version of Indian cities such as *bumbai*. In this connection, it is intriguing to note that he also translated terms which might not have emerged in the colonial era like; *hindur āstikyātattva* (Hindu Theism), *hindur naitik'tattva* (Hindu ethics), *hindur samāj'tattva* (Hindu sociology), etc.<sup>70</sup> Apart from these translations, it is interesting to note that in his Bengali writings, Brahmabandhab habitually uses the terms *Hindu jāti* (Hindu race) and *Hindu dharma* (Hindu religion).<sup>71</sup> Similarly, the copious quotations from Sanskrit are accompanied by their respective explanations and commentaries in Bengali. Both in form and content his Bengali texts are inherently heteroglossic, speaking simultaneously in different voices.

If we are to believe Ramachandra Guha, insistence on writing in different tones in Bengali and English also came from the sharp distinction that Upadhyay's contemporaries such as Tagore made between political statements and emotional

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<sup>69</sup> Hindurā īśvar'parāyaṇ, ār mlechharā saṁsār'bhakta; yadi purnatā lābh karite cāo, tabe īśvar o saṁsār, dui samān mātrāy bajāy rākha. Ām'rā kadalīpātre bhojan kari, ār sāheberā ṭebile khāy; esa ām'rā ṭebile kalāpātā bichāyā khāi. (Upādhyāy 2011: 141).

<sup>70</sup> To highlight a possible interpretation for this, we might like to turn to an article published in the *Asiatic Journal*, which suggested that there was indeed a scientific vocabulary of the West which could be mechanically reproduced without props. 'The nations of Europe form one great family; they have essentially the same religion, the same laws, the same institutions, and, to a very great extent, the same feelings and notions. The products of nature and art are much the same in all of them, or are equally familiar to all, in consequence of perpetual interchange; their language spring from one or two common sources, and their scientific language is a universal tongue.' 'Ram Comul Sen's Bengali Dictionary.' *Asiatic Journal*, 16. 64 (1835): pp. 221-236; p. 226.

<sup>71</sup> Research has suggested that both the terms of dharma and *jāti* were still in the process of finding their semantic anchor. For example, see Robb, Peter. 'Introduction: South Asia and the Concept of Race.' Ed. Peter Robb. *The Concept of Race in South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995: pp. 1-76.

engagements.<sup>72</sup> Upadhyay's personal correspondence in English, even as he appreciated Tagore's Bengali poetry, might serve as a case in point.<sup>73</sup> To use Guha's term, the colonial linguidextrous elite in fact invoked a different vocabulary when they spoke in these languages and these<sup>74</sup> specifically implicated the reader.<sup>75</sup>

Upadhyay's Bengali prose draws its humour from a mock-serious tone peppered with proverbial usages and puns.<sup>76</sup> Interestingly enough, Upadhyay is extremely self-reflexive about the politics of linguistic ordering. He avoids prevaricated prose for a direct topical humour which is at once self-referential. In his travelogue, Upadhyay stresses on the oddity pertaining to his subject position. In the opening sentence he proclaims that he is an English-educated *sannyāsī*.<sup>77</sup> In the same breath he takes a dig at the other *sannyāsīs*, armed with their orotund prose who travelled to the West, in search of an eager applause.<sup>78</sup> A prototypical *sannyāsī*

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<sup>72</sup> 'As for Tagore, this man who shaped and reshaped the Bengali language through his novels and poems, made sure that his most important works of non-fiction were available in English. His major political testament, *Nationalism*, was based on lectures he wrote and delivered in English. His important and still relevant essays on relations between east and west were either written in English or translated by a colleague under his supervision. Tagore understood that while love and humiliation at the personal or familial level were best expressed in the mother tongue, impersonal questions of reason and justice had to be communicated in a language read by more people and over a greater geographical space than Bengali.' Guha, Ramachandra. 'The Rise and Fall of the Bilingual Intellectual.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44. 33 (2009): pp. 36-42; p. 37. By writing in English as well as their mother tongue, Gandhi and Tagore were serving society as well as themselves. They reached out to varied audiences—and, by listening to their views, broadened the bases of their own thought.

<sup>73</sup> (Upadhyay 2002: 480).

<sup>74</sup> Scrase, T. 'The Hegemony of English in India.' *Asia Examined: Proceedings of the 15th Biennial Conference of the ASAA*, 2004: pp. 1-19.

<sup>75</sup> Spivak elaborates on the problems of readership in the colonial/post-colonial world as a part of the problem of representation. To quote her: 'The figure of the implied reader is constructed within a consolidated system of cultural representation. The appropriate culture in this context is the one supposedly indigenous to the literature under consideration. In our case, a vague space called Britain, even England, in its transaction with Europeaness (meaning, of course, Western Europe), Hellenism and Hebraism, the advent of Euroamericanism, the trendiness of commonwealth literature, and the like, our ideal student of British Literature must so internalize this play of cultural self-representation that she can, to use the most naive kind of literary pedagogy, "relate to the text", "identify with it", etc.' Spivak, Gayatri Chakraborty. 'The Burden of English.' Eds. Carol Appadurai Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer. *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993: pp. 134-157; p. 135.

<sup>76</sup> He borrows humorous titles from proverbs such as 'de kālībārī ekśa pāṭhā', 'kon kale nāī mansāpūja, ekebāre daśabhujā' to cite a few examples. J.C. Dutt reviews the collection of proverbs by the missionary James Long and supplements it with his own to suggest that proverbs could be mined not only to yield historical 'truths' but also could be used to connect the urban with the pristine 'rural'. Dutt, J.C. 'Bengali Proverbs.' *The Bengal Magazine*, Vol.I, 1884.: pp. 24-34.

<sup>77</sup> Notwithstanding his self-reflexive humour, it is important to note that the native Christians themselves were often not comfortable with the idea of a Christian *sannyāsī*. A satirical piece by the native Christians had noted: 'Throw away all your clothes, put on a bit of rag called "kaupin" round your waist, rub every part of your body with ashes, cast a tiger-skin on your shoulder, take a pair of tongs in one hand, and a dried pumpkin in the other, and you get yourself rigged out as an orientalist missionary of the Bosphorus Mission.' 'Dialogues of the Times'. *The Bengal Magazine*, Vol. X: pp. 72-75; p. 75.

<sup>78</sup> Given his proximity to Vivekananda, the most famous *sannyāsī* export to the West, one can hazard a guess that this description might be directed at him. Āj'kāl anekānek sannyāsī bilāte giye śāstrer

bound for the West has his head, moustache and beard shaved, turban (*pāgarī*) and a gown fashioned out of pure silk (*reśam*), foreign made boots, holding a pipe and a walking stick, with a Portman Gladstone bag, strapped foreign blanket and bedding and bag containing money strung around the neck. In a form of deeply introspective humour he confesses that he had tried to ape all the above but due to acute lack of funds couldn't manage any.<sup>79</sup> Expatriate Indians, visitors, the British and the author himself function as targets for the narratorial figure. The narrator is a keen observer who scrutinizes and is reluctant to ground his subject position in a discursive singularity and the common man as a reader both laugh with the narrator and at the narrator.

Interestingly enough, the most serious of his projects, the nationalist movement, does not escape the Upadhyay's humour. Although, his understanding of nationalism was not bound by linguistic identifiers (as evident from his English prose), the complexity of his politico-religious position is located in the intellectual flux of Bengal (indicated by his Bengali prose). He recollects his juvenile (mis)adventure to join an armed struggle against the British, which he suitably terms as his India rescue project (*āmār bhārat uddhār*)<sup>80</sup>.

Rather than focussing on momentous events, Upadhyay draws humour from quotidian practices. His often-incendiary prose accords significance to the mundane, thereby making a crucial political choice. Using everyday life as the point of departure, Upadhyay, as Michel de Certeau puts it, merges the particular with the universal where 'everyman' is both a participant and an actor of the knowledge produced.<sup>81</sup> In contrast to the significant break that a conversion invites, the comfortable humdrum of the religious everyday secures the benefit of posing as an

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buk-ni-miśāna-baktṛtā kāre khub hāt'tāli khāy. Āmār'o ek'din śakh hala je bilāter hāt'tāli khābo. (Upādhyāy 2011: 79).

<sup>79</sup> Āmi ai rakam katak'tā dham dharilām—kebal paisār abhābe reśam'tā juṭilā nā [...] Hāy re—āmār kebal imreji paṛāi sār. (Upādhyāy 2011: 79).

<sup>80</sup> (Upādhyāy 2011: 168).

<sup>81</sup> Michel de Certeau in the context of the significance of the play 'Everyman' in the human history says: 'Rather than being merely represented in it, the ordinary man acts out the text itself, in and by the text, and in addition he makes plausible the universal character of the particular place in which the mad discourse of a knowing wisdom is pronounced. He is both the nightmare or philosophical dream of humanist irony and an apparent referentiality (a common history) that make credible a writing that turns "everyone" into the teller of his ridiculous misfortune. But when the elitist writing uses the "vulgar" speaker as a disguise for a metalanguage about itself, it also allows us to see what dislodges it from its privilege and draws it outside of itself: an Other who is no longer God or the muse, but anonymous.' de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Stephen Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; p. 2.

unvarying continuum. Interestingly enough, the everyday of Bengal is religious as opposed to the rather a-religious everyday of his British travelogue. Even as he meticulously documents the quotidian practices of the British including cooking, cleaning, going for walks, sewing, etc., Christian religious practices rarely find any mention. Apart from the visit to the residence of Cardinal Newman, the proponent of the Oxford Movement (Anglo-Catholicism of the early nineteenth century), and the casual mention of the male students of the Oxford University going to the church at eight, Upadhyay rarely refers to the religious life of the English.<sup>82</sup> On the contrary, he highlights the materiality of the British life in great detail.<sup>83</sup>

In line with Upadhyay's interest in the ordinary, published as *Bāṃlār pāl-pārbaṇ*, in the magazine *Sandhyā*, these essays sets to outline his take on the religious everyday of the Bengalis.<sup>84</sup> Upadhyay, while challenging the colonial inputs about the Indian religious everyday, sets to reclaim and re-order the spaces of a religious everyday.<sup>85</sup> Quite unlike the expectations one might have from an ascetic Vedantin, he resurrects and in the process legitimizes the ritualistic practices of the Bengalis.<sup>86</sup> In the process, he does not merely focus on what we might call as a popular religion<sup>87</sup> (often understood as elitist stereotyping) but pitches his argument of

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<sup>82</sup> (Upādhyāy 2011: 103, 98).

<sup>83</sup> Upadhyay was particularly concerned 'that India should not be led away by the glitter of material civilization attained in the West to think that it is the highest and most worthy of human endeavor.' (Upadhyay 2002: 71).

<sup>84</sup> Ghōṣ notes that the essays were initially published in *Sandhyā* but later republished posthumously as a collection in 1925 (Upādhyāy 1987: xii).

<sup>85</sup> In an essay published in the *Monthly Sophia* in 1898, Upadhyay locates his Hindu self firmly in the customs and manners. In his words, '[b]y birth we are Hindu and shall remain Hindu till death. [...] In customs and manners, in observing caste or social distinctions, in eating and drinking, in our life and living we are genuine Hindus'. (Upadhyay 1991: 24). Even as he promotes the religious everyday, he decries idol-worship. (Upadhyay 2002: 32).

<sup>86</sup> In this regard it would be interesting to note that Brahmabandhab was following the legacy of his uncle Kalicaran Banerjee. Nistarini Debi had noted: '[n]o one in the family disregarded him because he was a Christian; rather when formal respect was to be shown this fact would be ignored. Kalicaran laid to rest the view that by becoming a Christian one separates from one's Hindu kin so decisively that later the missionaries found it very easy to make Christians. He would observe the customs of Bhaiphota and Jamai-sasthi; during Saraswati Puja he would do worship to his books, he regarded his mother as a deity.' (Quoted in Lipner 1999: 38).

<sup>87</sup> Sumanta Banerjee defines popular religion as 'a product of a collective rationality which developed primarily from and within the rural community's consciousness, often independent of the ecclesiastical codified scriptures of the learned clergy. The tribal gods and religious rituals, animistic beliefs and practices predate the birth of organized religions. Similarly, Indian rural communities (as well as urban, in certain circumstances) gave birth to local godlings who were far removed from the deities worshipped in the Vedas or the Upanishads.' Banerjee, Sumanta. *Logic in a Popular Form, Essays on Popular Religion in Bengal*. Calcutta: Seagull, 2002; p. 3.

containment and appropriation against an array of both mass and elite (brahmanic)<sup>88</sup> religious practices.<sup>89</sup>

As opposed to opulent festivals like the Durga Puja which were altering the bhadrakalok conceptions of class and identity in colonial Calcutta,<sup>90</sup> he focusses on *pāl-pārbaṇ* which has a humble parentage and yet a long unbroken history. For the title, he draws from a proverbial saying that the Bengalis have thirteen celebrations for twelve months.<sup>91</sup> So celebrations such as the ones indicated by the title at once were special yet mundane but never value-neutral. As a deliberate presentation, the range and scope of these festivals remain eclectic: from the Vedic (*Śiv Catur'daśī*), Purāṇic (*kojāgari lakṣmī pūjā*), localized cults (*itu pūjā*), to the worship of the nation that he calls *udbodhan*.

In much of his prose, the anglicised bhadrakalok functions both as his intended reader as well as the locus of his caustic humour. In this collection in particular, he targets the English educated civilized babus (*sabhya bābu*) who seem to think that Hindu festivals are meant only for the lecherous fools (*lampat*) or the prostitutes (*gaṇikā*).<sup>92</sup> Ironically, like his fellow elite upper-caste converts, Upadhyay was privy to the same western education as the civilized babus. In fact, in his travelogue he

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<sup>88</sup> Saswati Sengupta's interpretations of the terms *laukik* and *śāstric* is particularly useful in understanding the complexities of religious practices of colonial Bengal. To quote her, 'In the Hindu context, the two terms which are used to differentiate the domains of culture, tradition, and religion are the *laukika* and the *śāstrik*. In societies where the lower castes and women are denied the right to "high" culture and religion, the *laukika* traditions allow their participation in rituals with narratives in vernacular while the *śāstrik* is associated with the privileges of the upper caste male as sanctioned by the Brāhmaṇ with rituals and narratives in the exclusive Sanskrit language. The terms *laukik* and *śāstrik* cannot however be simply translated into English as "The Popular/Folk" and "The Canon". The *śāstrik* can be the popular as in the case of the *Mahāśivāratri vrata* and the *laukika* may be limited to a specific social group such as the *bratas* of *Dharam* in parts of Bengal. Moreover the marks and rituals of a *śāstrik* culture are often adopted by "low" Hindu castes, tribal, or other groups who change their way of life in the directions of a high caste. But if the *śāstrik* is popularised as it facilitates caste mobility then the *laukika* is also given *śāstrik* sanction within the culture for politic amalgamation as the entire body of *Purāṇas* and *Upapurāṇas* testify. Thus the *śāstrik* today may have had the *laukika* as its original impulse. The terms *laukika* and *śāstrik* then do not refer to hermetically sealed activities. They are not always available as simple oppositions but as, 'a continuum of forms, the endpoints of which may look like terms in opposition.' The trafficking between the *śāstrik* and the *laukika* realms is always a mark of the politics of the period.' Sengupta, Saswati. 'Ṣaṣṭhī: Between the Forest and the Lying-in-Chamber: The Formation of a Goddess.' *The Journal of Hindu Studies*. 3. 2 (2010): pp. 216-237, 217.

<sup>89</sup> For complexities that define Brahmanic practices in colonial Bengal see: Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. *Caste, Culture, Hegemony, Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004; p. 81.

<sup>90</sup> Bhattacharya, Tithi. "Tracking the goddess: religion, community, and identity in the Durga Puja ceremonies of nineteenth-century Calcutta." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 66.04 (2007): 919-962.

<sup>91</sup> For an engaging discussion on the re-orientation of class and community identities with the popularity of Durga Puja festivities in Bengal see, Bhattacharya, Tithi. "Tracking the goddess: religion, community, and identity in the Durga Puja ceremonies of nineteenth-century Calcutta." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 66.04 (2007): 919-962.

<sup>92</sup> (Upādhyāy 2011: 183).

delights at startling the English memsahibs with his fluent English speech.<sup>93</sup> Crucially, Upadhyay misidentifies with the anglicised bhadrak, his internal other, to unsettle the easy covalence between Christianity and western modernity. Drawing legitimacy from terrine religiosities he frames his brand of nationalism so as to claim his narrative authority, as I shall elaborate.

The Bengali festivals of Upadhyay's interest are placed in contradistinction to the newfound Englishized (*imreji bhābe ut-sab*) festivals of the bhadrak. Opposed to the rather uncouth and overcrowded *melā* with the promises of humble fried lentil cakes (*telebhājā pāpar, kacuri*) the festivals of the westernized elite are characterized by lectures followed by eager applause. The express purpose is to counter the amnesia due to western education (*bideśī bidyā*) and re-introduce these Hindu festivities as part of the integrating nationalistic ethos. However, this unifying religiosity is also in opposition to the west-influenced socialism (*bilāti samājtantra*).<sup>94</sup>

Both in terms of space and rich descriptions, Krishna, by far outweighs any other deity in Upadhyay's homegrown religious universe. With the dissenters in India and the Europeans alike, Krishna with his innumerable consorts was one of the most difficult gods to be accepted as morally secure. Krishna Mohan Banerjea among others has constantly spoken about the depravity of the Hindu Gods and in particular Krishna.<sup>95</sup> However, Upadhyay had already defended Krishna against his missionary and neo-Hindu detractors, in particular to charges of ahistoricity and immorality. In an essay *Śrīkrīṣṇatattva* read at the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *sāhitya sabhā*, Upadhyay successfully resurrected Krishna as a historical figure and the prime mover of the nation.

Upadhyay opens the discussion with the birthday celebration of Krishna. Subsequently, he proposes a huge generalization that all manner of ritualistic interactions in the society is dictated by the Bengali's incipient reverence and belief in Krishna. He consequently accords centrality to Krishna in terms of making India

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<sup>93</sup> Āmi phar· phar· kare imreji kathā kahitechi dekhe mem-sāheberā ekebāre abāk. (Upādhyāy 2011: 103).

<sup>94</sup> (Upādhyāy 2011: 183)

<sup>95</sup> At an essay (*Śrīkrīṣṇatattva*) read at the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *sāhitya sabhā*, he vociferously defended Krishna against his detractors, in particular to charges of ahistoricity and amorality. (Upādhyāy 1987: 73-96).

a holy land.<sup>96</sup> He continues in the same vein to outline that the only possibility of escaping the current status as an inferior race is to surrender to the power of Krishna. He further claims that the historic status of the Hindu race is derived from the feet of Krishna, and hence it is logical to bestow faith in him as the redeemer of the race.<sup>97</sup> Equating worship of Krishna to the service of the nation, in *Snān-yātrā* and *Dōl-līla*, he focuses on the aspect of complete surrender to the god in the ultimate achievement of Bhakti.<sup>98</sup>

With *Śiv Catur'daśī* he goes back to the question of what constitutes a festival. He commences the discussion with a basic question, as to whether the Vedas contain the worship of Shiva.<sup>99</sup> With these essays he firmly establishes that the legitimacy of the real *pūjā* lies with the worship ordained in the Vedas. He also vacillates between what constitutes true religious practices capable of worthy mention as he takes up fairly localized pujas such as the *kojāgari lakṣmī pūjā*, *itu pūjā*, the harvest festival *nabanna*, as cases in point. He squarely blames the English education to have spoilt the educated man's desire to pursue simple pleasures of life like enjoying the *rath yātrā*.<sup>100</sup> These ritualistic practices have been replaced by modern pleasures like watching football, cricket, theatre and that these everyday festivities have been relegated to the realm of the uncultured lot or the *choṭalok* (the conceptual opposite of *bhadralok*).<sup>101</sup> At the very end he urges the readers with *choṭa man* (inferior heart) and *choṭa buddhi* (inferior mind) to follow his footsteps and leave this baggage of Western education behind to partake in the festivity which is

<sup>96</sup> Hindur jībanta, bahanta itihās tāhār'i śricaraṇ haite udbhūta haiyāche. Tāhār'i śikṣā tāhār'i dharma tāhār'i ādarśa hindur jñān o sabhyatā kramabikāśita kariyā bhārat'ke puṇyabhūmi kariyā tūliyāche. Bāmlār pāl-pārbaṇ, (Upādhyāy 2011: 177).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 178. In a letter written to Khemchand in July 1904, Upadhyay blames the spurious Vaishnava cults to have sullied the image of Krishna. (Upadhyay 2002: 545).

<sup>98</sup> One might be tempted to note that Bankim even as he tried to historicize Krishna, found the Hindu festivals wanting in terms of historicity and instead termed it as 'superstition': 'In the whole range of Hindu festivals, I have been unable to trace any to a historical origin. Indeed, historical festivals can scarcely be expected to be found among a nation devoid of historical associations. Whatever that may be, it is my belief that most of the festivals and usages connected with them, at all events all the older festivals, had in their origin no necessary connection with religion, and their present religious character is owing to later Puranic superstition.' Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra. *Essays and Letters*. Eds. Brajendranath Banerji and Sajani Kanta Das. Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1940; p. 8-9.

<sup>99</sup> ye pūjā bedete nāi —se pūjā pūjāi na. bedete ki śib pūjā āche? bede yadi kōna pūjā thāke to śib pūjāi āche. (Upādhyāy 2011: 179).

<sup>100</sup> Such judgemental criticism held on the moral superiority of the colonized Indian race of superior civilizational ethos was common in the travelogues of the late nineteenth century. For example, see Behramji M. Malabari, *The Indian Eye on English Life; or, Rambles of a Pilgrim Reformer* (Archibald Constable and Company, Westminster, 1893); p. 188.

<sup>101</sup> Imrāji pariya ki bipad'i haiyāche. Ekhan ār rath-dōl bhālo lāge nā. phuṭ'bal byāt'bal thiyeṭār—ei sab bhālo lāge, ār pāl-pārbaṇ sab aśikṣita chōṭalōker kāṇḍa baliyā bodh hay. (Upādhyāy 2011: 183).

symbolic of the order of life at large. This contradiction between what is understood as high culture as derived from the Vedas and the culture of the everyday religious practices of the Hindus is evident in his essays and is dealt with abundant doses of humour which makes his take on the same unclear.

Among these otherwise religious festivities he includes an unlikely candidate *jāmāi ṣaṣṭī*. The essay commences on a humorous note by the author lamenting about his apparent disposition as being unable to join the community of the well-endowed *jāmāis* or the sons-in-law. Greying of his hair, the loss of a number of his teeth and his sunken cheeks are possible reasons for his inability to qualify as a potential son-in-law.<sup>102</sup> However odd these festivities may appear, they seem to contain qualities of uniting a race. Celebrating these festivals, Vedic or otherwise, makes apparent the underlying unifying agencies of the community that is the Hindu *jāti*.

Upadhyay brings these festivities together to legitimise his larger project of construing an autochthonous national festival. With Sri Krishna leading the way (*sārthī*), the Bengali brother is urged to come out of his internal inertia (*cirakāler jaratā*) even as *baṅgalakṣmī* and the localized gods (*grāmyadebatā*) are persuaded to respond to the call of mother India. The closure comes with the call of *bande mātaram*.

The reader must be reminded that Upadhyay used the terms Hindu *jāti* and Hindu *dharma* interchangeably, adding a semantic complexity to the debate.<sup>103</sup> The subjects of the essays are carefully chosen and range from Vedic ritualistic practices to Purāṇic heroes and festivities—that have largely been rejected as signs of moral bankruptcy—to much localized rituals bearing little allegiance to the Hindu pantheon. Upadhyay grants legitimacy, within the larger frame of nationalism, to all these practices, thereby creating the possibility of a cultural ethos distinct from both the Hindu purists and the Christian missionaries. Quite unlike the native Christian missionary Lal Behari Day's efforts at domesticating Christianity at the level of the cultural subconscious, Upadhyay's attempt hinges on difference rather than naturalization. The importance of the rituals as forms of Bengali cultural practice is advocated as supplementary to the Christian belief and is established in

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<sup>102</sup> (Upādhyāy 2011: 179).

<sup>103</sup> In particular in his Bengali essays, The Determination of the Hindu jati (*Hindu jātir ekaniṣṭhatā*) and the proverbial 'Three Enemies' (*Tin Śatru*)

contradistinction to the colonial modernity's movement away from it. He also draws his narrative legitimacy from a point of religious authority (in this case embodied in the figure of the *sannyāsi*). This twin approach ensures that Upadhyay's brand of Hindu-Catholicism works at the syncretic level of the high couture Sanskrit culture without forgetting its ritualistic roots. The Bengali and the English writings of the author introduces two separate facets of understating religion and politics and variegated identity marked by class and caste if not gender at the very least. For, of course, the oppositions and overlaps between the varied linguistic communities secure Upadhyay's narrative legitimacy.

## Concluding Remarks

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Christianity in Bengal has been habitually read as an external stimulus<sup>1</sup> which fostered the Bengal Renaissance, but ironically had negligible contribution in the internal struggles of the colonial public. Moreover, for reasons that are woven into the fabric of India's historical experience, Christianity's association with the colonial powers (often in the form of the civilizing mission) made easy associations with the nationalistic overtures untenable. As the introduction outlines, recent studies have documented that reading into the disparate realms of the Indian colonial and the Indian anticolonial in a pluralistic society like India has been trying. To this end, the literary production of the Hindu upper caste converts to Christianity, offering unique subject positions, might serve as a crucial case in point. The complicated socio-political location of the Christian converts—ostracized socially by the Hindu majority but privileged in terms of education and class/caste—in an age of political turmoil and vigorous social reform allows a unique entry point into the literary culture of colonial Bengal. The subject position of the converts was further complicated by a paradox: although Christianity occupied a meta-discursive space, (given the association with the colonizing powers and a close relationship with the Western education system) it failed to convert a significant part of the population.

The mandate of this dissertation to study Christian converts as a corpus given the nature of their narrative compass has produced distinct challenges and rewards. The major challenge was to attempt to decode the historical context that promotes an easy correspondence between colonial modernity and Christianity on a modest scale. During the nineteenth century, responses to these associations ranged from being zealous to critical (from the Hindu conservatives to the secular atheists), depending on the socio-economic and religious positioning of the respondents.

The particular focus on the upper caste converts to Christianity is not dictated by a particular bias against the other converts from Islam, Buddhism, etc.<sup>2</sup> The spotlight was simply aimed at the established figures in the literary canon so as

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson gives a useful overview of the range of critical opinion that read Christianity as an external stimulus for the Bengal Renaissance. Robinson, Bob. *Christians Meeting Hindus: An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India*. Nottingham: Regnum Books, 2004: pp. 1-11.

<sup>2</sup> Chowdhury expresses concern over the absence of Muslim or Christian intellectuals in the ideological foment of the nineteenth century Bengal. Chowdhury, D.A. 'The Mohammedans of Bengal.' *The Muslim World*. Vol. 15. 2, 1925: pp. 135-139.

to expose the limitations of the same. The authors pertaining to this study were part of the group of fiery Bengali men (with the exception of a few women) who enthusiastically took to Western education. The selection of the authors displays an immediate gender bias (normatively male, elite,) which deserves a clarification. Hindu women were barred from public education in general, hence their literary prominence is a much later development. Women who received education in the nineteenth century principally came from Brahmo and Christian households, but their numbers were still negligible. In the dissertation, this skewed demographic representation is evident in the proportions of male and female authors discussed. Incidentally, the upper caste conversions also highlight the upper caste intelligentsia's desire to articulate their religio-social dissent. Nineteenth-century Bengal's rhetoric of social reform made differentiating between social and religious dissent extremely tricky. Since the colonial rule, religion has been effectively used as a category of social identification. This study has further argued that the upper-caste converts' expression of dissent within the rubric of colonial modernity can be read beyond the indices of the sociological to include the performative: where the text performs to the claims of contending narratives.

To compound its difference from other modes of nationalistic articulations, the Christian convert literature lacked a notion of a pure undivided origin. Hindu mythology acted as a key agent in cementing the claims to narrativity of this corpus of texts. The vital uses of mythology in altered frames of references correspond to the religious, cultural, political and the social registers. Hence, the subterranean narrativities corresponding to a religious axis, in this case Christian, contribute to the composite understanding of the language of dissent. In this context, colonial bilingualism has been used as a running theme throughout the dissertation to study significant overlaps and related exclusions. It resulted in addressing not only sources of conflict (colonial vs anti-colonial, missionaries vs Hindu conservatives) but also initiated reading religio-social dissent as a conceptual unit. This unit could be potentially replicated to attend to both internal and external struggles. An outcome of this exercise was to find new narrative engagements as was the case with re-inventing autochthonous narrative traditions: the reformulation of folk tales, epics, mock epics, essays and legends.

The literary produce of the Christian converts can be seen as an engagement with three important political vectors of the nineteenth century: literature,

mythology and history. The amenable nature of these concepts was simultaneously related to the larger narrative of modernity. Conversion to Christianity was seen as a ticket to modernity by most converts, except, this posed a serious problem of belonging in modernity/ modernities. Ostracized by the Hindu intelligentsia and slighted by the European as colonized, the converts were faced with a crisis of entitlement. I contend that Hindu mythology, a fundamentally absolute space — with its premium on an ambivalence of time (both as timeless and within time) and a literary textuality (combining both political and aesthetic features)—was the perfect cipher of modernity for the Christian neophytes. Even in the context of modern textualities, Hindu mythology carried sacral practices as residue, which in turn catalyzed the production of a language of religio-political dissent unique to the Christian converts. As discussed in Part I Chapter 3, the Christian convert authors came from a problematic subject position. As recently indoctrinated Western modern affiliates, they were keen to belong to a larger Christian modernity. However, none of them ever abandoned their caste location or nationalist aspirations. Therefore, their participation in the intellectual scene in the nineteenth century involved multiple levels of belonging and un-belonging in modernities. The most evident contribution of this corpus of writing was to institute the authorial figure as participant-observer to negotiate problems of entitlement.

New sets of idioms of religious dissent were one of the immediate outcomes of these narratives. Christianity in Bengal both in terms of material and aesthetics, produced a distinct textual culture. Fuelled by missionary presses in the first half of the century and missionary education in the second half, Christian ethics and symbolism became a tactile presence in the intellectual currency of colonial Bengal. It was manifested in terms of comparative theology as much as comparative aesthetics, where Christianity was confused with Western modernity. These new religious idioms were not limited to the rhetoric forwarded by the agents of Christian enterprises, but importantly generated idioms of aberration as a response from the indigenous Hindu upper-caste intellectual class. The interactions of these typologies found repercussions in conceptual, social and political practices.

Conversions in this context of political praxis often took the form of social rebellion against the Hindu orthodoxy. Christianity as a religious option began to take shape as the alternative 'Other' with the Brahmo faith as the go-between in the wake of missionary propaganda in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Conversion, argued to be a private or individual act of sincere change of faith by the missionaries, was for the high-caste converts a ticket to political mobilization. As we have discussed earlier, Krishna Mohan Banerjea's highly publicized conversion is a case in point. The missionaries also advocated a marriage of politics and social mobility but to the end that Hindu orthodoxy would be replaced by the Christian faith. There were incessant debates about the current state of the Hindu religion that had failed to catapult the Indians to modernity. As has been argued by several theorists, in the early nineteenth century, *satī* came to be the defining moment for the Hindu religion in the West<sup>3</sup>. Apart from mass reporting on the alleged savage practices of the Hindus that included animal sacrifice and the *carak* celebrations in colonial Calcutta (which included men being suspended on strings attached to their body with hooks) *satī* came to symbolize that singular act of derangement that had the potential of subsuming within it itself all manner of evil of the Hindu religion. Even as the missionaries and the Hindu reformists argued about the deformed tenets of Hindu religious practices in the nineteenth century, the upper-caste converts to Christianity saw conversion as a medium of induction to 'modernity'.

Calcutta as a city, both wittingly and unwittingly, has played its part as a co-text in this dissertation. As the centre of colonial power and knowledge production in nineteenth-century Bengal, inadvertently the city asserted itself in this dissertation which is reflected in the choice of texts. The urban location of the texts have also facilitated in revealing some of the complex literary linkages. The city of Calcutta, the second city of the empire, with its premium on the new knowledge systems as well as its enduring oppositions and public debates contemplating religiosities therefore is the receptacle of this enquiry.

Enquiry at the textual level opened certain well-heeled assumptions to test. If we are indeed looking towards the birth of a literary corpus that owes its uniqueness to Christianity, does it pose itself as a continuous tradition? The answer is perhaps a whimpering no. The corpus of representative texts that I have chosen carries a glaring omission of an important Christian literary produce: the indigenous hymns (written in English, Sanskrit and the vernaculars). The scope and range of

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Mani, Lata. *Contentious Tradition. The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. Sarkar, Tanika. 'Something like rights? Faith, law and widow immolation debates in colonial Bengal.' *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 49. 3 (2012): pp. 295-320.

the hymns move beyond the temporal parameters of this dissertation precisely because they boast of a continuous tradition. The corpus of Christian narrativity in literary canon proper, however, has been marked by a temporal frame.

Analysing the Christian converts as a leading alliance of opinion is politically viable as they forward insights into the nature of religious dissent in India. They destabilize the easy equation between colonial governmentality and Christianity as their dissent was often directed at both the sacerdotal authorities and the colonial power. The language of this dissent incorporates religious, social, political, and aesthetic realms. In any case, it is moot to debate the relationship between religious dissent, its institutionalization, and the institution of modern autonomous individuals. Christianity as a form of religio-social dissent suffered from constant threats of being appropriated by dominant institutionalized actors, namely, the Hindu intelligentsia, the colonial government and the Christian missionaries. The texts and the authors discussed in detail in this dissertation responds to these threats in some measure. At the most obvious level, Hindu mythology in its malleable textual avatar provided new modernized modalities for altering frames of reference. Most importantly, it engendered constant paradigm shifts in terms of the position of the authorial figure as the observer and the observed. Therefore, even as the dominant concerns were presented they could be potentially challenged. Humour, whose success solely rides on a consensual community, was frequently adopted to facilitate an explanative and interpretative surplus. Ascription of these effects should also be shared with its direct political dimensions, in an age where the intellectual nucleus was increasingly shifting to animate a new nationalism. An exposé of this corpus of literature has been able to convincingly demonstrate the desire to obtain an independent stake in colonial modernity distinct from both the colonizer and the Hindu intelligentsia.

Evident in the poetry of Toru Dutt, Madhusudan Dutt, Shoshee Chunder Dutt and the prose of Lal Behari Day, Krishna Mohan Banerjea and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay is this diglossia or rather heteroglossia. This contradictory practice is duly represented in the bilinguality (English and Bengali) of the authorial interventions. The overlapping space in this bilingual literary sphere is represented by powerful intellectual elite who were themselves products of the Western education system. Apart from addressing a similar target audience, this overlap is also the space for intense inter-textual interactions (evident in the influences from

Romantic poetry, Dante, Virgil to folklorists of continental Europe). This has found one of its most elegant statements in Brahmabandhab Upadhyay and Madhusudan Dutt in terms of the divergences in terms of tone, imageries, references and tropes of their English and Bengali texts. K.M. Banerjea's conscious bilingual attempt at recording eclectic aspects of a Bengali life in *Encyclopedia Bengalensis* (1846) is another case in point.<sup>4</sup> The other most obvious was the traffic of socio-cultural misreadings between the colonizer and the colonized. The incentive for imagining a marginal yet powerful religious identity also lies in this bilingual gap as much as in the uninhibited adoption of western modernity.

In this regard, it was fitting to close the discussion on major individual Christian convert authors with Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, as his life and actions encapsulate the raging concerns at the end of the nineteenth century. Upadhyay, a close friend of Rabindranath Tagore, experimented with most of the religious options that the nineteenth century intelligentsia offered. Disillusionment with Hinduism was a common trope for which the newly educated bhadralok were looking for answers. Upadhyay first preferred the Brahmo fold and then converted to Anglicanism to finally settle for the Catholic and chose to call himself a Hindu-Catholic *sannyāsī*. Krishna Mohan Banerjea had converted only once in his life, but his dilemma about the Hindu religion and its impact remained with him until the end of his life. Banerjea did not demonstrate his unease about the relationship of Hinduism with his personal Christian faith by converting again but towards the end of his life and writings he engaged more with the tenets of Hinduism. In fact, his last text, *Two Essays as Supplements to the Arian Witness* (1880) calls to conclusively forge an Aryan link, thereby associates the Hindu race with the more superior Aryan races of the West. In an effort to conclusively link the Hindu religion with Christianity, he invokes Prajapati as the primeval form of worship of a unitary God. These discourses by Banerjea and Upadhyay at the very end of their careers, at the turn of the twentieth century, are indicative of a larger political action. Conversion to Christianity for the upper-castes performed a disruptive role that carried within its womb the potential of revolution. Denouncing Hinduism and subsequently converting to Christianity was to combine a political act with a social and spiritual one. Conversion to Christianity invited immediate social censure and ostracization. Even though most of the social censure continued, the disruptive potential of

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<sup>4</sup> Banerjea, K.M. *Encyclopedia Bengalensis, or a Series of Publications in English and Bengalee, Compiled from Various Sources on History, Science and Literature*. Calcutta: D'Rozario and Company, 1846.

religious conversions failed to ignite revolutions. The social reforms and their subsequent lobby in the educated class influenced by Western liberal thought seemed to have turned their attention elsewhere. Hence, the 'disruptive potential of conversion', which was dependent as much on the performer as the audience, began to lose its revolutionary tenor by the end of the nineteenth century. While the better half of the nineteenth century witnessed some prominent upper-caste conversions to Christianity in Bengal, which were discussed and debated vociferously in the public sphere, the 1930's witnessed mass movements. Post the government of India Act of 1935 that tied political rights with religious communities and followed by Doctor Ambedkar's declaration that he would not die a Hindu, mass lower caste conversions became commonplace<sup>5</sup>. The individual acts of conversion that made news in the earlier half of the nineteenth century by the 1930s came to constitute mass movements that were meant to empower the lower-castes. Therefore, this corpus also expresses the shifting tensions within the performance of religious dissent in the nineteenth century.

In addition to the socio-political dimensions of conversion that are specific to the Bengal of the nineteenth century, which have emerged during the course of the dissertation, the entangled nature of literary pursuits has been highlighted. Although the Christian converts were very vocal about their religious choices in retrospective constructions of Bengali literature, they have been subsumed into a nameless category as opposed to Muslim literature. This kind of religious othering, on the one hand, legitimatizes the formation of the independent state of Bangladesh in 1971 by providing a cultural tradition enmeshed in the literary practices. In another sense it completely belittles the religious tenor of the other body of work. While this might be useful as a strategy for outlining the nationalist aspirations of Bangladesh, (or in retrospect constructed to explain the prevalence of a long tradition of 'muslim' writing) it has failed to counter the entangled nature of literary histories. On the other hand, the histories of Indian writing in English in an attempt to account for secular nationalist aspirations had completely banished religion from their intellectual universe. They instead concentrated on the stultified and imitative nature of the early Indian English writing (of the nineteenth century) which ultimately yields to a more mature artistry that speaks for the nation. This

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<sup>5</sup> Laura Dudley Jenkins. 'True Believers? Agency and Sincerity in Representations of 'Mass Movement' Converts in 1930s India'. Eds. Dennis Washburn and A. Kevin Reinhart. *Converting Cultures, Religion, Ideology and Transformations of Modernity*. Leiden: Brill, 2007. pp. 435-464; p. 437.

dissertation has demonstrated that both these strains of historiographies fail to account for complicated literary practices. In particular, I have highlighted the problems that religion and bilinguality pose to such closed assumptions. Owing to the connected and often contradictory nature of the linguistic spaces that the colonial intelligentsia inhabited, it is imperative to concentrate on the complexities of a bilingual literary culture. Sequestered literary spaces did not exist in the nineteenth century, the Western educated colonial intelligentsia wrote both in Bangla and in English often to address different audiences.

Examining the corpus of literature of the upper caste Christian converts in the nineteenth-century Bengal does not merely appeal to a temporal referent. It seeks to question some of the logical fallacies of a sanitized shared tradition in the form of literary histories. In sum, the dissertation forwards the necessity of looking at literary cultures with the apparatus of religion. In this analysis, religion (in particular Christianity) does not function either as a category of identification or an external stimulus but as an aesthetic performer in an embedded literary culture. This dissertation subsequently seeks to open the discussion on entangled literary histories. The historical contingencies urge an engagement with minority religious identities, as banishing literary cultures is not a feasible option in the knotted history of India. Communalism for most part in contemporary India has concentrated on Muslims as a minority religion and Christians as minority of minorities. Conversion to Christianity is not a closed question in India as we continue to witness religiously motivated pogroms and deliberate upon conversion laws. The dissertation, therefore, participates in the extant conversation between the Indian and the Christian components of the Indian-Christian hyphenated identity.

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