THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

MEDIEVAL LANDSCAPES: THE IDEA OF THE MIDDLE AGES IN BENGAL

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOUTH ASIAN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

BY
EDUARDO ACOSTA

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
AUGUST 2022

Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my committee for helping me complete this project. My chair, Dipesh Chakrabarty, offered many critical insights into historical thinking and Bengali literature during our conversations. My engagement with the natural history of Bengal, and my scholarly preoccupations with the 'non-human,' were candidly supported and encouraged by Dipesh as early as my third year in the PhD. program. Perhaps needless to say, I have learnt a lot from his most recent work on the planetary. Thibaut d'Hubert has been an extremely kind adviser since I arrived in Chicago seven years ago. It was him who first suggested, at the end of my second year in the program, the Nadia Raj as a possible subject of research. Thibaut's unshakeable ethic of reading, especially non-modern texts, has always fascinated me, and while my own attempts fall short of his example, he is still is and will be the role model I keep aspiring to. Whitney Cox has been an unfailing source of unwavering guidance and support for this process. Whitney has been not only a dedicated committee member, he is also an inspiring mentor. While not part of my committee, professors Andrew Ollett, Gary Tubb, Rochona Majumdar, Ulrike Stark and Tyler Williams helped me a great deal in navigating the doctoral program in my early years; I learnt a great deal in their classes, not only about South Asia but also about how to be professional on my endeavors. Special

thanks also to Mandira Bhaduri, who very patiently taught me Bangla and sat down with me to read many times.

I wish to thank the Committee on Southern Asia Studies at the University of Chicago for funding received for language training and for dissertation writing in the last year. Also, the archival work carried out for this dissertation was funded in part by the Nicholson Center for Research in the British Isles at the University of Chicago, and the Dissertation Development Program, managed jointly by Northwestern University and the Social Science Research Council. During my archival research, many kind and generous people helped me navigate the at times Borgesian and labyrinthian world of catalogues and libraries. I especially thank Laura Ring at the Regenstein Library for helping me in the initial stages of this project. While my archival work in Bengal was cut short by the pandemic, a host of people helped and guided me in the archives there. Abhijit Bhattacharya at the Center for Studies in Social Sciences; at Vishwa Bharati University in Shantiniketan, Prof. Syed Ejaz Hussein, Prof. Dipankar Ray, and Prof. Biswajit Ray, they all were extremely welcoming and helpful.

The difficult task of writing this dissertation would not have been completed without the help of friends and family in Chicago, Mexico and India. Special thanks to the members of the R. Committee: Akshara Ravishankar, Itamar Ramot, Sanjukta Poddar and Talia Ariav. Without their careful reading and shared laughs, it would have been hard to find pleasure in my scholarly and life projects in Chicago; More than solidarity and solace, I found true friendship and allyship in the R. Committee. In Chicago, the friendship and help of Thomas Newbold, Supurna Dasgupta, Ayelet Kotler, Eric Gurevitch and Ahona Panda were a constant source of enjoyment. I also would like to thank Andrew Halladay, Jo Brill, Joya John and Ishan Chakrabarti for their presence and conversations at different stages of the program. Corinne Smith took a lot of her vacation time to proofread this dissertation: if it is in a better, more legible, state is only due to her unfaltering efforts; I thank Corinne not only for this, but also for her joyful presence during my archival work in Shantiniketan

and in London.

While I spent most of my time in Chicago during the Ph.D. program, people in Mexico supported me in many ways, for which I will be forever grateful. Profs. Ishita Banerjee and Saurabh Dube at El Colegio de Mexico made real the possibility of my studying in Chicago: they are not only terrific professors and unbeatable bosses, they are also and foremost loving and caring friends. Angelica Hoyos' companionship in spite of the physical distance was for some years a constant source of solace. As a historian of Mexico, Angelica's takes on some aspects of historiography discussions opened up new paths of inquiry for me; I will always be grateful for the conversations and the time we shared. Gema Gonzalez, Luisa Escobar, Rocio Gonzalez, Sandra Cruz, Arual Anele, their friendship for now more than half of my life has kept my spirits high in many moments when I faltered. Lastly, my family, Himelda Gonzalez and Luciano Acosta, my parents; and Itzel Acosta, my sister, they all supported my projects and dreams, even when it meant I was moving farther away from them. However, their unshakeable love keeps me going back to them both physically and spiritually, for I think of them every day. This dissertation is dedicated to my family.

Abstract

This dissertation investigates the formation of the idea of the Middle Ages in Bengal during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It explores the processes and intellectual debates through which modern historical time, understood as teleological, stagist and rooted in the notion of progress, was naturalized in this region. In particular, *Medieval Landscapes* explores these processes by examining the history of the region of Nadia in central Bengal, focusing mainly on two aspects of it: the natural landscape of the region, and the cultural production of the royal court of Nadia, as well as its reception in the Bengali nineteenth century. This dissertation argues that the narratives of natural decay written about Nadia situated the fortunes of the region as a place intimately linked to the fate of its royal court—known as the Nadia Raj—and vice versa. In that sense, the declining yield of cultivable lands in Nadia, the silting of its rivers, and the demise of the political power of the Nadia Raj, all became aspects of a single, unified understanding of historical time: the naturality of the teleological passage from medieval times to modernity. *Medieval Landscapes* shows how the conflicted relation of colonial historiography with the political, cultural and even natural past of Nadia, along with its engagement in attempts to theorize the modern divide as a moral and political distance from these pasts, generated the temporal boundaries of what would be known as the "Medieval period" of Bengal's historiography.

Note on transliteration

For this dissertation, I have taken a sort of hybrid approach to the transliteration of Bengali names. Trying to respect the rich and somewhat unusual phonology of Bangla (unusual if the reader is more acquainted with a Sanskritic approach to spelling) I have transliterated the names of some persons following the conventional names found in print. I do this with names of well-known historical figures, like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Rammohan Roy, or Krishnachandra Ray. So, for example, I write here Ishwarchandra instead of Īśvarcandra.

Other Bengali and Sanskrit names that do not appear printed much in modern scholarship, I have transliterated them, as well as the titles of Bangla and Sanskrit works, following the IAST transliteration scheme. Finally, I have decided not to transliterate with diacritics Perso-arabic names or works.

Introduction

The scope and aim of this dissertation are probably better illustrated by the nostalgic scenes of one of Bengal's landmark films. Satyajit Ray's film, "*Jalsaghar*" (The Music Room, 1958), based on a story of the same name by the Bengali writer Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay (first published in 1938) depicts the struggles of an old *zamindar* (a landlord), named Biswambhar Roy, to keep his estate, his family and himself afloat in trying times. These difficult times, however, are not momentary: the decayed state of Roy's finances has little to do with, for example, a bad harvest or any other fleeting situation which could be solved in time. It is not a temporary situation but rather, a *temporal* one which pushes Roy into unavoidable ruination; it is time itself which spells doom for Roy; it is the epochal change from medievality to modernity which finally engulfs Roy and drowns him, like Walter Benjamin's angel of History who gets propelled helplessly into a future in ruins by the storm of progress.

The metaphors in the previous paragraph broadly follow the imagery of the story. The film is divided into two parts, the first of which explains the tragedy that animates most of the plot. The first scene presents the *zamindar* in an almost catatonic state, unable to cope with an irreparable loss. The sound of a *shehnai* alerts the music-loving *zamindar* to a nearby celebration, an *upanāyana* ceremony for the son of his neighbor, a moneylender

named Mahim Ganguly. The sounds of the *upanāyana* call memories of better times for the *zamindar*, of a time when his family was still alive. A terrible scene at the end of the first half of the movie finally explains the tragedy that put the *zamindar* into the lethargic state in which we found him at the beginning: the untimely death of Roy's wife and only son after their boat capsizes in the river during a storm.

This tragedy is not presented as a mere accident, nor as an unfortunate event of nature. Instead, Satyajit Ray skilfully weaves together into the tragic event the two main narrative threads that lead the *zamindar* into financial and, eventually, personal ruin. On the one hand, Roy is presented as a flawed character: vain, reckless with money and more preoccupied with maintaining a veritable display of his status as a *Rājā* than with finding new forms of revenue for his failing estate. On the other hand, the deterioration of Roy's material wealth and his diminishing social status are simultaneously presented as a product of the changing conditions of rural Bengal, and of the transition into modernity and capitalism. These shifts are characterized by the antagonistic figure of the moneylender, Ganguly, who is uncouth and uncultured, but whose financial success puts him above Roy in the social stratification of the region.

These two threads, of individual character faults and wider, social change, culminate in the tragic death of the *zamindar*'s family: trying to upstage Ganguly, who invites the *zamindar* to a musical soirée at his mansion, Roy decides to offer an impromptu recital at his palace on the same night that Ganguly is holding his. But there is no money left, and Roy's wife and son are, at that point in time, still away on their travels and will not return for another month or so, once travel conditions have improved. Undeterred, Roy sells his wife's last pieces of jewelry and calls for his family to return home. Just before the music recital begins, we find Roy looking anxiously at the river: a storm is coming, and the river is capricious and treacherous; a previous scene informs us that the river had swept away many houses belonging to the subjects of the *Rājā*, as well as many of his own material luxuries and arable land. Waiting for his family's return, a foreboding wind enter his room and tips

over a small toy boat. Roy views this bad omen with a certain apprehension, but he is either incapable or unwilling—most likely both—to put a stop to his plans: we are to realize that this is wind is heavy with meaning, like a force which continuously drives him towards the direction of his doom.

As Rochona Majumdar recently argued, the early films of Ray, including *Jalsaghar*, map "the development of characters along a recognizable trajectory, with attendant losses, fissures, and conflicts: from the village to the city, from a feudal to a modern society, from superstition to rationality, and from communitarian identity to individual autonomy."[1] In that sense, both the *zamindar* Roy and the moneylender Ganguly are metaphors of different temporalities inhabiting the same space at the same time. Roy's recklessness and vanity, especially his decadent and ultimately fatal taste for music, are not scripted as mere personal flaws; they represent the political, financial and, most importantly, moral failures of the feudal order. The imagery that Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay and Satyajit Ray displayed in the story and the film of *Jalsaghar* are a typical case of the discursive interventions of Bengali colonial modernity around the medieval ages and the feudal order. That is, the images, ideas and scenes of Biswanath Roy, the broken *zamindar*, shaped and at the same time were shaped by the discourses on the premodern past of the region prevalent in Bengal during the nineteenth century. These discursive formations show in particular a distinct understanding of temporal and epochal change in Bengali history, especially of the transition period between the Middle Ages and modernity.

The present dissertation investigates the formation of the idea of the Middle Ages in Bengal during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I explore the processes and intellectual debates through which modern historical time, understood as teleological, stagist and rooted in the notion of progress, was naturalized in this region. In particular, my dissertation explores these processes by researching the history of the region of Nadia in central Bengal, focusing mainly on two aspects of it: the natural landscape of the region, and the cultural

[1]Rochona Majumdar, *Art Cinema and India's Forgotten Futures: Film and History in the Postcolony* (Columbia University Press, 2021), 189.

production of its royal court (in reality a *zamindari*, better known as the Nadia Raj) before the onset of British colonialism, as well as its reception in the Bengali nineteenth century. On the former aspect, the first two chapters of this dissertation focus on a specific feature of the environmental history of the region of Nadia, its ever-shifting riverine landscape. In this part of the dissertation, I closely read maps, travelogues and hydrological reports to illustrate the technical and epistemological challenges that the rivers of Bengal presented to the colonial surveyors, which in turn created a distinct sense of temporality, which I call 'fluvial temporality.' Fluvial temporality, I argue, took into consideration the deep imbrication between geological and historical time, that is, between rivers and humans in the landscape of Bengal. However, this fluvial temporality disappeared from records once technological improvements on river management finally allowed the taming of the ever-changing rivers, thus naturalizing the stark distinction between geological and historical time.

Since the narratives of natural decay written about Nadia situated the fortunes of the region as a place intimately linked to the fate of its royal court and vice versa, this dissertation examines both the natural and the cultural landscapes of Nadia. In that sense, the declining yield of cultivable lands in Nadia, the silting of its rivers, and the demise of the political power of the Nadia Raj, all became aspects of a single, unified understanding of historical time: the naturality of the teleological passage from the medieval to modernity. The chapters in the second part of the dissertation interrogate how binary temporal concepts—like old and new, medieval and modern, moral and immoral—and operative concepts like chronology, were forged on the contested site that the cultural production and the historical memory of the Nadia Raj became. How these conceptual interventions shaped the historical landscape and place of Nadia in Bengal's history, and how the place of Nadia embodied questions of periodization and medievalism, is the subject of my dissertation. Overall, I argue that the conflicted relation of colonial historiography with the political, cultural and even natural past of Nadia, along with its engagement in attempts to theorize the modern divide as a moral and political distance from these pasts, generated the temporal boundaries of what

would be known as the "Medieval period" of Bengali historiography.

Nadia as a historiographical problem

While the region of Nadia and its royal court are the main topics of this dissertation, this work is neither a history of the region of Nadia, nor is it a history of the reception of Nadia and its royal court in the nineteenth century. Certainly, Nadia and its pasts were not the only places in eastern India that became subject and object of a different understanding of temporality along the lines of the modern/medieval divide. The glorious past and the state of decay of the palace of Rajmahal, for example, were a different, romantic, takes on the divergent temporalities that the colonial and modern Bengali *intelligentsia* came to appreciate in Bengal's past.[2] However, other important regions and cities of the medieval past of Bengal, like Dhaka or Murshidabad, did not enthrall the same attention as Nadia, not even other Hindu kingdoms (*zamindari*) like Bishnupur, which like the Nadia Raj engaged in an ample project of temple construction.[3] In modern scholarship, a number of works have dealt, directly or indirectly, with the most salient aspects of Nadia's past that rendered it, at the eyes of colonial modernity, the space/time of the medieval. For example, Nadia and in particular the towns of Nabadvip and Shantipur, both at the banks of the Bhagirathi river, were for centuries famous sites of Sanskritic learning, which entered into crisis once the traditional networks of patronage suffered under the economic pressures imposed by the English Company.[4] Another aspect was that for a long time scholars thought Nadia had been

[2]On the temporalities of the ruins of Rajmahal, see chapter one of this dissertation.

[3]See Samuel Wright, "From Praśasti to Political Culture: The Nadia Raj and Malla Dynasty in Seventeenth-Century Bengal," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73, no. 2 (2014): for an analysis on the differences between the political projects of both Hindu polities in Nawabi Bengal. See Pika Ghosh, *Temple to Love: Architecture and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Bengal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

[4]Sinha's remains the most in-depth work on the networks of scholarship and patronage of pandits in Bengal. The first chapter of his book provides a detailed prosopography of pandits in Nadia that engaged not only with Nyāya, but with other Sanskritic sciences as well. Samita Sinha, *Pandits in a Changing Environment: Centres of Sanskrit Learning in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (Calcutta: Sarat Book House, 1993); Jonardon Ganeri has an interesting historical analysis of the state of networks of scholars and patrons before the Mughal period in Nabadvip. However, I disagree with the general conclusion he reaches on

one of the capitals of the Sena dynasty, the last Hindu kingdom to rule over most of Bengal. The vestiges of this glorious past, however, had been either erased by the unforgiving rivers or they had never existed, which made it a site of interest for colonial historiography trying to understand the ancient past of Bengal.[5]

The Nadia Raj became a key political and cultural player in the turbulent atmosphere of late eighteenth-century politics, especially the last great king of the Nadia Raj, Krishnachandra Ray (r. 1728-1782), who cast a long shadow on the cultural memory of Bengal during the nineteenth century.[6] Especially, the royal court of Nadia acquired more cultural clout thanks to its influential literary production in Middle Bangla with poems like the *Annadāmaṅgal* by the poet laureate Bharatchandra or the *Śākta* poetry of Ramprasad Sen.[7] These works, in particular Bharatchandra's, had a decisive role in defining not only the literary tastes of the Bengali *bhadralok* society during the nineteenth century, but even in defining the periodization of the literary history of the Bangla language.

his book, that the new sensibilities developed argumentatively through *Nyāya* philosophy amount to an early modern age. This conclusion leaves intact the periodizing presuppositions with which this dissertation engages and questions. Jonardon Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450-1700*, The Oxford History of Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 39–59.

[5]The issue of Nadia, and especially Nabadvip, as the site of the capital of the Sena dynasty has been a contentious one in Bengal historiography, but the implications of this debate has rarely been problematized as a historical problem. For example, Syed Ejaz Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate: Politics, Economy and Coins, A.D. 1205-1576* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003), refers to this issue, but only to try to determine where the Sena capital that was attacked by Afghan invaders in the early thirteenth century actually was. This invasion brought about the demise of the Sena reign in Bengal and inaugurated the dominion of Islamicate dynasties in the region. This particular point has not, to the best of my knowledge, been fully historicized in modern scholarship. Richard Eaton refers to it in the introduction to his seminal work on the spread of Islam in Bengal. Richard Maxwell Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Only Varuni Bhatia has treated as a historical problem the impossibility of locating vestiges and ruins from Bengal's medieval past during the nineteenth century; but only in the context of the modernization of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Bengal. Varuni Bhatia, *Unforgetting Chaitanya: Vaishnavism and Cultures of Devotion in Colonial Bengal* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 179-99. Chapter two of this dissertation further problematizes this point.

[6]A full political and cultural biography of Maharaja Krishnachandra Ray is Alokakumāra Cakrabartī, *Mahārājā Kṛṣṇacandra o tatkālīna Baṅgasamāja* (Kalikātā: Pragesibha Buka Phorāma, 1989); many aspects of the weight and importance of the Nadia Raj for the Bengali nineteenth century are discussed in this biography of the renowned poet laurate of the Nadia Raj under Krishnachandra, Bharatchandra Ray Gunakar. See Śaṅkarīprasāda Basu, *Kabi Bhāratacandra* (Kalikātā: Maṇḍala Buka Hāusa, 1974); See Joel Bordeaux, "The Mythic King: Raja Krishnacandra and Early Modern Bengal" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015), for an in-depth analysis of the construction of the myth of Krishnachandra in Bengal.

[7]Rachel Fell. McDermott, *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams: Kāli and Umā in the Devotional Poetry of Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

The region of Nadia, much like other regions of rural Bengal, underwent a series of ecological and economic collapses in the last decades of the eighteenth century. The natural processes of silting of the riverbeds and the disastrous agricultural policies put in place by the Company created the dire conditions which would finally give way to the crumbling of the political space and power that sustained many aspects for which the region of Nadia was famous, mentioned in the previous paragraph. As a result, the political, cultural and even natural past of the region became perfect embodiments of narratives of medieval decay and moral failure of the ancient, feudal, regime in Bengal.[8] While this dissertation queries and contest these narratives, the goal of this work is neither to dismiss nor accept the appropriateness of the medieval/modern periodization and the processes that rendered obsolete many aspects of the cultural and political order of the Nadia Raj, like its patronage of Bangla literature or Sanskritic knowledge production. Rather, my dissertation takes these temporal divisions and obsolescence processes as objects of inquiry themselves.

To argue that a region of the colonized world—in this dissertation, the region of Nadia—was the subject and object of temporalities and processes of periodization during the colonial period based on the construction of historical difference with regards to a metropolis, is not something particularly new. What part of the colonized world was not subject to these temporalization processes?[9] As Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, the process of political/colonial modernity outside Europe—especially in what was referred to as the 'third world,' more recently as the postcolonial world—put formerly colonized regions in a political/temporal relationship of backwardness and subordination. Historicism, adds Chakrabarty, "posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance (at least in institutional development) that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West."[10]

[8]For a thorough revision of the policies put in place by the English Company and the tense relation of the English administrators with the landed gentry of Bengal, see Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India: The British in Bengal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[9]While the bibliography on this point is vast, a good introduction and overview of the temporalization and periodization processes in the non-western world, and especially in relation to the idea of the middle ages, is the edited volume by Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul, *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of the Middle Ages Outside Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

[10]Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.* (Princeton:

Historicism then is at work on the periodization of historical time, which counterposes the modern age of political modernity (or, lately, early modern period) to a fundamentally backwards medieval period. Thus, as Chakrabarty following Hegel states at the end of his book, political modernity was lived in historical thought as "the struggle of the Enlightenment with superstition."[11] This can be seen in the classic scholarly works and narratives written in Bengal about the new age inaugurated with British colonialism, like Benoy Ghosh's historical analysis of the Bengali Renaissance written in the 1950s, or the biography of the educator and reformer Ramtanu Lahiri, written by Shivnath Shastri in the first decades of the twentieth century. In both texts, as in many others, the tale of a "coming of age" of Bengalis implies the narrative of how Bengalis became modern by stopping being medieval.[12]

Medievalisms

However, the standard narrative of periodization which establishes a fundamental difference between the "Middle Ages" and the modern age, did not simply emerge through the consciousness of a new age. The aim of this dissertation is to put the temporal divisions that emerged in Bengal into question with the categories that constituted them. In that sense, *Medieval Landscapes* makes two contributions to historiography. First, it moves away from considering the 'medieval' as merely the obverse of colonial modernity. Much of contemporary scholarship dealing with the emergence of the nation or nationalist ideations of history in India has treated the 'medieval' as an undifferentiated space-time of moral and political decay from which the native *intelligentsia* wanted to escape. Secondly, it goes beyond considering the idea of the medieval only as an abstract analytical category used at the level of history writing in Bengal during the nineteenth century. Dipesh Chakrabarty has

Princeton University Press, 2009), 7.

[11] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 237.

[12] Binaẏa Ghosha, *Bidyāsāgara o Bāṅālī Samāja* (Kalikātā: Beṅgala Pābaliśāra Prāibheṭa Limiṭeḍa, 1957); Roper Lethbridge Sibnath Sastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri, Brahman and Reformer: A History of the Renaissance in Bengal ...*, in collab. with University of California (Swan Sonnenschein, 1907), I examine this last book in chapter three of this dissertation.

explored the conceptual entanglement between Empire and history writing in his denunciation of historicism as that which allowed Europe to exclude "others" from the stagist and developmental narrative of history as progress with Europe at the front.[13] In the same vein, scholars like Kathleen Davis and Ananya Jahanara Kabir have shown that the 'medieval', rather than an uncritical and ahistorical conceptual transplant from Europe into India, was forged in the colonial encounter, seeking parallels between forms of authority and sovereignty through concepts like the idea of feudalism.[14] Feudalism as a global concept allowed for a historiographicla presentation of India's present akin to Europe's medieval past, thus cementing the temporal distance between the West and the rest. However, further work is needed to understand *how* the idea of the 'medieval' was deployed upon the Indian past not only on the level of an idea of decay, as the inverse of modernity, but in the realm of lived and *grounded* narratives. A grounded narrative, I argue, shows how different experiences of time in and around Nadia were gradually transformed by the gradual advance of a historicist understanding of historical time. How did the fluid temporality of ever-changing rivers become a static picture of medieval decay? How did a sense of 'old' and 'new' in Bengali literature emerge from a particular poem written in this region? Each chapter of *Medieval landscapes* explores grounded narratives that shaped the discourses about the nature of historical time, epochal change, and historical periodization of Bengal.

In terms of chronology, this dissertation covers a range of between 120 or 150 years, from the mid-eighteenth century to the last decades of the nineteenth. Although the temporal boundaries are fuzzy, two decades function as anchoring points around which the sources consulted for this work and the overall discussion hinge. The first is the tumultuous decade of 1750-1760, which saw the rise of British power in Bengal, especially after the army of the Company won the battle of Plassey in 1757, not that far away from the district of Nadia.

[13]Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

[14]Davis and Altschul, *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World*; Ananya Jahanara Kabir, "An Enchanted Mirror for the Capitalist Self: The Germania in British India," in *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of the Middle Ages Outside Europe*, ed. Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 51–79.

In this decade, the Nadia Raj reached its cultural and political zenith, with the apparition of the most celebrated work of the court's poet laureate Bharatchandra Ray Gunakar, the *Annadāmaṅgal*. I will show in the dissertation how these events, in the political and cultural fields, were perceived and constructed as epoch-making. The other temporal boundary in this dissertation is the ten-year period running from 1872 to 1896. This temporal boundary is more porous than the first, since throughout this dissertation I often analyze sources and discussions that took place dozens of years after this decade. Yet, around this decade two important developments took place in the field of Bengali literary history that shaped the way the medieval period was conceived. First, the publication in 1872 of Rāmagati Nyāẏaratna's book *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣā o Bāṅgālā Sāhityaviṣaẏak prastāva*, the first chronological history of Bengali literature and the first to introduce a periodization of Bengali literature based on three ages: ancient, middle (*madhya-kāl*) and current. Notably, Nyāẏaratna posited the poets Bharatchandra Ray and Ramprasad Sen, both beneficiaries of Krishnachandra Ray's patronage, as the division between middle and modern times. The second development that marks the chronological boundary of this dissertation is the publication in 1896 of the magnum opus *Baṅga Bhāṣā o Sāhitya* of the doyen of Bengali literary history, Dineshchandra Sen. As I will show in the dissertation, this work solidified the ideation of the Nadia Raj as the embodiment of the decay and decadence of certain aspects of the Middle Ages of Bengal.

While the temporal boundaries of this dissertation are marked by important developments in the literary field, I examine the broader historical context from which ideations of the medieval and their identification with Nadia and its past emerged. In the chapters of this dissertation, I explore the multiple intellectual and scholarly fields in which temporal and historiographical concepts were given content, contested and deployed *vis a vis* the pasts of the region of Nadia.

Chapter outline

The first part of *Medieval Landscapes* focuses on the naturalization of the medieval/modern in writing the history of the Nadia region. In the first chapter I closely read maps, travelogues and hydrological reports to illustrate the technical and epistemological challenges that the rivers of Bengal presented to the colonial surveyors, which in turn created a distinct sense of temporality, which I call 'fluvial temporality.' Fluvial temporality, I argue, took into consideration the deep imbrication between geological and historical time, that is, between rivers and humans in the landscape of Bengal. However, this fluvial temporality disappeared from records once technological improvements on river management finally allowed the taming of the shifting rivers.

Chapter two analyzes the political/administrative and disciplinary (geological) position towards the nature of the rivers in Bengal and their history that emerged once technological improvements of river management could finally allow the taming of the wildly changing rivers. I argue in chapter two that this attitude towards the rivers and their history also created a different temporality, one that allowed the colonial administration to justify the colonial enterprise, for the unwieldy nature of Bengal's rivers in the past became a marker of the inadequacy and powerlessness of past, medieval, regimes, especially the Muslim/Mughal administrators in Bengal. Thus, the triumph of modernity in South Asia, which in this reasoning had only been brought about by the English colonial endeavor, meant the triumph of man over nature and the defeat of the decay of the medieval.

Chapter three forms a bridge between the discussion of the natural landscape of Nadia and the cultural and political influence of the Nadia Raj in Bengali history by examining another temporal agent in Nadia's history, the royal court of Krishnachandra Ray and his ancestors. Chapter three explores the place and role that the region of Nadia had in the emergence of the developmental and historicist vocabulary that aimed to separate Bengal's enlightened colonial modernity from its perceived despotic, decaying past. In particular, the chapter focuses on the use of the word 'feudal' to describe Nadia's history when discussing

its political past and in particular the history of the dynasty that started with Bhavananda Majumdar in the sixteenth century, whose most notorious scion was Krishnachandra Ray. The discussion on this chapter does not hinge on the fitness of feudalism as a historical category for the past of Bengal. Rather, this chapter traces the use of the word 'feudal' to describe Nadia, understanding the use of 'feudal' as both a moral indictment as well as a historiographical category. My argument focuses on the imbrication of these two uses when describing Nadia.

Chapter four shows how the most famous poem that came from Nadia, Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar*, became the pivot upon which the medieval/modern divide turned in Bengali literary history. I discuss here the contentious processes by which the medieval/modern divide came to be, for what was 'old' and what was 'new' in Bengali literature was a shifting frontier. I argue that it was the gradual rise of chronology as an organizational principle for the literary history of Bengal which finally cemented the medieval/modern divide in Bengali literature, despite repeated scholarly efforts to show that this poem had opened new stylistic and poetical venues which escaped any temporal codification.

Chapter five shifts the attention from the *bhadralok* discussion on the perceived moral qualities of the *Vidyāsundar* and its reception in Hindu Bengali society to the textual history of Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar* itself. Different from a history of the *Vidyāsundar* as a book or its print history, a project which Tapti Roy has painstakingly and successfully completed recently, I understand a textual history of the *Vidyāsundar* as comprising also the way the text was read and the evolution in its readership.[15] The centrality of Bharatchandra's poem in *bhadralok* discussions about medieval moral values has somewhat occluded an important aspect of the poem's own textual history, that the poem was in fact part of a long literary tradition of writing and reappraising, in Sanskrit and in vernacular languages, the story of the *Vidyāsundar*. Rather than focusing on the genealogy of Bharatchandra's composition, I highlight the tensions in the modern understanding of authorship and translation of these

[15]Tapti Roy, *Print and Publishing in Colonial Bengal: The Journey of Bidyasundar* (Taylor & Francis, November 13, 2018).

Bengali and Sanskrit *Vidyāsundars* to show how these texts and the textual tradition to which they belonged were marginalized in drafting the textual history of Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar*. These tensions, I argue, were central to the conceptualization and writing of Bengali literary history and the idea of the middle ages in Bengal during the late nineteenth century.

Taken as a whole, *Medieval Landscapes* rethinks the use of 'medieval' as a historical category in Bengal, presenting a grounded conceptual history of this idea, straddling different temporal, linguistic and epistemological divides and thus complicating the tortuous and non-linear development of historical time outside Europe. The larger questions that this dissertation addresses, however, have to do with the narratives that shape our engagement with different senses and experiences of time and our relations to past and future.

Chapter 1

Riverine encounters: Maps, Rivers and Historical Agency in Eighteenth-century Bengal

Around the mid-nineteenth century, a travelogue of an Indian man published in the English press in India offered an intriguing description of the region of Nadia. The traveler, named Bholanauth Chunder or Bholanath Chandra in modern spelling, was an upper-class Bengali gentleman, educated in an English medium school and well acquainted with the history and stories of the different regions he visited during his travels. The description of Nadia that Bholanath offered paints a bleak landscape where the forces of nature had leveled the history of the site to the ground:

> Indeed, the past of Nuddea [Nadia/Nabadvip] raises very high expectations—but the present of it disappoints a man in the extreme. It is not found to be that

> hoary old town, with venerable ruins and vestiges, a crowd of temples and buildings of all epochs, a thick and ancient population, time-honored tols [Sanskrit schools] and colleges in every street, [...] which one has reason to expect from its antiquity extending at the least over a period of six to seven hundred years. Nothing of the kind meets the eye, but a rural town of small size, with a little nucleus of habitations, and a community of Brahmins, rather busy seeking for bread than in acquiring a profitless learning. The caprices and changes of the river have not left a trace of old Nuddea.[1]

What was that hallowed past that our traveler expected to see? Bholanath's expectations were indeed high, for Nadia's past stretched, by some accounts, back to the thirteenth century, and the place had been the scenario of important events and processes that defined the history of Bengal. For example, The town of Nabadvip had been, according to popular beliefs long held, one of the capitals of the Sena dynasty, the last independent Hindu royal house in Bengal before the Afghan invasion in the thirteenth century.[2] It was the birthplace of the medieval saint Chaitanya, and the home of one of the most important branches that developed within the Gauḍiya Vaishnava religious reformist movement.[3] The town of Nabadvip had been famous throughout India for being the major seat of learning for the 'new' philosophers of the *Navya-Nyāya* school, and for colonial administrators who sought to learn the Sanskrit language from the pandits of the region it was known as the "Oxford of Bengal."[4] The region of Nadia had embodied all these different lives and yet, according to Bholanath, their traces were nowhere to be found.

Bholanath's portrayal of the historical landscape of Nadia was to become a prevailing trope during the nineteenth century, for it captured perfectly the modern colonial effort to imagine and visualize premodern pasts in South Asia by locating ruins and historical monuments. But this same narrative of a hallowed past implied a negative counterpart. If

[1]Bholanauth Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India*, vol. 1 (London: Trübner & Company, 1869).

[2]See next chapter for a discussion on this historiographical problem in Bengal.

[3]For a brief biography of Chaitanya, see Tony K. Stewart, *The Final Word: The Caitanya Caritāmṛta and the Grammar of Religious Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 45–56; Sushil Kumar De, *Early History Of The Vaisnava Faith And Movement In Bengal* (1942), for a detailed analysis of biographies of Chaitanya in Sanskrit and Middle Bengali and their impact on Bengali literary history, see.

[4]Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason*, 39–59; Kānticandra. Rāṛhī and Yajñeśvara. Caudhurī, *Nabadvīpamahimā*, Paribardhita saṃskaraṇa. (Nabadvīpa: Nabadvīpa Purātattva Parishada, 2004), 76–91.

the past of Nadia had been a golden age, it meant that a process of political and moral decay had taken place at the end of the eighteenth century. This, of course, was in line with a teleological understanding of historical time, for it meant that the decadence of the old time gave way to the modern regime.

This chapter takes Bholanath's encounter with the ruined (but ruin-less) landscape of Nadia as a starting point to query the construction of a temporality that puzzled our traveler at the sight of Nadia and the river. The place of the 'medieval' in Bengal and in India in general was a contested site, for colonial administrators embraced it to justify British rule in India while modernized Indians, in this case especially Hindus, had to fight to 'recover' what was valuable in India's medieval past.[5] Yet, the idea of a naturalized relationship between decay and medieval times went pretty much unchallenged during the nineteenth century. I argue here that Bholanath's encounter could be read as an 'out of time' experience that could allow us to explore how this particular temporality was constructed and imposed upon Nadia and its landscape and history. Why was Bholanath's encounter an 'out of time' experience? Bholanath's amazement at the ruined-but-ruinless landscape of Nadia points to an expectation which is rooted in a particular form of temporality, that of the naturalization of ruins. Whereas ruins become a feature of a naturalized landscape of human history, the lack of ruins in a historical site is an 'unnatural' landscape. This is somewhat paradoxical, and it is the reason why I read Bholanath's description as an 'out of time' experience, for it was nature who rendered the historical landscape of Nabadvip ruin-less. If in the Simmelian conception of ruin, nature is a force but mainly in the backdrop of human history, in the lack of ruins of Navadvip, nature—in the avatara of the Bhagirati river—is the agent by which the landscape becomes unnatural.[6] I argue here that our traveler's amazement stemmed from

[5]In the case of Nabadvip, colonial modernity sough to recover a pristine, religious past for the ancient city. By stressing that Nabadvip had been Chaitanya's birth place, Vaishnavas tried to deflect the accusation of the city being an embodiment of the natural decay of medieval times, stressing rather the historical importance of the city and moreover, its capacity to still function as a rally point for reformed Hindus. See Varuni Bhatia, "Images of Navadwip: Place, Evidence and Inspiration," in *Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), for further discussion on this point.

[6]Georg Simmel, "Two Essays," *The Hudson Review* 11, no. 3 (1958): See below for an outline of Simmel's conception of ruin.

the collapse of natural/geological time into human/historical time, temporalities which had been strongly separated earlier in the nineteenth century.[7]

In order to query how this temporality was constructed, I explore in this chapter a particular practice of time-making that was carried out in and around Nadia, that of putting time in its place, or put in another way, to make time out of space. By putting time in its place, I refer to a set of techniques that early colonial administrators deployed upon the space of Nadia in particular and of Bengal in general: the production of current and historical maps, surveys and hydro-geological studies of rivers in Bengal. While archaeology has been, disciplinarily, the preferred method to make time out of space since the nineteenth century—to derive chronology from a set of objects buried in the soil, or even from mere slices of earth—I choose here to focus on maps and cartography.[8] I argue that the effort to fully map out the territory of Bengal carried out for decades by the General Surveys also tried to create time out of space: by locating in time the changes on the landscape, rivers and on human settlements, colonial administrators tried to map out historical time.[9] However, it soon became clear to colonial officers that the changing nature of the rivers in Bengal resisted this effort of time-making, for the rivers changed course quite rapidly, sometimes from one season to the next one, thus erasing the distinction between geological and historical time since sudden and violent changes on the landscape took place in much less than a human lifespan.

By 'putting time in its place' I mean the processes by which a sense of historical time was not only derived from the riverine landscape of Nadia, but also how the landscape was made to embody the history of the region. I have borrowed the turn of phrase 'putting time in

[7]Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 13; See also Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): for an analysis of the collapse of these two orders of time, natural and historical, in the context of the current global climate crisis.

[8]See Tapati. Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-colonial India*, Cultures of History (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), for a history of archaeology and history writing and their institutionalization as disciplines in colonial India.

[9]See Pratik Chakrabarti, *Inscriptions of Nature: Geology and the Naturalization of Antiquity* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), for a detailed analysis of how geology, nature and history intersected each other in the landscape of India during the nineteenth century.

its place' from an article by Kathleen Morrison, in which Morrison investigates interactions between people and landscapes and monuments rooted in a sense of locality and dwelling. These interactions, argues Morrison, usually sit outside the discipline of archaeology but still engage with the same objects and places in the landscape that are the usual objects of archaeology.[10] However, the aim of this chapter is not to stress the dichotomy between a disciplinarily constructed temporality versus a 'local,' sense of time, outside of a discipline. Few, if any sources from the region of Nadia between 1760 and 1830 CE that could offer us a glimpse of 'native' temporal practices have reached us. Nor is the end goal here to stress the so-called 'epistemic violence' that colonial mapping lays on a place.[11] This kind of analysis usually stresses two already existing temporalities, posing them as binaries: the modern, colonial and static temporality of an unchanging map, versus the out-of-modernity, fluid/porous and native temporality of the place. In a nutshell, this binary could be described as map versus memory. Rather than taking any of these temporalities for granted, I look at practices of time-making in Nadia at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century to understand how a particular temporality for the region, one that took into account the continuous movement of rivers, was constructed.

The narrative structure of this chapter follows not a chronologically ordered series of events, but rather a series of encounters that took place along the Ganges in the second half of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century in Bengal. In a way, the chapter follows downstream the meandering Ganges river, in its western-most branch through Bengal known as the Hooghly/Bhagirathi river, the same river that touches Kolkata and discharges into the Bay of Bengal. I start this chapter with a brief overview of the geography and hydrology of Bengal, which will be helpful to the reader to locate in space (and time) the references to places and rivers throughout this chapter. At Rajmahal, just before the Ganges branches out into two streams when entering the plains of Bengal, I analyze the (English)

[10]Kathleen D. Morrison, "On Putting Time in Its Place: Archaeological Practice and the Politics of Time in Southern India," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 26, no. 04 (2016): 619–641.

[11]Matthew H Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (2009), 24.

romantic view on landscape and history transplanted into Bengal, in order to better highlight the stark differences that colonial surveyors found between the landscape of England and that of Bengal. In this section, I focus mainly on the Anglo-Indian poet Henry Vivian Derozio and his sense of temporality when looking at the ruins of the palace at Rajmahal, stressing that this temporality tried to replicate the English romantic view on landscape and the picturesque. Continuing the flow of the river, at the site of the ruins of Gaur, I read carefully several travelogues that highlight the different reactions to the landscape of Bengal and its history. Outside the realm of poetry and romanticism, we see that the shifting river and the presence of somewhat sudden ruins brought up questions about the nature of historical time in Bengal in the minds of the travelers who encountered these ruins.

A brief (natural) history of the rivers in Bengal

The historical region of Bengal, divided now between the Indian state of West Bengal and the independent country of Bangladesh, sits on one of the largest riverine deltas in the world. Two powerful rivers enter the plains of Bengal through a 150 kilometer wide stretch known as the Rajmahal-Meghalaya gap: the Ganges (known in India as *Gaṅgā*), which stretches for 1,569 miles starting in the Western Himalaya, and the Brahmaputra river, with origins in the Northern Himalaya and with an extension of 2,391 miles. Combined, these two rivers carry annually 1,254 billion cubic meters of water, with suspended sediment load of about 100 million tons.[12]

A triangular region of land demarcated by the Bhagirathi-Hooghly river on the West, the Ganges-Padma in the North and East, and the sea of the Bay of Bengal in the South forms the delta, which was formed by the continuous pouring of a sediment load for a period of about 150 million years. When the Ganges enters the Bengal delta, its current splits into two main streams: the Bhagirathi-Hooghly system, and the Ganges-Padma system. This

[12]Kalyan Rudra, *Atlas of Changing River Courses in West Bengal,1767-2010* (Kolkata: Sea Explorers' Institute, 2012), 1.

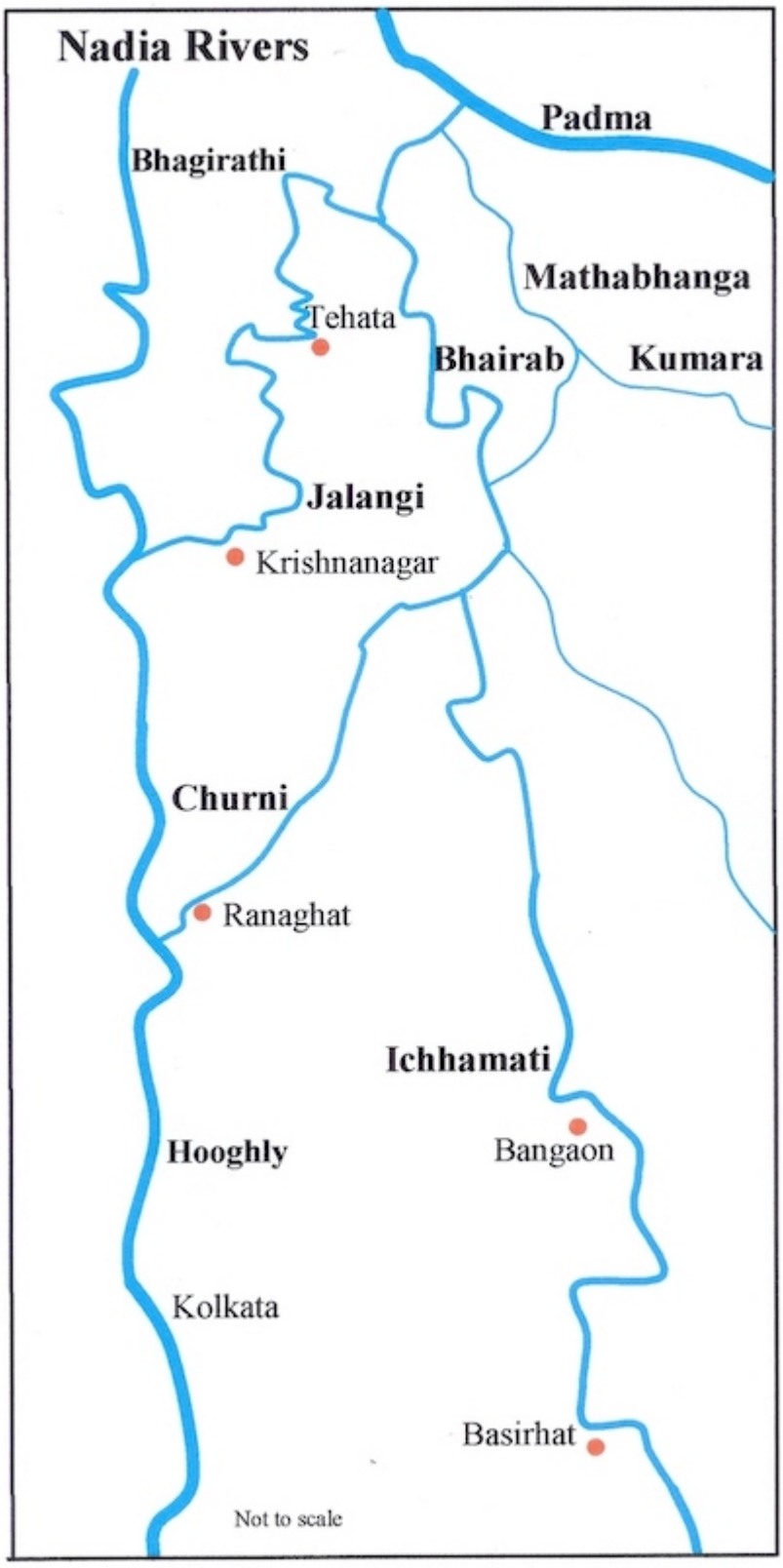

Figure 1.1: P.K. Niyogi, *Flow of rivers through Nadia District*, accesed April 2 2020, Wikimedia Commons, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_rivers_of_Nadia/media/File:Nadia_Rivers.jpg

breakpoint, which is known as the apex of a delta, is located in a place called Mithipur, though for centuries the apex was found near Rajmahal.[13]

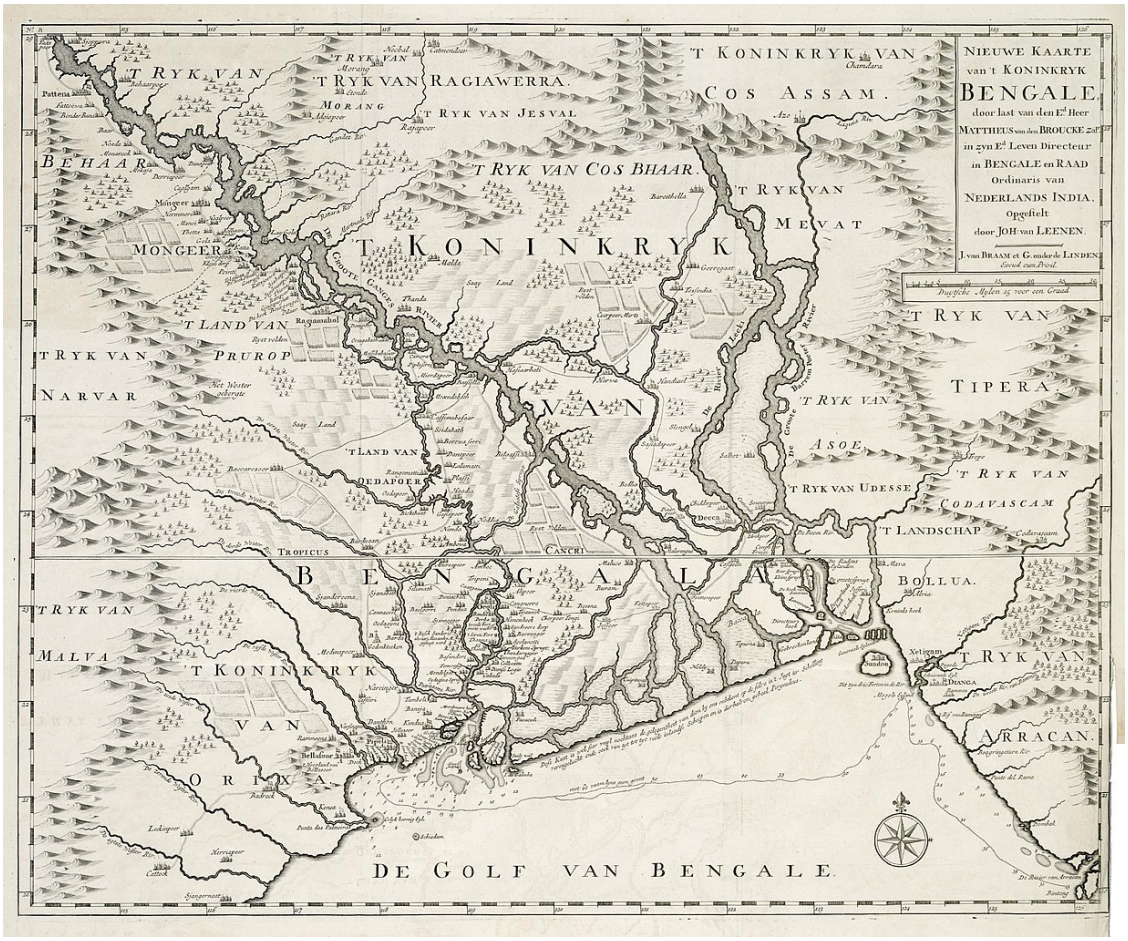

Figure 1.2: Mattheus van den Broucke, *Map of Bengal*, based on a survey carried out by Johan van Leenen in 1666-67, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMH-7259-KB_Map_of_Bengal.jpg

From the apex of the delta the Bhagirathi-Hooghly river moves southbound for approximately 500 kilometers, passing near important cities of West Bengal like Murshidabad, Nabadvip, Hooghly and Kolkata, finally discharging into the Bay of Bengal. From the apex down to the ancient town of Nabadvip in Nadia, this tributary of the Ganges is known as the Bhagirathi.

The region of Nadia lies approximately seventy-five miles to the north of Kolkata, in the

[13]See for example figure 1.3 which shows the apex near Rajmahal.

present state of West Bengal, India. The Bhagirathi River encounters another stream, the Jalangi River, an offshoot of the other main branch of the Ganges, the Padma, exactly at the site of the town of Nabadvip, located on the western bank of the Bhagirathi, while the town of Mayapurt sits on the eastern side. Traveling along the river from Nabadvip, upstream of the Jalangi, we find the town of Krishnanagar, the present capital of the modern district of Nadia and the city where at the end of the seventeenth century the Nadia royal family established their capital. Traveling downstream, the combined flow of the Bhagirathi and Jalangi rivers is known as the Hooghly River.[14]

Historical sources, starting in the eighteenth century, mentioned that at some point in time the Bhaghirathi-Hooghly was the main channel of the Ganges, the Padma being a secondary one. This is not the case currently and has not been the case for centuries; it seems that this big shift took place at some point during the 16th century.[15] In fact, the stream of the Bhaghirathi-Hooghly was rescued from heavy blockages of silt by the construction of the Farakka Barrage, just a few kilometers downriver from Rajmahal. This barrage, built in 1970, sequesters nearly 87 million cubic meters of water from the Ganges-Padma and redirects them through the Bhagirathi-Hooghly in order to prevent the further accumulation of silt and to prevent the clog of the waterway near Kolkata.

The ruins lesson

When Bholanath Chandra entered Delhi, after almost a year of slow travel up the Ganges, he found a much more familiar landscape than that of Nabadvip: ruins upon ruins littered the city. "Three epochs," declared Chandra, "three sovereignties, and three civilizations, combine to form the 'mingled yarn' of Delhi's history. The Pandoo, the Moslem and the

[14]Md. Julfikar Ali and Subrata Roy, "Morphodynamic Changes of Hooghly River and Reorientation of Chakdaha Settlement: A Perspective of Urban Evolution (WB, India)," *Natural Hazards* 93, no. 1 (August 1, 2018): 2.

[15]Robert Ivermee, *Hooghly: The Global History of a River* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2020), 4.

Figure 1.3: Detail of Van den Broucke's Map of Bengal showing the historical apex of the Ganges delta around 1666 CE.

Briton, encounter each other on the same ground."[16] In Delhi, a millennial city competing in fame with Babylon, Carthage, Troy and even Rome, Bholanath could see clearly the traces of its history, notwithstanding the long list of invasions and plunder by human hands and the closeness of the Yamuna river. When we take together the descriptions of Nadia and Delhi, the deep contrast between the two ancient cities highlights the unnaturality of the historical landscape of Nadia, with its wonderful past yet with its barren landscape, devoid of history.

Ruins and ruination have occupied a central place in Western thought in philosophy, history writing, literature and the arts. From Pliny the elder, the Roman naturalist and philosopher of the first century CE, to the twentieth century German philosopher Walter Benjamin, the semiotic significance of ruins is woven into the temporal fabric of Western culture.[17] It is via ruins, thinking through them, that the temporalization practice of Western culture is achieved: ruins inhabit the liminal zone between the past and the present, and in thinking through ruins the nature of historical time can be elucidated. For example, in 1764 Edward Gibbon, the English historian of Rome, claimed that the idea of writing the history of Rome, its rise and fall, sprung into existence in his mind after a promenade around the old ruins in the eternal city. A well-known quote of Gibbon portrays the moment and the circumstances by which this project appeared in his mind: "It was Rome, on the 15th of October 1764, as I sat musing amid the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind."[18] Clearly dramatizing the moment of conception of what would become his major work, Gibbon was hardly the first one to feel galvanized into historical reflection by the ruins of Rome. Donald Kelley argues that Rome had functioned as

[16]Bholanauth Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India*, vol. 2 (London: Trübner & Company, 1869), vol. II, 134.

[17]On the importance of Pliny the Elder in re-discovering the ruins of Rome for Renaissance intellectuals, see Peter Fane-Saunders, *Pliny the Elder and the Emergence of Renaissance Architecture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), especially Part 1. Walter Benjamin discussed the "cult of ruin" in the baroque drama, see Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 1998), 177–178.

[18]Edward Gibbon cited in Arthur Quinn, "'Meditating Tacitus': Gibbon's Adaptation to an Eighteenth Century Audience," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70, no. 1 (February 1984): 53.

the framework with which to explain the vicissitudes of History, be they the dispensations of Fortune or the turning of the Wheel of Empires.[19] But Rome as a pure idea is only an aspect of its power as catalyst of historical and historiographic reflections. The site of Rome as a geographical space, but mainly the configuration of contemporary Rome as ruins, prompted reflections about time, space, and loss and recovery. This was, as mentioned, not particular to just a handful of authors, it came to be known as the ruins lesson: to look at ruins was an act of translation between the past and the present.[20]

The ruins lesson became a trope of a particular understanding of history and historical time: history as *historia magistra vitae,* that is, the idea that History was a source of examples from where to learn. This relation to historical time stresses the search for "comparisons and parallels between the ancients and the moderns," which finally renders the singularity of an historical event moot: revolutions, change, and ruination succeed themselves without end.[21] The perseverance of the ruin across time and space was then to be read not as a series of singular catastrophes but as an overall pattern: all empires rise, and all empires fall, that is just the nature of this understanding of historical time. However, by the eighteenth century, the *historia magistra* model was already coming to an end, being replaced by the modern concept of history.[22] In that passage, ruins became not an act of providence, but an act of nature.

This secularization of nature and time can be seen in what the German sociologist George Simmel, writing in the early decades of the twentieth century, had to say about ruins: a perfect example of nature and the human spirit as opposing forces. Simmel said that all human arts struggle "between the will of the spirit and the necessity of nature," but only architecture manages to embody the "most sublime victory of the spirit over nature", achieved

[19]Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 227.

[20]Susan Stewart, *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), xiv; See also François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 91–95.

[21]Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 74.

[22]Hartog, 72.

not by imposing or dominating, but by guiding the will of the matter to execute, according to its own nature, humanity's plans.[23] For Simmel, architecture is the best token not only of human civilization, but also of human history, which he understands as this constant struggle between nature and the human: "the whole history of mankind is a gradual rise of the spirit to mastery over the nature which it finds outside, but in a certain sense also within, itself."[24] Thus, the fascination with architecture comes from this precarious balance of nature and will within the building; but once the edifice collapses, nature begins to take it over, as if liberating it from the bindings imposed by humanity. In fact, adds Simmel, it is only in this interplay between human will and nature that the fascination with ruins emerges; a man-made ruin, i.e. through plunder or wanton destruction, could never have the same significance than a 'natural' ruin, for a ruin's significance rests on "the contrast between human work and the effect of nature."[25]

When Caesar visited the remnants of the city of Troy in his campaign against Pompey Magnus, the Roman historian Lucan lamented the sad state of the glorious city's ruins and remarked that "even ruins perish." That is, even ruins have a history. The next section deals with the encounter of ruins and the lack of them in the ever-changing landscape of Bengal, and how this encounter prompted English administrators and travelers to query the nature of historical change in the region.

Rajmahal as a heuristic device

> "Rajahmahl [sic] is still distinguished among the villages of Bengal, by having formerly been the residence of the Rajahs of this rich province, and afterwards of the Mahommedan viceroys. The ruins of this spacious palace are still partly standing; and from the apparent strength, and durability of the materials, might

[23] Simmel, "Two Essays," 379.

[24] Simmel, 379.

[25] Simmel, 380. To illustrate this point, Simmel notes that many Roman ruins, despite their antiquity, lack the proper fascination of a ruin, either because they are man-made or are still inhabited by the locals. Simmel understood the ruination process as coming from nature only.

> have continued entire for ages, had it not been for the irresistible, encroachments of the Ganges. On many occasions the Hindoos pay dearly for their veneration of this river: whole villages are in one season, perhaps in a single night, undermined by its stream, and buried in the water. This has at last been the fate of the palace of Rajahmahl, after it had stood for ages one of the greatest monuments of magnificence of which this part of India can boast."[26]

Thus begins the description of the ruins of the palace of Rajmahal by Rev. William Tennant, who visited the place in 1790. Rajmahal is a region on the bank of the Ganges in present day Jharkhand. It became the capital of the *Subah* of Bengal some years after the defeat of Daud Khan Karrani, the last Sultan of Bengal, when the Mughal Empire annexed Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1576 CE. It was the Rajput general Man Singh who moved the capital of the *Subah* from the old city of Gaur to Rajmahal, since Gaur had become disease-ridden due to the shifting of the river: the old capital had become so unsanitary that in 1575 a malaria outbreak killed a significant part of the population of the city.[27] It is not uncommon in Bengal to have rivers deciding the fate of cities and people, and it seems that the shifting of the river away from Gaur and the strategic geographic position of Rajmahal—including its proximity to the river—made this site suitable for the position of capital of the Bengal *Subah.* It was during the vice-royalty of Shah Shuja, from 1639 till 1660 CE, that Rajmahal reached the peak of its grandeur. In this period, Shah Shuja erected a grandiose palace and fortified the structures that Man Singh had put in place before.

However, just a year after its establishment as the capital city of Bengal in 1640, the Ganges shifted its course once again, taking with it the newly constructed palace.[28] This does not seem to have prevented the instauration of the capital at Rajmahal, since it remained there till 1660, when it was moved to Dhaka. By 1676, the French traveler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier already noted that Rajmahal had seen better days:

[26]William Tennant, *Indian Recreations* (London and Edinburgh: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1804–8), 126.

[27]Lewis Sydney Stewart O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers Santal Parganas* (Concept Publishing Company, 1910), 27. More on Gaur and its process of ruination below.

[28]Charles Stewart, *The History of Bengal: From the First Mohammedan Invasion Until the Virtual Conquest of That Country by the English, A.D. 1757* (Black, Parry, and Company, 1813), 250.

> Rajmahal is a town on the right bank of the Ganges, and when you approach it by land you find that for one or two *coss* the roads are paved with brick up to the town.[29] It was formerly the residence of the Governors of Bengal, because it is a splendid hunting country, and, moreover, the trade there was considerable. But the river having taken another course, and passing only at a distance of a full half league from the town, as much for this reason as for the purpose of restraining the King of Arakan, and many Portuguese bandits who have settled at the mouths of the Ganges, and by whom the inhabitants of Dacca, up to which they made incursions, were molested—the Governor and the merchants who dwelt at Rajmahal removed to Dacca, which is today a place of considerable trade.[30]

From the seventeenth century to the early decades of the nineteenth century, there was an important production of texts and pictorial works that portrayed the ruined state of Rajmahal for a European audience. People like William Hodges in 1781, James Moffat in 1800, and Thomas and William Daniel in 1814, depicted Rajmahal as one of many scenic and, importantly, representative landscapes of India.[31] By the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth, Rajmahal—and, in particular, the ruined palace of Shah Shuja—had become a common place for Europeans to think about the experience of difference that was India. But what was this experience? What does the pervasive presence of Rajmahal and its ruins in European travelogues convey about the representation of India by Europeans?

The confluence of the natural with the human (that is, history) in India created the idea that it was possible to read the nature of historical time of India in its landscape. This was already a different experience of nature and time from the one in England, where the Romantic movement had conceptualized the 'landscape' not as a historical heuristic device, but as an external prompt that had an effect on the internal world of the observer/poet; as the English painter Samuel Palmer in the nineteenth century put it: "landscape is of little

[29] *Coss*, different spelling of *kos*, an ancient Indian standard unit of distance, roughly equivalent to 3000 meters or 1.8 miles.

[30] Jean-Baptiste Tavernier and V. Ball, *Travels in India* (Lahore: al-Biruni, 1976), 125.

[31] Thomas Daniell, William Daniell, and James Wales, *Oriental Scenery: One Hundred and Fifty Views of the Architecture, Antiquities, and Landscape Scenery of Hindoostan* (London: Published by the authors, 1816).

value, but as it hints or expresses the thoughts and doings of man."[32] This relationship with landscape was crystallized on the idea of the 'picturesque,' that is, not on the mere description of the scenery, but on "viewing nature according to the principles of its presentation in art."[33]

However, the relationship with the Indian landscape was not mediated solely by the 'picturesque.' Near the end of the eighteenth century, another European traveler, Captain Francis Wilford, gave testimony of the lost glory of Rajmahal. Eager to see the area, which he thought was the same city that Diodorus Siculus had identified with *Palibhotra* (Pataliputra, actually more than 100 km. to the West of Rajmahal), he traveled to the area just to be disappointed at the sight of it:

> When I was at *Raj-mehal* in January last, I was desirous of making particular inquiries on the spot, but I could only meet with a few *Bráhmens*, and those very ignorant; all they could tell me was, that in former ages, *Raj-mehal*, or *Raj-mandal*, was an immense city; that it extended as far as the eastern limits of *Boglipoore* [Bhagalpur] towards *Terriaguly* [Teliagarhi]; but that the *Ganges*, which formerly ran a great way towards the N.E. and E. had swallowed it up; and that the present *Raj-mehal*, formerly a suburb of the ancient city, was all that remained of that famous place.[34]

The pervasive presence of the Rajmahal ruins in these travelogues and painting books reveals a deeper engagement with the landscape that transformed the 'picturesque' views of crumbling palaces and decaying tombs into a "metaphor for the country at large."[35] This means that India, its landscape and its history, were not to be merely contemplated; the gaze of the traveler/colonizer rather transformed the landscape and its history into a metaphor for the nature of historical time in India: while Rajmahal had come to symbolize the pinnacle

[32]Samuel Palmer cited in Stephen Hebron, *The Romantics and the British Landscape* (London: British Library, 2006), vii.

[33]Hebron, 7.

[34]Francis Wilford, "On the Chronology of the Hindus," in *Asiatic Researches Or, Transactions of the Society, Instituted in Bengal, for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature, of Asia. Volume Five.* Vol. 5 (London: London: printed for J. Sewell; Vernor and Hood; J. Cuthell; J. Walker; R. Lea; Lackington, Allen, and Co.; Otridge and son; R. Faulder; and J. Scatcherd., 1799), 271.

[35]David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science, 1800-1856* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 76.

of the Mughal/Islamic civilization in India, it now lay bare in ruins, as it should be, as the nature of historical time dictated.

While the rupture with and the inaccessibility of the past is an object of mourning for English Romantic authors, the glory of the past of Rajmahal, its distance with the present, meant something different for a young Indian poet in the first decades of the nineteenth century. In 1826, Henry William Vivian Derozio published an English poem on the ruins of the royal palace at Rajmahal in a purely European romantic style. The poem could be read as a lament and as a meditation on the nature of time itself, for in the poem the ruins of Rajmahal tell at the same time the story of its past grandeur and its present ruined state. In usual romantic fashion, the voice of the poet is mixed with that of the site, being indistinguishable at moments. The poem starts with heavy descriptions of the interiors of the palace, and while the poet does not speak in the first person, it is clear that it is the poet/spectator who reflects on the long-gone scenes of royal grandeur:

> No serf has lighted yon kiosk.
> There's no Muezzin in the Mosque,
> No vesper hymn, no morning prayer
> Shall be put up, or answered there [...]

Near the end of the poem, the poet declares: "how eloquent is all around!" With this gesture, it is now the site of Rajmahal who speaks. The mourning for the time gone comes from the site itself. The palace is a witness to everything that has happened and it will probably be a witness to future cataclysms too. And this change of voice is important, for the message of the site and that of the poet are divergent, pointing towards different directions at the point of time of the poem:

> But most these very stones impart
> A lesson to the human heart.
> Perhaps they say to him whose gaze
> Is fixed on them, "In after days,

"Such e'en may be thy hapless fate,
"Forlorn — neglected — desolate!"

It is apt that the stones are the ones now warning about the inevitable dangers of the passing of time. If anything can withstand the fury and caprices of weather and time, it is the stones; these usually silent spectators are brought to life not merely to lament the forgotten and lost glory of Rajmahal, but to warn the passer by that all present time will inevitably become a forgotten, past time; such is the nature of time itself. Ten years before Derozio wrote "The Ruins of Rajmahal," the English romantic poet Percy Shelley composed the well-known poem "Ozymandias," instigated by the somewhat recent archaeological discoveries in Egypt after the Napoleonic wars there. Like Derozio's poem, in "Ozymandias" the stones speak, conveying the same message that the stones of Rajmahal proclaimed: a lamentation and an avowal on the nature of time, that all that was great and noble will come to an end, that all empires will meet their fate:

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

However, the poet's voice and message are significantly different from that of the stones and from that of Romantic poets like Shelley or Wordsworth whom Derozio so consciously sought to emulate. This split of the voices of the site and the poet is important to notice, for Derozio was not merely trying to ponder what effects the natural world had on his interior

world; he was a poet on a mission, and that undertaking had to do with finding a new voice for literature in India. The parallel between Derozio's and Shelley's is, of course, no mere coincidence; Derozio was among the first Indian poets to write in English, with a style that would seem to be openly mimicking the one of English romantic poets like Moore and Byron.[36] What was this new voice Derozio was trying to find? Just like for the Europeans travelers that offered a glimpse of the Indian scenery, the ruined landscape of Rajmahal presented to Derozio an opportunity to reflect on the nature of Indian historical time.

But this chance to reflect on Indian landscapes and its links with the nature of Indian time did not hinge around stressing the difference of India *vis à vis* Europe, as it did for European travelers. Instead, Derozio's meditation on landscape and time sought consciously to demarcate a new era in Indian literature by, essentially, starting to write literature; whatever was there in the past of India, that was not literature. In a column published in the Indian Gazette in 1826, Derozio, under the pen-name "Juvenis," wrote:

> Why is it that Literature does not flourish in this country – is the soil or the climate uncongenial to the culture of so delicate a flower – or is there a paucity of those talents which are necessary to accelerate its growth? There is something that withers it in spite of every effort, and every care. What it is, I have never yet satisfactorily ascertained.[37]

In "The Ruins of Rajmahal," there is a surprising turn when the poet speaks, for he puts on hold the melancholy, the mourning for the glory of the past, the picturesque in the ruined landscape that was so common in Romantic poetry and art, and instead offers

[36]Thomas Edwards, in the biography of Derozio, explains the young poet's infatuation with English Romanticism, although framing it in the well-known model of derivation and repetition: "A good deal has been said regarding the style of Derozio, that it is but an echo of Byron, Moore, and Mrs. McLean (L. E. L.), exaggerated idealism and pictures of passion. No doubt, the influence of these writers exercised considerable power in moulding the form of much of Derozio's poetry. They were the poets then fashionable, and to depart from their models was, for a young unknown writer, to court defeat. Derozio's idea was, first, to gain the ear of the public by singing to them in the prevailing fashion of the day and then, having gained a hearing, to strike out in that style in which his own nature would most vigorously drape his song." Thomas Edward, *Henry Derozio, the Eurasian, Poet, Teacher, and Journalist: With Appendices* (Calcutta: W. Newman, 1884), 192.

[37]Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, "Beginnings, Literature in India, Promises," *Indian Gazette* (Calcutta), July 20, 1826.

us a departure from these sentiments and from the glory of Rajmahal itself. As Rosinka Chaudhuri has argued, the Romantic goal of melancholic remembrance is subverted on this particular object of memory/mourning and instead we are presented with a will to forget.[38] After paying attention to the message of the stones and understanding the transient nature of glory and time itself, the poet declares:

> I would not have the day return
> That saw these wrecks in all their pride —
> As he who weeps o'er Beauty's urn
> Feels what he felt not by her side,
> A gloom that gives to sorrow zest!
> A pang that's welcome to the breast!

Usually, the melancholic sentiment of the picturesque landscape makes Romantic poets weep over the vanished glory, longing for a return to that moment, which they know is impossible. Yet, here Derozio is moving away from that, bidding a definitive adieu to the ruins and advising the traveler to keep marching on, for while the might of the palace and of Shah Shuja is long gone and irrecoverable, there is a new site in which the glory of the past can be appreciated:

> On, stranger! on, nor start at things
> That mock the pride and power of kings —
> But Shoojah thought such hapless fate
> Could ne'er the golden Mosque await,
> Nor could the mighty monarch deem
> Its wreck would be the Poet's theme.
> Why should it not? My native land
> Is that which he did once command —
> And though her sons to fame are dead.
> Her spirit is not wholly fled;
> For while her rivers glisten sheen.
> And roll their fertile banks between,
> And while her mist-clad mountains rear

[38]Rosinka Chaudhuri, "Three Poets in Search of History. Calcutta, 1752-1859," in *Trans-Colonial Modernities in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2012), 196.

Their peaks, as if to pierce the sky.
In memory's page shall live the year
Of glory that has long gone by —

In this stanza the nation, referenced when Derozio calls it "my native land," emerges almost furtively, for there is a displacement from the ruins of the palace and the landscape of Rajmahal—the 'picturesque' that is the relationship between these natural and man-made elements—to a rather abstract conceptual formation, one that still has to do with the natural landscape ("her rivers," "her mist-clad mountains") but not the landscape of the region, instead, of the whole territory of India. Rather than a romantic, melancholic remembrance of the past, *The Ruins of Rajmahal* reads like a programmatic attempt to apprehend the different temporalities of India—both the past and the future— differently, even differently from the way European travelers portrayed the nature of Indian time. The past can be read in the landscape, but unlike the landscape of Nadia, the message legible there is not the naturality of the decay of India, but an articulation of a glorious past with a bright future, the time of the nation.

Rosinka Chaudhuri argues that this different articulation of the past with the present and future signaled that Derozio had a modern apprehension of time, that is, that a new form of historicality was available to him in which the past was seen as completely gone, i.e., as absolutely inaccessible. Derozio, argues Chaudhuri, inhabited a "space of modernity," a space from which the past of Rajmahal in particular and of India in general could be seen as 'medieval:' "in his repeated invocation of the lost glories of the country we recognize the triad of antiquity, the Middle Ages and modernity, which has been available since the advent of humanism and the Enlightenment."[39] But how this historicality became available to Derozio, it is not perfectly clear in Chaudhuri's analysis. Rather, Chaudhuri treats the historicality in Derozio's poem as if the poet were able to tap into a previously unknown stream thanks to his Western education and liminal position as an Eurasian man (born of an English mother and an Indo-Portuguese father.) It is more probable that Derozio, a connoisseur of the tradition

[39]Chaudhuri, "Three Poets in Search of History. Calcutta, 1752-1859," 197.

of English romanticism, reworked his understanding of historical time visible in *The Ruins of Rajmahal* from his life-long engagement with the poetry of Byron or Woodsworth.[40] But Derozio's experience was not the only temporal experience obtained from ruins of Bengal. In the next section, I discuss how English officers encounter in the ruins of the old city of Gaur a starkly different temporal experience.

Ruin-thinking: Gaur, the Ganges and the agent of history

The ancient city of *Gauṛa*, anglicized as *Gaur* or *Gour*, is located near the international border between the Indian state of West Bengal, specifically in the northern district of Maldah, and Bangladesh, around 218 miles north of Kolkata. The city is eponymous with the northern and western areas of Greater Bengal in which it is located, one of the five historic divisions of Bengal. This region was for centuries an important seat of power in eastern India, starting with the kingdom of the ruler Śāśaṁka around 606 CE, who established his capital not in Gaur but in a city known as Karṇasuvarṇa, in modern day Murshidabad.[41] After Śāśaṁka, a period of political turmoil ensued for more than one hundred years, until Gopāla I (ca. 756-781 CE) established the Buddhist Pāla dynasty in the region.[42] The Pālas were ousted eventually by the Senas (starting with Vijayasena, c. 1095-1158 CE), whom all accounts identify as natives from South India but also as feudatories of the Pālas.[43]

The Sena's sway over Gaur did not last for long, for in 1204 CE an Afghan warrior under orders of the Delhi Sultanate, Bhaktiyar Khilji, entered Bengal after conquering parts of Bihar. According to the Persian *Tabaqāt-i Nāṣiri*, Bhaktiyar managed to overthrow Rājā

[40] See for example the poem *Rome, Ruins of the Coliseum* by Lord Byron, which presents a similar imagery to *Rajmahal*. I am in no way suggesting that Derozio copied the poem or that his work was derivative, but the influence of English romanticism in Derozio is well documented. See footnote 36 above.

[41] Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate*, 6.

[42] Ābadula Mamina Caudhurī, *Dynastic History of Bengal, c. 750-1200 A.D.* (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1967), 273.

[43] Caudhurī, 210.

Lakṣamaṇasena with merely eighteen riders. Disguised as merchants, Bhaktiyar and his men approached the capital of the kingdom, only revealing their intentions when they were at the gates of the royal palace. Frightened, Lakṣamaṇasena fled the capital in a hurry, crossing the river and leaving his palace and court intact. That episode did not only mark the end of the Sena dynasty, it was also an epochal tour de force, for it signaled the beginning of five centuries of political rule by a Islamicate regime. For later modern historians, both English and Bengali, this was the beginning of the "Muslim" period in Bengal. It was in this period that the city of Gaur, already an important urban center in the past centuries, became the capital of the region; Bhaktiyar himself minted a coin, with Arabic and Sanskrit engraving, to commemorate "upon the conquest of Bengal" (*gauḍavijaye*). Subsequent rulers of the Bengal Sultanate only increased the prestige and attractiveness of the city with ample architectural programs; most buildings that still survive today were built between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. In 1575, the Mughal commander and first *subahdar* of Bengal captured the city of Gaur from the Sultan of Bengal, Daud Khan Karrani, and transferred the capital of the province to Gaur. However, a severe epidemic led to the abandonment of the city and to the death of Munin Khan himself.[44] When the Mughal general Khan Jahan defeated and beheaded Daud Khan Karrani in the battle of Rajmahal on the twelfth July 1576 CE, the Bengal Sultanate came crumbling down and the Mughal era started in Bengal.[45] The city of Gaur, derelict and ravaged by the elements, became part of the jungle.

Though abandoned, the ruins of Gaur were never fully forgotten; they inhabited the tales and chronicles of European travelers for centuries. In 1683, Sir William Hedges, the first governor of Bengal for the East India Company, took a day trip to see the ruins of Gaur, which he found "in my judgement, considerably bigger and more beautiful than the Grand Seignor's Seraglio at Constantinople, or any other Pallace that I have seen in Europe."[46] A

[44]Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, 144.

[45]Abdul Karim, *History of Bengal: Mughal Period* (Rajshahi, Bangladesh: Institute of Bangladesh Studies, University of Rajshahi, 1992), 29.

[46]William Hedges, Henry Yule, and R. Barlow, *The Diary of William Hedges, Esq. (Afterwards Sir William Hedges), during His Agency in Bengal: As Well as on His Voyage out and Return Overland (1681-1697)*, vol. I (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1887), 89.

lieutenant in the corps of the Bengal Engineers of the East India Company, William Baillie, sketched what has been considered the earliest visual record of the ruins of Gaur in 1784, now accessible on the British Library website.[47] Other travelers/administrators also visited the area and left written impressions of what they saw, like Robert Orme (visited in 1760), Reuben Burrow (visited 1787), and the cartographer James Rennell (visited in the 1770s.)[48] Henry Creighton, who published decades later a book with some drawings of the ruins, came to work as a clerk in an indigo plantation in Malda in 1786, and stayed there till 1807.[49] Creighton's book containing his appreciations of the ruins of Gaur and the aquatints he painted was published in 1817, ten years after his death as a way to help his widow and his family who had become destitute after his untimely passing. Probably the most well-known account of Gaur, which has been quoted in numerous works, came from him. After providing some initial impressions and measurements of the palace complex, Creighton summarizes the state of the ruins in a single paragraph:

> In passing through so large an extent of former grandeur, once the busy scene of men, nothing presents itself but these few remains. Trees and high grass now fill up the space, and shelter a variety of wild creatures, bears, buffaloes, deer, wild hogs, snakes, monkies [sic], peacocks, and the common domestic fowl, rendered wild for want of an owner. At night the roar of the tiger, the cry of the peacock, and the howl of the jackals, with the accompaniment of rats, owls, and troublesome insects, soon become familiar to the few inhabitants still in its neighbourhood.[50]

At a glance, the account and paintings of Creighton of the ruins of Gaur are another prime example of the 'picturesque,' that is, an almost seamless blend of the ruins into the backdrop of nature. As Parjanya Sen indicates, picturesque works needed to depict some

[47]William Baillie, "Ruined Gateway in the Baisgazi Wall with the Remains of an Hexagonal Tower, Gaur. In the Distance, Outside the East Wall Is the Firoz Minar," www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/other/019wdz000003953u00000000.html.

[48]Parjanya Sen, "Gaur as 'Monument': The Making of an Archive and Tropes of Memorializing," *Journal of Art Historiography* 8 (December 1, 2013): 5. However, Sen misidentifies the date of Baillie's drawing, stating that it was drawn in 1758, when Baillie was at most seven years old.

[49]Henry Creighton, *The Ruins of Gour Described and Represented in Eighteen Views. With a Topographical Map* (London: Black, Parbury, & Allen, 1817).

[50]Creighton, 5.

human reference in the landscape: a passing peasant, a lost farm animal, or a ruin, something that could serve as a memento to man's transience.[51] Looking at the textual and pictorial production around the ruins of Rajmahal and Gaur that sprung up in the eighteenth century, we can see that both ruins, found on the same river, appealed to the romantic sensibility that European travelers and East India Company functionaries had brought with them. As stated by David Arnold, this picturesque/romantic gaze upon the landscape of India was an effort to draw parallels with known landscape concepts and ideas that were developed in eighteenth century Britain, a cultural process that was set in place through signs, metaphors and narratives that compared the English and the Indian landscapes. While recognizing that India had "its own and distinctive physical and cultural identity," the landscape of India, dotted with ruins like those of Rajmahal and Gaur, was subject to "ideas of landscape and nature that were external and alien to itself, and which aligned it [...] with distant places and other times."[52]

While Creighton's book and the aquatints he made of the ruins of Gaur fall within the conceptual realm of the 'picturesque,' much like Derozio's poem of Rajmahal and the Daniell brothers' *Oriental Scenery* book, Creighton's book also points to a different engagement with India's landscape that started to appear in the second half of the eighteenth century. Creighton did not spend considerable time walking in and around Gaur with the sole purpose of sketching and stressing the 'picturesque' character of the ruins of Gaur. He also took measurements of the buildings, provided a short history of the city based on Portuguese, English and Persian sources, and even detailed a number of coins recovered from the site. But, importantly, he also dutifully noted the shifts the river suffered throughout its history; he described not only the alterations in the river course, but also the changes in elevation and the silting of the banks near Gaur. The first edition of his book, published in 1817, contained a large map with observations made during his stay at Malda, from 1786 to 1807.

Creighton was certainly not the first one to note the changes in the river, nor the first

[51] Sen, "Gaur as 'Monument'," 7.
[52] Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze*, 3.

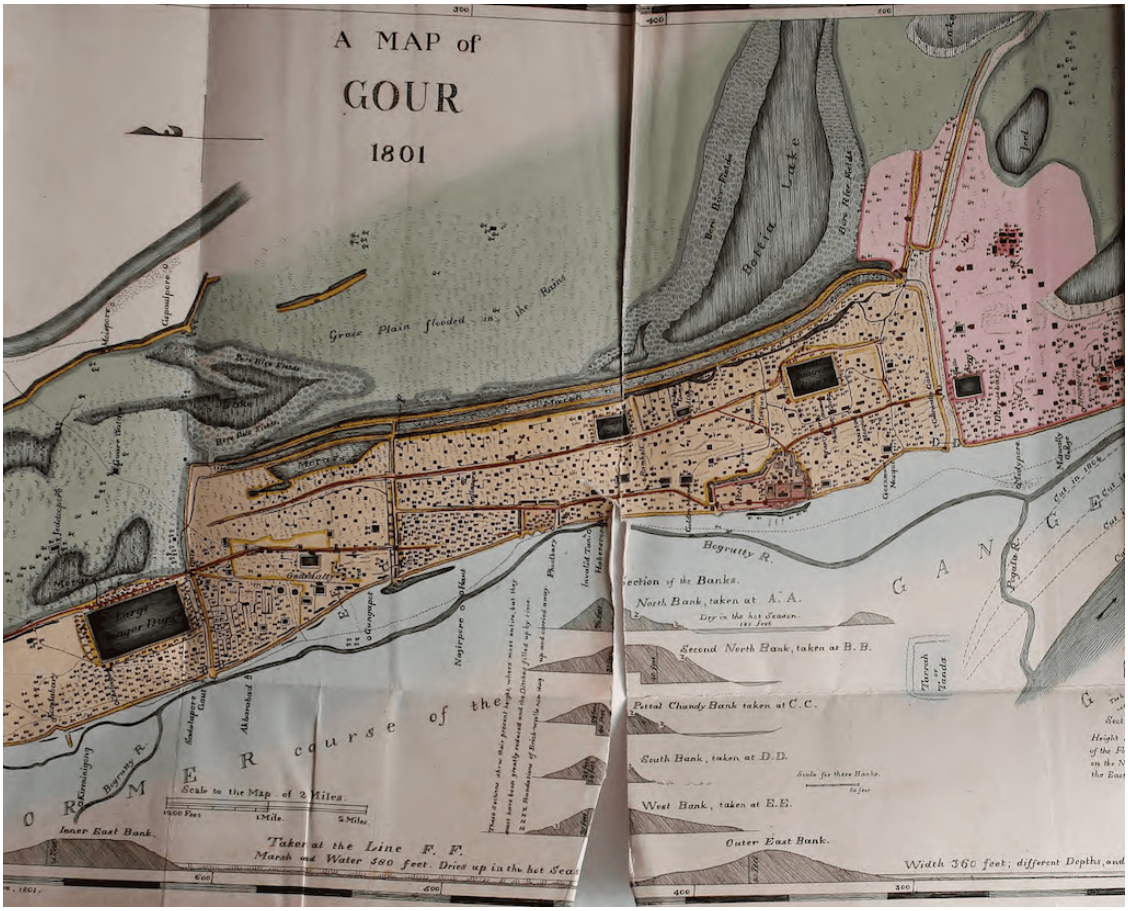

Figure 1.4: Slice of a map of the ruins of Gaur, the river and a study of its banks, in Henry Creighton, *The Ruins of Gour Described and Represented in Eighteen Views. With a Topographical Map* (London: Black, Parbury, Allen, 1817).

to publish a map showing these changes in the course and in the elevation of the waterflow. However, Creighton's book is a prime example of an evolving different appreciation of the Indian landscape, moving from a picturesque or anecdotal engagement to a more 'scientific' preoccupation with the patent difference between the Indian and European landscapes. David Arnold has described this change in attitude towards landscape as a process of "tropicalization" of the Indian natural landscape. The invention of 'the tropics' or the tropical zone, the idea that the regions of the world contained within the Tropic lines—at latitudes of 23º North for the Tropic of Cancer and 23º South for the Tropic of Capricorn—shared a series of characteristics, came about during the last decades of the eighteenth century and up to the 1850s thanks to figures like Alexander Humboldt who applied a scientific lens to

their travels throughout the recently colonized world, like the West Indies and South America. Scientific tropicality, as Arnold calls it, emerged from the tight relationship between exploitation and exploration to which the European colonial drive subjected the 'tropical' regions of the world after the age of discovery, through minute observation, classification and mapping.[53] If the vast differences between Europe and India were understood by Romanticism as South Asia's inherent exoticism, tropicality coded in scientific terms the difference with Europe and at the same time created a commonality of the non-European world. It was the difference with Europe which united all regions within the Tropics.

The ruins of Gaur, located between the most important rivers of greater Bengal, figure prominently in the link between exploitation and exploration. Gaur city appeared in many European accounts and travelogues not merely because of its picturesque quality, but also because it was on the path that European administrators, officers and merchants took from the mouth of the river Ganges in the Bay of Bengal upstream to the many villages and towns along the river where business was to be conducted. This is clear for example in William Hedge's diary, cited above, who in company of his wife visited the ruins of Gaur while assessing the state of the commercial enterprises of the Company along the river. Another salient example is the *Journal of a route from Rajemehul to Gour, A.D. 1810-1*, written by then Captain William Francklin (1763 - 1839).[54] Francklin's manuscript of his journey to the ruins of Gaur, printed several times after the original journey in 1810, enjoyed some recognition among an audience of English and Indian geographers and cartographers.[55] Francklin combined both the picturesque (the exploration) drive with the scientific recognition (exploitation) force in his Gaur journal; he provided a detailed account not only of the ruins, but of the Arabic inscriptions found in the site, along with an English translation of the same and, importantly, a detailed chronology of the Hindu and Muslim kings of Gaur obtained from different sources, including Persian manuscripts.

[53] Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze*, 113.

[54] William Francklin, "Journal of a Route from Rajemehul to Gour" (British Library, IOR/X/1292, 1810).

[55] See for example William Francklin, *Journal of a Route from Rajemehul to Gour, AD 1810-11 [with a Typed Memorandum by G F Tinney, India Office]* (Shilong, 1910).

The link between exploration and exploitation, between leisure and duty, or even between a Romantic disposition to the ruined landscape of India and a scientific drive to dissect and classify the landscape experience in South Asia was crystallized in the travelogues of European travelers of the time, like Francklin, who succinctly described this very relationship when at the end of his journal he wrote: "thus terminated an interesting survey of about 130 miles on both sides of the Ganges, through a part of the country not generally visited by Europeans. The pleasures of this little tour have been enhanced by the recollection, that under a liberal Government, an officer in the performance of his duty may for a while be permitted to turn aside from the ordinary path, to gather a few of the flowers of literature and science."[56] However, while the Arabic inscriptions and translations of Persian manuscripts were the blossomed flowers of literature, he also provided a clear path to enjoy the fruits of science:

> The access to Gour in the rainy season is very difficult, and, it is said, abounds in tigers and other wild animals. We did not fall in with any of these, but whilst traversing this deserted spot, it occurred to me that if Government should be desirous of bringing it once more into a cultivated state, and considerable benefit might be ultimately derived, i.e., by drawing off the water and clearing the forests of the thick underwood that abounds, the soil which is excellent would amply repay the time and expense incurred in the execution of the plan; considerable advantages would occur to the State in the supply of fuel alone in clearing and cutting down the woods, which by means of a thousand more prisoners, collected from the adjacent districts, might easily be effected and at a small expense. The price of labour thus saved by the employment of convicts would not only be reduced to a trifle but very large sums of money would be annually saved to Government, in the consumption of the articles of fuel, which is annually purchased by the residents for the supply of the Honorable Company's filatures at Maldah, Boliah, Jungeepore and Moorshedabad, in manufacturing the silk produced in these districts.[57]

Traversing the river, however, required knowledge of it, especially for such a shifting river as the Ganges in Bengal. From the sixteenth century onward, European sailors drew

[56]Francklin, "Journal of a Route from Rajemehul to Gour," 31v.
[57]Francklin, 3v-4r.

detailed maps of the coast of India, which could be used to navigate its sandy shores. But as the Europeans started to build and maintain factories inline, especially along rivers like the Hooghly in Bengal, locating and understanding the formation of shoals in rivers, especially rivers prone to sudden silting as the Ganges in its last stretch to the ocean, became an important matter for merchants.

Thus, the question of the navigability of the river Ganges in Bengal and the change of the water levels throughout the seasons was a central issue to be solved for the profitability of the early colonial enterprise in Bengal. Numerous travelogues of East India Company officials contain descriptions of the country and the state of the land, but these travelogues were careful to also point out the conditions of the rivers and watercourses intersecting the travelers' path. In January 1763 Henry Vansittart, Governor of Bengal from 1759 to 1764, wrote a small logbook capturing the details of a travel throughout the province from *Moota Gill* (a garden near Murshidabad) to Kolkata via Krishnanagar. While most likely Vansittart undertook the journey to evaluate the state of the English East India Company business operations, including the rent of lands in Bengal, Vansittart only said of Krishnanagar that it was a "well peopled town and good buildings."[58] The bulk of the travelogue is spent in describing the many inlets or *nullahs* (from *nālā*, river), the amount of water they carried, whether they were navigable, and where these riverlets intersected the main watercourses, like the Bhagirathi. Vansittart's logbook is just one of such documents produced in the eighteenth century. Vansittart's contemporary and historian of the East India Company, Robert Orme, compiled many of these travelogues by English clerks and officers in order to get and provide a better understanding of the geography of Bengal, which he finally published in his book on the military history of the East India Company.[59]

The perennial shifting course of the rivers in Bengal, and the seasonal opening and

[58]Henry Vansittart, "Mr. Vansittart's Journey from Mootagill to Calcutta by Kisnagur and Barrasut with Some Description of the Country and of Hybut Oolah the Renter, I [Orme] Believe of Kishnagur. Probably Original." (British Library, Mss Eur Orme OV.67, January 1763).

[59]Robert Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan, from the Year MDCCXLV. To Which Is Prefixed A Dissertation on the Establishments Made by Mahomedan Conquerors in Indostan.* (London: printed for John Nourse, 1763).

closing of many inlets due to the continuous silting of the channels, however, prevented European merchants and officers from having a full picture of the landscape of the region. Moreover, in tune with the link between exploitation and exploration, the shifting rivers were not only a constant obstacle to commerce and a good administration of the region: it was clear to explorers, cartographers and other European functionaries that the rivers of Bengal had actively shaped the history of the region. A manuscript titled "Field Book of a Survey undertaken to find the Difference of Level between the Ganges and Bogrutty Rivers. Observations on the Ganges, Cossimbazar, and Jellinghee Rivers," written by Lieutenant Francis Wilford, offers glimpses on the historical agency of the Bhagirathi/Hooghly river.[60] Wilford worked under the Surveyor General from 1790 to 1796, making military maps in Bengal and Bihar. Like other European officers around that time, Wilford developed a keen interest on the antiquities and languages of South Asia, contributing several fanciful and factually misleading articles to the journal, *Asiatick Researches*.[61] While Wilford would be derided for his absurd linguistic and historic theories about India and the Hindus, in his survey of the rivers of Bengal Wilford managed to crystallize the historiographic anxieties that the shifting rivers produced in Bengal's historical and natural landscape.

The *Field Book of a Survey* starts by declaring the aim of the survey trip: "It has been supposed by many that if the Baugrutty [Bhagirathi] on Cosimbazar River was not navigable towards the latter end of the dry season, it was only owing to some impediment towards the head of that River, which being once removed, the water of the Ganges would flow freely into it, and consequently render this river navigable."Wilford, "Field Book of a Survey," 1r Yet, as Wilford noted in his report, the situation was much more dire, for removing the obstacle at the head of the river would yield few if any positive outcomes. In reality, the heavy and uneven silting of the two branches of the Ganges, the Ganges proper (the Padma)

[60]Francis Wilford, "FIELD BOOK of a SURVEY Undertaken to Find the Difference of Level between the GANGES and BOGRUTTY RIVERS. Observations on the Ganges, Cossimbazar, and Jellinghee Rivers. No Date. Signed F. Wilford, Lieut. Surveyor. On 13 Pages, 4to. Stiff Cover. MS." (British Library, IOR/X/428).

[61]See Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 335-6, for a description of Wilford's serious gaffes in his search for a link between India and ancient Egypt.

and the Bhagirathi, had led to a significant difference in height between the river beds of the two streams. As Wilford noted, only in the rainy season the waters of the two rivers had the same height. The rest of the year the disparity between the water levels was intensely pronounced: in January, the difference between the branches amounted up to six or seven feet; in February the bed of the Bhagirathi sat even higher than the level of the water of the Padma. Thus, as Wilford concluded, removing the sand banks at the entrance of the Bhagirati would have achieved nothing, for the problem actually lay in the nature of the Bengal delta. Wilford, citing Greek geographers Strabo and Dionysius Periegetes, claimed that the plain of the delta had formed upon thousands and thousands of years of continuous silting, the former head of the river being just below the hills of Rajmahal; everything south of it was but a 'recent' (in geological terms) encroachment into the sea. For the longest time in the history of the Ganges near the delta, the main branch of the river had been what is now the Bhagirathi river, but around 1650 CE, maintained Wilford, the silting of the river had led to a heavy occlusion of the mouth of the branch, which in turn produced a sudden and substantial shift of the main waterflow of the river, shifting further to the East, to the Padma branch:

> This was occasion'd by the Ganges removing from Goar [Gour] towards Rajemall [Rajmahal] for whilst the Ganges was close to Goar its waters ran directly in to the Baugrutty [Bhagirathi] and consequently kept its bed clean and the sands from gathering in to Shoals and Banks but the main body of the water having now alter'd its direction has forced its way thro' the Eastern branch of the Ganges called Puddan [Padma], the bed of which being thus enlarged, it is now become the grand channel of the Ganges and the Baugrutty is reduced to almost nothing.[62]

According to Wilford, the shifting of the main course of the Ganges towards the eastern branch had larger historical consequences: "this removal of the Ganges from Gour," argued Wilford, "was also the principal cause of the ruin of this once famous city."[63]

[62]Wilford, "Field Book of a Survey," 4r.
[63]Wilford, 4r.

Thus, in the mid eighteenth century, the ruins of Gaur and the ever-changing river were not mere elements in a picturesque landscape. The idea of geological time as a different order of magnitude from historical time—and the very idea of time itself being an empty realm in which human history takes place—had not been conceptualized at this moment when European travelers were trying to make sense of the alien landscape of India. The concept of geological time would only take root in sciences and the imaginary of European and westernized audiences after the publication of Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology.* But what we see here in these sources dealing with the ruins of Gaur and the riverine landscape of Bengal was not only an attempt to tame, through science, the wild landscape of Bengal. Unlike Simmel's conceptualization of a ruin as a perfect blend between civilization and nature, the ruins of Gaur presented a historical conundrum: what was the nature of historical time in Bengal? And importantly: who was the agent of historical change in Bengal?

Map-thinking (I): James Rennell and the early cartography of Bengal

As stated above, European cartographers started mapping the territories over which they claimed control in South Asia rather early, especially around the coasts and river mouths in order to aid the navigation of merchant ships. As European powers began to migrate or expand inland from ports near to the coast, increasingly larger and more accurate maps became necessary. In the eighteenth century, maps became a "manifestation of Enlightenment encyclopedic mentality," argues Edney, which meant that maps were produced with aims beyond the practical necessities of coastal navigation; maps were also used to imagine (i.e. to provide an image of) a unified territory under a unified political entity, like the Mughal empire.[64] One of the first maps to offer a general view of India as an imagined unified ter-

[64]Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843*, 5.

ritory was made by the French cartographer J.B.B. d'Anville in 1752. Anville's map relied on older maps and travelogue sources to place on the grid the geographical features of the country. Thus, while North India, the Carnatic region and Bengal—especially the mouth of the Ganges—are well-represented in terms of the number of natural details and cities present in the map, the rest of India contains large chunks of white space.

Figure 1.5: Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d' Anville (1697-1782), cartographer. *Carte de l'Inde Dressée pour la Compagnie des Indes*, 1752, Gallica BnF, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53052830q

As shown in the previous section, mercantile and military travelogues were written and circulated not only to keep a record of the affair and movements of functionaries and militias, but also as a way of broadcasting the geography of the territories. Decades of travelogues and other texts became the sources upon which the new cartographic imagination was being

built around the mid-eighteenth century. However, d'Anville's map and the great white spaces it contained show one important issue that was patently felt in the mid-eighteenth century: the insufficiency of sources for producing accurate cartographic representations of South Asia. This was felt even more acutely in the second half of the eighteenth century, when European powers came to rely more and more on the huge revenue produced by land taxation in India, and not so much on profits obtained by trading.

The first major attempt to unite all geographical and political knowledge about the territory of India under a new cartography of the country started with James Rennell's surveys. James Rennell (1742-1830) arrived in India in 1760 and served in the Royal Navy till 1763, when he was appointed as the first Surveyor General for the East India Company in Bengal by Robert Clive in the same year.[65] Rennell was in charge of producing local and provincial maps of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa up to 1777, after which he left India to go back to England. In 1779, once in England, Rennell published *A Bengal Atlas* and in 1782 *A Map of Hindoostan* along with a *Memoir* of the same map.[66] These works presented to the English and larger European public a unified and cohesive (cartographic) view of India probably for the first time ever.

These published works, and the surveys and maps he produced while in India, made Rennell a household name for any geographer, explorer or English functionary with any connection to India. For example, Markhand's biography of Rennell hailed him as "the greatest geographer that Great Britain has yet produced."[67] While Rennell's methods and sources were not fundamentally different from other cartographers, like d'Anville who had produced his *Carte de l'Inde* thirty years before Rennell, it was the piercing together of myriad chunks of information minutely described in Rennell's *Memoir*, along with his and his collaborator's

[65]Clements Robert Markham, *Major James Rennel and the Rise of Modern English Geography* (Cassell & Co., 1895), 42.

[66]James Rennell, *A Bengal Atlas* (Lyon: Bibliothèque du Palais des Arts, 1781); James Rennell, *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan; or, The Mogul Empire: With an Introduction, Illustrative of the Geography and Present Division of That Country: And a Map of the Countries Situated between the Head of the Indus, and the Caspian Sea.* (London: Printed by M. Brown, for the author, 1788).

[67]Markham, *Major James Rennel and the Rise of Modern English Geography*, v.

field surveys, which granted Rennell a heroic aura in the cultural imaginary of British India decades after his death. This is what separated Rennell from other cartographers of his time, the application of "his clear and logical brain and knowledge of travel literature" to different sources, regardless of Rennell's personal knowledge and experience in the area; in most cases, Rennell did not travel to many of the areas on which he had produced maps.[68] However, this was not seen as a defect of Rennell's cartographic knowledge production, but as the triumph of a scientific approach to the space of India, in clear contrast with the romantic and anecdotal engagement that travelogues had shown for centuries.[69] His logical, rational approach to sources with the aim to fill in gaps in information, and the framing of India as both territorial *and* political made Rennell the first scholar to project a cohesive, unitary and definitive image of India for the British and European public.[70]

Thus, Rennell entered the annals of British India as the purveyor of a new idea about space, one directly linked to a new kind of domination that in turn relied on a novel epistemological basis. This epistemological imperative sought to create a set of "factualized statements" about the Indian territory, history and culture through objective, positive and universal science. Rennell's maps were not only a technical answer to the physical challenge posed by the Indian terrain and landscape; his maps were seen as the crystallization of the epistemological ideal of the Enlightenment: rational, scientific and objective ways of knowing could produce empirically correct and accurate representations of the natural world.[71]

In the scholarship of that time, James Rennell came to occupy a prominent position among the pantheon of Orientalist researchers. These orientalists inaugurated a way of looking at India's past and present that was rooted in a deeply entrenched relationship

[68]Alison M. Johnson, "The Rennell Collection," *The Geographical Journal* 148, no. 1 (1982): 38.

[69]Rennell's critical use of sources, despite a complete lack of field experience in many scenarios of India, did yield cartographic breakthroughs at the time. For decades, if not centuries, travelers had talked about a mythical river, the "Ganga", with its source in the Deccan and travelling north-east through Bihar to its mouth in Bengal. It was Rennell who proved that the Ganges and the Ganga were but one and the same river, and the course of the fictitious Ganga a mistake that had been reproduced for many years. Figure 1.5 shows this ghostly Ganga still. See G. F. Heaney, "Rennell and the Surveyors of India," *The Geographical Journal* 134, no. 3 (1968): for further discussion on Rennell's methods.

[70]Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843*, 9.

[71]Edney, 18.

between power and knowledge, which in turn sustained the colonial and imperial enterprise of Europe outside its own borders. For example, the historian David Ludden argues that Rennell should be counted among towering Orientalist scholars like Sir William Jones and Thomas Munro. A recent work also stresses Rennell's role in defining the space that was formerly Hindustan (in Persian histories) as an imperial dominion of Britain.[72] Ludden and Asif highlight the 'epistemological violence' of representing the territory of the South Asian subcontinent as a unified space under the aegis of the British. Both authors also accentuate the very clear relationship between knowledge and power; between knowing the space of British India and the success of the colonial enterprise. This relationship was made clear in the cartouche for Rennell's "Map of Hindoostan" of 1782, where a scene depicting the transfer of power/knowledge takes place, from the pandits (brahmins) who bestow the *śāstras* (laws, scriptures) upon a personification of Britain attired as a Roman goddess attire. What the cartouche suggests is that India, or Hindustan as Rennell still calls it, was not only an aggregate of different territories, lands, peoples and histories. With Brittania receiving the ancient knowledge of Hindustan's inhabitants, India was rather re-configured as a space-time of the imperial: the time of the Hindus and the Muslims as rulers had ended, it was now Britain's time to rule over the territories of India.

However, I argue that focusing on Rennell's role in the genealogy of colonial epistemology and in the forging of a unified image of India obscures the actual processes by which the time-space of British India was *gradually* constructed. Rennell's orders when first appointed as Surveyor General of Bengal by Clive in 1763 were not to produce a cohesive and unified image of India. Rennell's first task was a much more practical and urgent query: he was to find the shortest, all-year round navigable passage between Calcutta and the main Ganges river for boats carrying up to eleven tons.[73] Thus, most of Rennell's work on the field was

[72]Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020); David Ludden, "Orientalist Empiricism: Transformations of Colonial Knowledge," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 250.

[73]F. C. Hirst, *The Surveys of Bengal by Major James Rennell, F.R.S., 1764-1777: Illustrated by a New Atlas Containing Important Unpublished Maps by Rennell / by F.C. Hirst.* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat

Figure 1.6: Cartouche of James Rennell's Map of Hindoostan, 1782, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hindoostan_Rennell_1782.jpg

devoted to surveying the rivers of Bengal and their water levels throughout the year to find new and/or stable routes of navigation. This endeavor, however, was quickly found to be almost impossible due to the behavior of rivers in the plains of Bengal. If Rennell's "Map of Hindoostan" came to represent the cartographic/epistemic violence of the Empire upon the space of South Asia, as Asif, Ludden and Edney maintain, then the rivers of Bengal and their changing courses represent a serious hindrance to the Enlightened cartographic ideal that strived for a faithful representation of the space in maps through knowledge and science.

The constant survey of Indian rivers under English administration had been an urgent issue for the Board of Directors of the Company since the seventeenth century. In 1669 CE, the Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan granted permission to the English to bring large seafaring ships up the Hooghly river. This was seen in the moment as a great jump forward, since it meant that the English vessels did not have to be loaded and unloaded at the port of Balasore (or Baleswara, in present day Odisha, around 300 km. south-west of Kolkata) where Mughal officials would take a commission on each ship. The river Hooghly, however, was a highly difficult one to navigate, and many boat captains refused to do the trip upriver; the board of Directors even offered ten additional shillings per ton for goods delivered to any of the factories along the Hooghly, but no captain took the risk. Then, the Company built a special ship in order to survey the river, the *Dilligence*. Only then ships began doing the trip upstream.[74]

However, a hundred years after the first voyage of the *Dilligence*, rivers in Bengal were still in constant need of survey due to their changing nature. Rennell mentioned in one of his surveys that during the eleven years of his tenure in Bengal, the head of the Jalangi river (that is, the point in which a new branch of the river diverts from the main stream) had shifted three quarters of a mile down river , but two subsequent surveys found that in the lapse of nine to twelve years, the head of the Jalangi had moved actually a mile

Book Depôt, 1917), i.

[74]Ivermee, *Hooghly*, 67.

and a half.[75] Rennell's maps and surveys might have revealed to the European public for the first time a unified idea of India, but Rennell's constant surveys and updating of the streams and water levels of rivers, an enterprise that continued throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, revealed that despite European colonialism's embrace of the Enlightened cartographic ideal of knowing completely a territory through a map, rivers in Bengal undermined the confidence and reliance on this cartographic ideal.

While the cartouche in Rennell's map of Hindustan of 1782 has received a lot of scholarly attention, due to its patent representation of the link between (British) imperial domination and knowledge, another elaborated cartouche found in his map of Bengal and the course of the Ganges reveals perhaps a more nuanced approach to the problem of knowing and mapping the capricious rivers of Bengal. In this cartouche, Rennell tried to portray the tradition and lore he had acquired about the Ganges during his stay in India. First, in the image we see a Greek god-like old man seated on a bank of the river might be either the river itself (though Rennell knew that Hindus referred to the river Ganges as *Mā Gāṅgā*) or some representation of the god Vishnu; in a text describing the course of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers, Rennell provided a false etymology for the name of the Padma river, which is the name that the main course of the Ganges receives after the branching out of the Hooghly-Bhagirathi in western Bengal; the Padma, said Rennell, received its name because the Hindus thought that the Ganges had its spring at the feet (*pada* in Sanskrit) of the God Vishnu. This etymology only works, however, in the Bengali pronunciation of the Sanskrit word *padmā* (lotus), which in Bengali is pronounced *Poddā*, quite close to *pada*, foot. Another bit of lore that Rennell introduced is the oxen head visible in this cartouche. Natives and Europeans alike told tales about a rock in the shape of a cow's head through which the Ganges flowed. But, as Rennell remarked, no European had really visited this geological formation, and most Indians acknowledged that such a natural monument did not actually bear a resemblance to a cow's head.[76] Importantly, unlike in the previously discussed

[75]James Rennell, *An Account of the Ganges and Burrampooter Rivers* (London: s.n., 1781), 113.
[76]Rennell, *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan*, 256.

cartouche, there is no transfer of knowledge from natives to the British. In fact, there is a stark contrast, a chasm between the natural world and the human world. On one side of the river, the old man sits in the middle of a lush jungle, among two beasts that populated the European travel narratives around India and whose presence gave these narratives an exotic character: an alligator and a leopard, which might have very well been a tiger.[77] On the other side of the river, a troupe of persons—none European—stand together, but none seems to be engaged in any activity that could yield some useful knowledge about the river. In fact, all of them seem to be rather oblivious to the scene on the other bank of the river.

Figure 1.7: Cartouche of *A map of Bengal, Bahar, Oude Allahabad: with part of Agra and Delhi, exhibiting the course of the Ganges from Hurdwar to the sea,Cartouche of James Rennell's map of the course of the Ganges*, published in London, 1786, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ganges_map_Rennell.jpg

There is another element that is almost hidden by the cartouche itself. The lettering of the cartouche sits on what seems to be a split rock that towers above the scene, though on a

[77]Think, for example, of Creighton's description of the ruins of Gaur, as "infested with tigers."

closer inspection, we see lines, patterns and shapes in the rock that could only be man-made. We are in front of a ruin, possibly a tower that has fallen and now has been reclaimed by nature. Much like the ruins of the city of Gaur, ravaged not by time, fortune or human hand but by the vagaries of the river, in this cartouche the presence of these ruins so close to the river and on nature's side of the divide, brings back the question of the historical agency of the river and of the nature of historical time in Bengal.

Conclusion

Starting in the thirteenth century, when European travelers began to pour into Asia attracted by the higher chances of economic and social advancement to be made in the trade with Eastern empires, they encountered a social, cultural and even natural landscape that was fundamentally alien to their experiences. Accounts of European travelers in Asia and Africa circulated in Europe for centuries, combining retellings of fantastical accounts with actual facts and information about the societies and cultures of different Asian regions. Perhaps the most famous one is Marco Polo's own account of his travels and stay in the court of China during the 13th century, but he was certainly not the first to offer a European audience a glimpse of the refined courtly cultures of East Asia and the perceived marvels, riches and odd customs of these countries. Marco Polo himself wrote his book in order to expel from the minds of European the fanciful tales that circulated about Asian kingdoms, offering instead a balanced narrative of fantasies and facts.

But by the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth centuries, the genre of the travelogue had evolved from being an *édifiant* tale with a mixed balance of quixotic exploits and information to what came to be called 'philosophical travel.'[78] The shift to philosophical travel took place gradually during those centuries, combining the aesthetic and the sentimental. Johannes Fabian explains this passage from pilgrimage to descriptions of foreign places rooted in a Romantic view of nature and landscape, paired with a scientific, posi-

[78]Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 7.

tivist approach to describing the natural world. However, the most important change with previous traditions of travel writing in Europe had to do with the understanding of history, from a divinity-centered sacred history to a man centered secular time. Pilgrimage had been at the center of a religious conception of history in Europe, in that the pilgrimage of Europeans to the Christian Holy Lands in the Middle East ascertained the most important events of Christian religious history: the birth, death and resurrection of the Christ. To travel to the Holy Lands was to bear witness to the unique occurrence of the life of Jesus Christ and, above all, to the promise that the second coming of the Messiah will finally bring about sacred history to its completion. Pilgrimage was of course a social and cultural richer phenomenon with far reaching implications than the upholding of the centrality of divinity for social life. Thus, while travel/pilgrimage was both a way to attest divine intervention in the human world and an interpretative device through which the social world could be explained, travel narratives in sacred history did not question the nature of time and space. The relations to be worked out in this kind of travel writing were between men and God; time and space were a given.

Philosophical travel, on the other hand, was about finding man's place in the world, the secular world of nature. Opposed to the assertion of divinity's intervention in the history of men that was traveling (pilgrimage) as an understanding of sacred history, philosophical travel was about the Enlightenment urge to know the world through positive science, though it also integrated Romantic views and attitudes towards nature, especially towards landscape. During the Enlightenment the genre of travel narrative explodes in Europe, especially in Britain where travelogues written in languages other than English were quickly translated for the consumption of the British public.[79] As Johannes Fabian has argued, the main concern in this literature was "the description of movements and relations in *space*."[80] But this understanding of relations *in* space could only be achieved by presupposing secular time,

[79]Peter. Hulme and Tim Youngs, *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

[80]Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 7.

that is, a conception of time that was immanent and universal, in a metonymical relationship with nature.

Modern scholarship has tended to explain the encounter between the colonized world and European travelers through some kind of conceptual verticality that was imposed on the territory by the Europeans. In this chapter, for example, we encountered the idea that the European scientific and administrative endeavor of mapping the colonized space of India constituted a form of 'epistemological violence' upon India, homogenizing and totalizing the territory.[81] David Arnold has also contributed to this debate by coining the concept of the 'traveling gaze,' an idea which he elaborated from Foucault's works like *The Birth of the Clinic*, *Discipline and Punish*, and Foucault's investigations on human sciences as in *The Order of Things*. Arnold says that the idea of the traveling gaze, thus, has the senses of both "the disciplining power of constant monitoring and surveillance" and the "the investigative, ordering and interpretative intelligence that pervades the practice of a modern science like botany or zoology."[82] And though Foucault discussed human subjects and not landscapes, Arnold argues that the asymmetrical power relationship between the traveler and his gaze gave way to the idea of 'nature' imposed on a landscape.[83] However, as Arnold himself argues, landscapes resist these 'epistemological impositions,' though they do it only by failing to meet the expectations of the one with the gaze, the European traveler/administrator; hence, the colonial ideation of transforming the landscape to make it productive, to improve it.[84]

This chapter has shown that there was more to the 'epistemological violence' of mapping a territory, at least in the case of Bengal and its rivers during the eighteenth century. It is not that ideologies of improvement and extraction were absent from the ideation of the landscape of Bengal by colonial officers, quite the contrary. But focusing on the use of maps and descriptions of nature and landscape as mere tools of an overarching imperial ideology presupposes that concepts of nature and cartographical epistemologies existed elsewhere

[81]Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843*, 24.
[82]Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze*, 28.
[83]Arnold, 29.
[84]Arnold, 33.

and were simply deployed upon the territory of Bengal. In that sense, the description that Bholanath made of Nabadvip and the many descriptions that Gazetteers and reports on the rivers and lands of Nadia made during the nineteenth century, which talked about a 'naturally' decayed place, do not have a history, these descriptions would only be repetitions of an imperial ideology that arrived in India with the first English cartographers and naturalists. This chapter is an attempt to develop a historicized approach to the kind of thinking about time that was undertaken through maps and travelogues. While it is true that ultimately the idea developed by Fabian about the non-coevalness of the colonized world took place through these thinking devices, I have argued here that the encounter with the riverine landscape of Bengal and the ruins (or lack of) that dotted the landscape prompted a serious meditation on the nature of historical time in Bengal. The next chapter discusses how eventually the fluid riverine temporalities that officers and travelers had observed became fixed in the landscape, thus turning the region of Nadia and its rivers into the embodiment of a past, decayed age.

Chapter 2

A River of Ruined Capitals: Fixing Time in the Landscape

In 1841, the Anglo-Irish priest James Long wrote an article for the *Calcutta Review* journal describing the places of historical interest along the Bhagirathi river, using Rennell's *Atlas of Bengal* and Tassin's *Atlas of the Delta*. Long is better known nowadays as the translator into English and publisher in 1861 of the Bangla play *Nīl Darpan* (The Indigo Mirror) written by Dinabandhu Mitra, a play denouncing the excesses of the colonial administration against the peasants working at indigo plantations. But he was also a scholar interested in the past of Bengal and India in general. The article, aptly named "The Banks of the Bhagirathi," is rather a collection of colorful and, in many cases, marvelous local stories than a serious engagement with the history of the places Long described. Yet, despite the colorful character of these stories that Long tried to pass as history, he recognized that there was a historical *gravitas* to the region, one that needed to be preserved from oblivion in such a moment

of flux, when the "old pandits and natives, whose heads are stored with traditionary [sic] lore, are passing away."[1] In Long's narrative, Nadia got a central place in determining the historical importance of the sites along the Bhagirathi river, a place that could rival in importance with the place of Troy in European history:

> To the mere stranger the banks of the Bhagirathi present little calculated to afford interest; so would the plain of Troy to the person ignorant of Grecian history. But for those who love to dwell on the past, there are few parts of India, except Rajputana, which are crowded with a series of more interesting associations.[2]

In the previous chapter, I argued that the encounter with the ever-shifting rivers of Bengal had prompted colonial administrators to query the nature of historical time and historical agency in the history of Bengal. This chapter analyzes two parallel outcomes of querying the temporalities of the rivers in Bengal. First, I discuss the political/administrative and disciplinary (geological) position towards the nature of the rivers in Bengal and their natural history, which emerged once technological improvements of river management could finally allow the taming of the shifting rivers. Secondly, I argue that the understanding of the nature of rivers and time in Bengal, a concept I call 'fluvial temporality,' was overthrown by a new sense of temporality rooted in a separation of the river from human history. The movement of rivers, I argue, stopped being viewed as part of the historical agency of rivers in Bengal. What was before an act of nature and of everyday life—that rivers shift their course—became a historical event.

These two developments gave way, I argue, to a new temporality which allowed the British administration to justify the colonial enterprise, for the unwieldy nature of Bengal's rivers in the past became a marker of the inadequacy and powerlessness of past—medieval—authorities, especially the Mughal administration in Bengal. Thus, in the colonial logic, modernity in

[1] James Long, "The Banks of the Bhagirathi," *The Calcutta Review* 6, no. 12 (July - December 1846): 398.

[2] Long, 399.

South Asia had only been brought about by the English colonial endeavor, which meant the triumph of man over nature and the defeat of the decay of the medieval.

Map-thinking (II): fluid temporalities, ephemeral sandbanks and the Atlas of the Ganges

James Rennell, who had first-hand knowledge of the difficulties of surveying and of the changing nature of the rivers in Bengal, knew that mapping rivers, while a necessary and useful endeavor, represented a serious set of technical and epistemological challenges. On the technical problems of surveying rivers, Rennell spent considerable time in his journals discussing the probable causes for the silting of the streams of the rivers in Bengal and the changes it produced, in order to prevent (or at least try to prevent) further blockades to the navigation. One of the main issues that Rennell saw cropping up in the surveys was the sudden apparition and quick disappearance of sand banks in the middle of streams, known in Bengal as *car* (pronounced *chor*). These sand islands were formed by the accumulation of rich soil, which made these emergent formations quite fertile, thus attracting peasants and land-renters who would profit off the cultivation of these emergent sand banks, which would spring into existence in one season just to disappear by the next one. However, the *chors* represented not merely a technical challenge, but also an epistemological one.

In England's romantic view of the landscape, nature dominates its own realm, starkly separated from the human realm, only touching each other when human-made structures were turned into ruins by the workings of time and fortune, much like Derozio thought of Rajmahal or Gibbon thought of the ruins of the eternal city. And ideally, cartographic thinking should approach space and territory following the Enlightenment's paradigmatic "order of things," which Michel Foucault has famously argued built its epistemological basis on natural history.[3] But how should a map capture such a fleeting and rapidly shifting thing

[3]Michel Foucault, *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences* (London; New York: Rout-

as a river in Bengal? The problem was not just technical but also historical: the idea of nature as a stable backdrop of human history just did not hold in Bengal. Rennell points out this problem when discussing the *chors* emerging in the rivers. He inadvertently conflates historical time with geological time, arguing that the lifespan of the river and of these islands was actually shorter than a man's life, measured in years:

> Some future generation will probably see these banks rise above water, and succeeding ones possess and cultivate them! Next to earthquakes, perhaps the floods of the tropical rivers produce the quickest alteration in the face of our globe. Extensive islands are formed in the channel of the Ganges, during an interval far short of that of a man's life; so that the whole process is completed in a period that falls within the compass of his observation.[4]

As stated above, Rennell was aware of the technical and epistemological challenges that the surveying of rivers presented to the colonial administration in Bengal, but he was also a staunch advocate of the Enlightenment's methods and epistemological presuppositions when it came to cartography and representing space in maps. Rennell had a strong faith in the cartographic methods of his times, which consisted of mainly two processes. First, cartographers of that time would mine information from surveys and travelogues and then they would map out the information on a grid with latitude and longitudinal information, trying to locate landmarks in the landscape and using them as anchoring points around which the information of the terrain would be detailed.[5] The second method consisted of scientific abstractions drawn from other surveys in wildly different places. In the personal library of Rennell, there are many works of cartography authored by English and French surveyors who spent their careers in different latitudes, in Europe but also in India and in Africa as well. Inside the pages of those memoirs and cartographic journals, Rennell wrote by hand his impressions on the methods and findings of those other surveyors, and

ledge, 2006), p. 141.

[4]Rennell, *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan*, p. 266.

[5]For a deeper and richer description of the methods and instruments employed by surveyors, see R.H. Phillimore, *Historical Records of Survey of India*, vol. 1 (Dehra Dun: The Surveyor General of India, 1945), especially chapter xiii.

he was not very charitable with his thoughts. For example, Rennell tried to intervene in the debate about the location of the mythical city of Troy, which had occupied the minds of European historians and poets alike in a moment when Greek and Roman ruins were imbued with romantic feelings and ideas. Two important books had been published in Rennell's time on the subject, Jean Baptiste Le Chevalier's *Description of the Plain of Troy* (1791) and Chandler's *History of Ilium or Troy.*[6] Rennell bitterly criticized the authors and their methods, writing on the margins of both books snippets of his mind like "whizz, how very ignorant," or about the maps "very inaccurately copied. A sad performance."[7] But Rennell relied on the powers of abstraction which the rational methods of cartography had bestowed upon him to find flaws in other people's methods; through a careful reading of modern and ancient sources (among which Homer was the principal one), Rennell thought that he could provide better topographical maps of the region, this notwithstanding the fact that Rennell never set foot on the Troad, the coastal valley where the ancient city lay dormant.[8] This is why Rennell spent so much time trying to elucidate the inner workings of riverine silting and the perpetual shifting and caving of river banks, because he was interested in understanding the mechanics of rivers so that surveyors in other parts of the world could produce more accurate cartographic and topographic representations of a territory, by extrapolating the findings about the nature of the rivers in Bengal.[9]

Rennell's cartographic endeavor has been considered as the beginning of a particular rep-

[6]Jean-Baptiste Lechevalier, *Description of the Plain of Troy.* (Edinburgh: T. Cadell, 1791); Richard Chandler, *The History of Ilium Or Troy: Including the Adjacent Country, and the Opposite Coast of the Chersonesus of Thrace* (Nichols and son, 1802).

[7]Johnson, "The Rennell Collection," p. 39.

[8]The city of Troy was only excavated in the 1870s, when the German entrepreneur Heinrich Schliemann and Frank Calvert, an amateur archaelogist, began excavating in the area, in a different hill from where previous scholars thought the ruins were buried.

[9]Rennell entered a bitter debate with Benjamin Lacam about the suitability of Channel Creek, a water canal in the Hooghly, as a port that could serve the city of Calcutta. Lacam relied on the surveys of John Ritchie, carried out around 1730, to argue that Channel Creek was deep enough for ships entering Bengal through Sagar Island in the Bay of Bengal. Rennell, claiming scientific knowledge derived not from recent surveys of the actual area but abstractions drew from other spots in the river, claimed that the water levels at Channel Creek could not sustain proper commercial navigation. See Debjani Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta: The Making of Calcutta* (Cambridge University Press, May 24, 2018), p. 58 for a discussion on the debates about the authority of scientific and experiential knowledge in the Bengal surveys.

resentation of India's territory, as a unified, politically and geographically coherent space.[10] Cartographic thinking, especially in the non-European world, is seen as an epistemological imposition of fixed categories, spatial and temporal, upon a fluid and borderless space.[11] As Debjani Bhattacharya has argued, in the rich and shifting riverine ecosystem of the Bengal delta, maps failed to grasp the fluid temporalities of rivers, coasts and all the natural forces that kept shifting the boundaries between land and water. According to Bhattacharya, Maps were only able to catch a snapshot, a single moment in the fluctuating history of Bengal's landscape.[12] While it is fundamentally true that maps at the end of the eighteenth century could only offer a snapshot in time of the space represented, I argue that this was a limitation of their material base rather than an epistemological shortcoming. Map-thinking at the end of the eighteenth century in Bengal meant not only the flat objects (maps) that represented and projected space into a two-dimensional Cartesian plane, it also involved the journals, memoirs, travelogues, and seasonal charts with information about the ebbing tides and shifting water levels of the rivers.[13] I argue that the first surveyors of Bengal were aware of the different temporalities that the riverine landscape presented to them, and we can read that if we look into cartographic thinking beyond focusing on maps and their two-dimensional, static representations of space.

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, Robert Hyde Colebrooke, appointed Surveyor General of Bengal in 1794, undertook a major survey of the Ganges river between Rajmahal and Calcutta. He tried to update Rennell's *A Bengal Atlas*, keeping track of the changes of the river in the region from the moment when Rennell's surveys were first carried out, thirty years before Colebrooke's own surveys. However, Colebrooke died of dysentery while

[10]Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843.*

[11]Morrison, "On Putting Time in Its Place."

[12]Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta*, p. 16.

[13]That the material basis of the maps, their papery, two-dimensional flat nature, posed the major challenge in capturing moving temporalities instead of being purely an epistemological hindrance can be seen when we attend to the present-day digital materiality of maps. Modern computer software can overcome the fixed nature of ink and paper, presenting a slideshow of landscape changes through time. In fact, recent shareware software like ArcGIS advertise "story maps," that is, maps showing a (usually) temporal narrative, as one of its most attractive features for scholars, especially those working on Digital Humanities.

surveying the Ganges—a common fate among surveyors–before he could finish his work. But like Rennell, Colebrooke managed to become acquainted with the changing nature of rivers in Bengal. And while his maps (now almost all lost) struggled to show these changes over time, his journals patently show an acute awareness of the nature of rivers in Bengal. In 1801, after spending around 10 years surveying the Hooghly and the many channels and creeks of Western Bengal, Colebrooke wrote about the devastating effects of the rivers on human settlements from one season to next one:

> I have seen whole villages thus deserted, the inhabitants of which had rebuilt their huts on safer spots inland, or had removed entirely to some neighbouring village or town. The Topography, I might almost say the Geography, of a large portion of the country, will be liable to perpetual fluctuation from this cause; as the face of the country is not only altered by the rivers, but the villages are sometimes removed from one side to the other; some are completely destroyed, and new villages are continually rising up in other spots.[14]

According to descriptions like the above, found in the colonial archive, the inhabitants of the region were tuned into the dynamic ecosystem of the Bengal delta, which presented a different temporality. The constant movement and shifting of whole villages was an everyday fact for people dwelling around rivers, marshes or on the coast. The appearance and disappearance of *chors* (sandbanks) in channels that just the previous year had been fully navigable was integrated into the rhythm of life. As Colebrooke noted, when such a sandbank would appear after the rainy season had passed, people would flock to it to cultivate vegetables and even rice in the mud puddles of the collapsed banks. Some sandy islands, argued Colebrooke, would even resist the change of seasons for several years, sometimes decades. In those cases, people would move into the island with all their effects, huts and cattle, and would take full ownership of the sandbank. Yet, remarked Colebrooke, these islands were still liable to destruction by the river, and though they could last some decades, the river would eventually take them with it.[15]

[14]R. H. Colebrooke, "On the Course of the Ganges through Bengal," *Asiatick Researches* 7 (1801): p. 2.
[15]Colebrooke, p. 5.

We can see then that early surveyors like Rennell or Colebrooke were fully aware of the shifting ecosystem and the effect it had on the lives of people in Bengal, including people like them, colonial administrators who dwelt in a foreign land. While most of Colebrooke's maps have been lost, some of his maps appeared in Thomas Prinsep's Gangetic Atlas, published in 1829, and one of the last efforts to chart the rivers and their historical courses, drawing from historical sources like Rennell's surveys.[16] This book, known as *Prinsep's Gangetic Atlas*, was a compendium of several surveys, starting with Rennell's, intended to show the changes that the Ganges river had undergone from the first survey till the year 1828. However, this *Gangetic Atlas* was not meant to be a book for use in navigating the river, nor was it a map used to ascertain the limits of a district or of a proprietor's claim to land. From the style in which it was drawn, its limited printing (few libraries in the world hold a copy of this book), and its author (Thomas Prinsep was an amateur artist based in Calcutta, brother of the philologist James Prinsep), it seems that the main use of this atlas was to visualize, with no particularly obvious use in mind, the historical changes that the river Ganges had seen. Figure 2.1 below shows a section of this atlas; the grayish area near the stream of the river shows the course of the river in the last decade of the eighteenth century, following Colebrooke's surveys, while the blue stream shows the course of the Bhagirathi as it was in 1828.

It is true that the rivers in Bengal challenged any cartographic spatial and temporal representations, although as we saw, surveyors were indeed interested in portraying those changes. Despite the challenge presented by the rivers, map-thinking, the Enlightenment ideal of full representation of a territory's space and time through cartography, set a firm hold in the colonial imagination of India. However, after Prinsep's *Atlas*, only J. B. Tassin's *Atlas of the Delta*, published in 1835, offered a general and historical view (relying on historical surveys like Rennell's and Colebrooke's) of the course of the Ganges in Bengal for the last time. After Tassin's *Atlas of the Delta* in 1835 and especially after the technical

[16]Thomas Prinsep, R. H Colebrooke, and J. S May, *The River Ganges from Allahabad to Mohungunje: In Six Plates* (India, 1828).

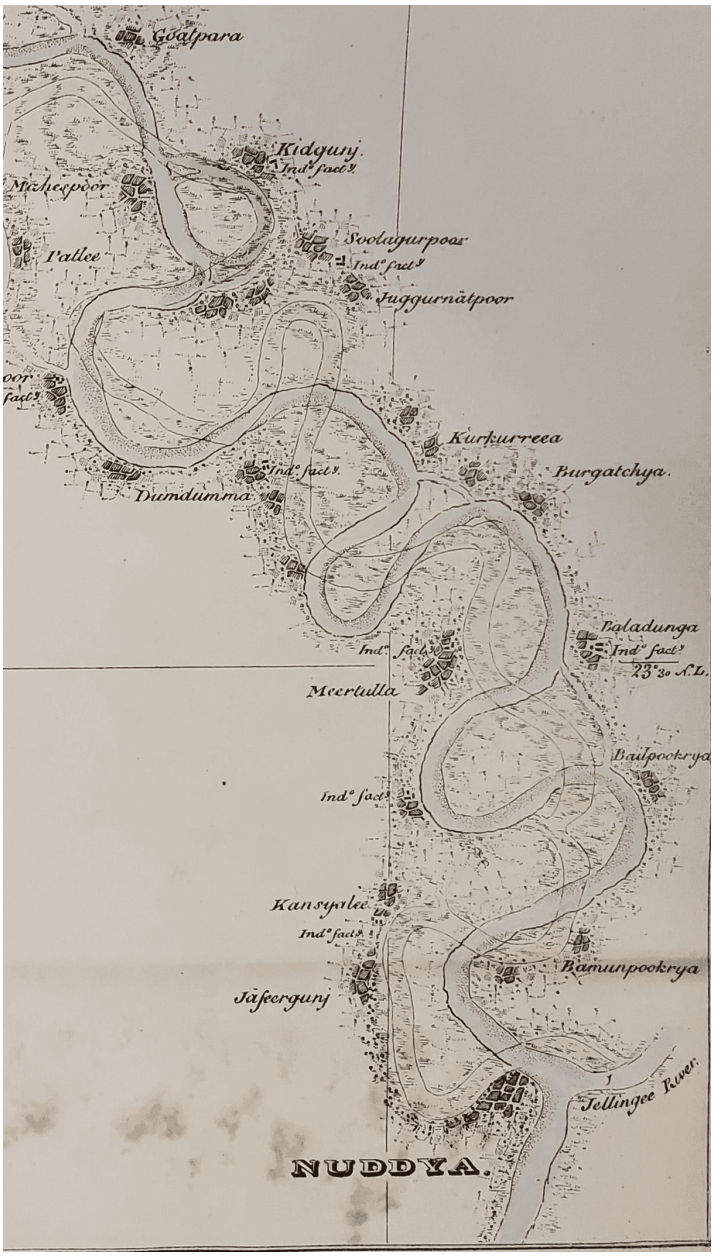

Figure 2.1: Section of the plate "The river Bhag'ruttee [Bhagirathi]" showing the changing course of the river near Nabadvip, Nuddya in the map, in Thomas Prinsep, R. H Colebrooke, and J. S May, *The River Ganges from Allahabad to Mohungunje: In Six Plates* (India, 1828), The British Library, IOR/X/478/1

improvements and higher accuracy that the Great Trigonometrical Survey brought about, Rennell's maps and surveys fell into obsolescence and disuse for any serious cartographic and scientific endeavor.[17] In 1919, C. Adams Williams, Superintendent of Bengal stated that there was no "connected account of the many changes which have taken place in the last 150 years since Major Rennell made his surveys and maps."[18] It was not that colonial administrators suddenly lost interest in knowing how the rivers changed, quite the contrary in reality. In the early nineteenth century, the colonial administration in Bengal set up many offices to survey regional rivers and to produce reports about the state of the rivers and channels in a particular district.

In this section, I argued that cartography in the early surveys of Bengal did not necessarily mean a fixation of the fluid temporalities that the river Ganges presented in Bengal. Following Bhattacharyya, I argue that such fixation of the landscape came only with the idea of property, which transformed the relation to the landscape and especially to the shifting rivers. The rise of property-thinking during the nineteenth century, which I address in the next section, paired with the increasing reliability and accuracy of cartography after the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India (1830), cemented the relations between river, land and humans. Colebrooke had described the temporal fluidity of the lives of people living on sandbanks, but property-thinking did away with this fluidity, instead fixing the relationship to the land in perpetuity.

Property-thinking: fixing the landscape in time

The setting up of commissions and special offices to the constant surveying of the state of the rivers, abandoning the previous practice of making general maps of the region (including maps showing historical changes, like Colebrooke's and Prinsep's), responded to a fundamental change in the appreciation of the riverine landscape of Bengal: the rise of

[17]Heaney, "Rennell and the Surveyors of India," p. 321.

[18]C. Adams Williams, *History of the Rivers in the Gangetic Delta. 1750-1918.* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1919), p. 2.

property-thinking. Debjani Bhattacharyya in her groundbreaking ecological history of Calcutta has put forward this concept. Bhattacharyya defines property-thinking as a process by which the mobility of the landscape—the porous borders between land and water—was fixed into a concrete, immobile landscape, a propertied geography.[19] The rise of 'property' as a category of thinking through different existing relationships in Bengal began to slowly materialize after the East India Company took by force *diwani* rights (the right to collect taxes in a given region of the Mughal Empire) in Bengal after the battle of Plassey in 1756, but took concrete shape after the instauration of the Permanent Settlement in 1793. The Permanent Settlement was based on the principles of English Whig political philosophy that tried to reduce to the minimum the exercise of political power by the executive. It tried to allocate managerial and administrative decisions to a landed aristocracy, in the belief that this echelon, in pursuing its own class interest of increasing production and thus revenue, would make society as a whole thrive.[20] Thus, the Permanent Settlement fixed, in perpetuity, the revenue from lands to be paid to the government and, most importantly, bestowed the private ownership of cultivable land on the hands of the *zamindars* who under the Mughal regime had collected taxes not as owners but as representatives of the Mughal emperor.

The Permanent Settlement had diverse intellectual, social and economic consequences in Bengal, but I will not discuss these here. But it is important to stress that during the nineteenth century, when the colonial regime started to think anew the basis and consequences of the Permanent Settlement, colonial administrators focused mainly on the policies concerning the creation and bestowal of private property upon the *zamindar* class, a process known as the "restoration of *zamindars*." As Ranajit Guha has argued, this re-focusing on aspects concerning the granting of lands to *zamindars* occurred despite the fact that Phillip Francis, the mastermind behind the Permanent Settlement and a man deeply influenced by the ideas of the French Enlightenment, had conceived of the Permanent Settlement as an

[19]Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta*, p. 5.

[20]Ishita Banerjee-Dube, *A History of Modern India* (Daryaganj, Delhi, India: Cambridge University Press, October 27, 2014), 61.

overarching, quasi-philosophical treatise on the question of British authority and legitimate sovereignty in Bengal, and not only as a loose set of fiscal policies to increase the revenue collected by the Company.[21] Thus, in the nineteenth century, the thinking of fiscal policies was centered around the idea of private property. In a way, property-thinking became king.

A case presented to a court of law in Bengal illustrates this point. In 1910, a certain Sarat Chandra Singh presented a lawsuit against someone named Kshitish Chandra Roy on a matter of land ownership. According to the lawsuit, an inlet of the Bhagirati river in Sonadanga was clogged and its flow was cut from the main branch of the river, creating a *beel* (*bil* in Bengali), which refers to either a flooded plain or to an oxbow lake.[22] In the lawsuit, the plaintiff (Singh) claimed that this *beel* was situated within his family estate, and was suing to recover it. The defendant's counterclaim was that the *beel* was in reality situated in his own property. The Singh family had attempted to claim this land before, in 1862, but at that time the *beel* was still a flowing channel of the Bhagirathi, and the Roy family had fishery rights upon that section of the river. Two facts of law conspired against the desires of the Singhs to claim that land with the river as their own: that the Roys had fishery rights which was ruled by the courts of law to be an inseparable incident from the rights of soil; and that a flowing river was not private but public property.[23]

Since both parties made the same claim of land ownership, the court had then to ascertain two things: first, whether the cutting off of the inlet from the main channel had changed the status of the land. Second, if it did change, when had this change taken place. The court found that in 1898, the inlet had been indeed cut off from the navigation of the main channel of the Bhagirathi. Appealing to the Roman Institutions of Justinian, the judge found that the old channel of the river ceased to be public property and became private at that point. Since the change had occurred in 1898, it was not barred by limitation, hence the question

[21]Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal; an Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement.* (Paris: Mouton, 1963), 115.

[22]See https://goo.gl/maps/cvcEGTwffivsBEF48 for an idea of the location of Sonadanga, in the district of Nadia in West Bengal.

[23]"Sarat Chandra Sing vs Kshitish Chandra Roy," *The Calcutta Law Journal* XII, no. 1 (1910): 216–224.

of the ownership of the land became the most pressing question. However, in Solomonic fashion, the judge decided to divide the *beel*, its ownership and the fishery rights, between the quarreling parties, giving each a proportional share of the old channel. This decision was based on the boundaries of both estates as depicted in the Revenue Survey Map of 1855-7, which showed that the *beel* was indeed in the middle of both estates.

This, however, did not suit any of the interested parties, both still claiming full ownership of the *beel*, which pushed the court to investigate what were the true boundaries of Singh's and Roy's estates. Singh argued that the true boundaries of his estate had to be drawn not from the Revenue Survey Map of 1855-7, but from Rennell's map of 1780, which was actually based on surveys carried out in the region during the years 1764 to 1773. However, the court argued that using Rennell's maps to ascertain the boundaries of a specific estate was not possible. First, the court argued, Rennell's maps were known to be inaccurate; a lack of landmarks in the area made it quite difficult to know in detail what part of the Rennell maps corresponded to the estate of Singh. Secondly, Rennell produced his maps not for revenue survey purposes, but only for knowing the course and state of the rivers and routes of trade in Bengal. Thirdly, the court ruled that it was outside the scope of the law to rule whether the boundaries of an estate as shown on maps predating the Permanent Settlement were identical with the later boundaries of the same estate as established during the Permanent Settlement. However, the court added: "it is open to the Court to presume, in the circumstances of a particular case, that the condition of the locality has not changed materially between the date of the Permanent Settlement and the time of the Revenue Survey."[24] What this somewhat cryptic sentence means is that the question of the historical changes of the landscape, now referred to as 'locality,' had become a legal matter and not only a natural and geographical issue. Roy, the defendant, tried to claim that no change had occurred in the landscape since the first lawsuit in 1862, and hence there could be no change in his rights to fishery and to the soil of the *beel*. However, the court decided that

[24]"Sarat Chandra Sing vs Kshitish Chandra Roy," 220.

there was enough evidence to suggest that there had been indeed a change in the 'locality,' that is, the landscape had changed and the river had shifted its course:

> It has been proved beyond the possibility of dispute that whereas at the date of the previous suit [1862] boats used to pass up and down for the greater part of the year over the channel which then connected the flowing river with the disputed property and the water was considered as holy as Ganges water by the people of the neighborhood, at the time when this suit was commenced [1905], no communication remained between the flowing river and the disputed property, and the consequence of this isolation was that the water had lost all sanctity in the estimation of the people of the locality.[25]

At the end, the court upheld its first ruling, dividing the land of the *beel* between the plaintiff and the defendant. The colonial archive during the nineteenth century is full of such cases in which the name of James Rennell crops up in legal disputes about the boundaries of private land tenures, especially when it came to permanently settled estates whose perimeters had been established in 1793, decades after Rennell conducted his river surveys. Rennell, Colebrooke, Creighton and other surveyors and scholars had been interested in tracing the natural history of the region and the historical changes of the rivers in Bengal, but knew that the nature of the soil and the rivers in Bengal made that enterprise rather difficult, especially with the technology available to them at the time, and even more so with the lack of accurate historical sources. What this shows is that the question of historical change of the riverine landscape of Bengal became, during the nineteenth century and thanks to the rise of property thinking a matter to be ascertained at the discretion of the courts of law. This had, however, further ramifications. The next section details how the changing rivers of the central region of Bengal, especially in the Nadia district, kept posing not only a geographical and technical challenge to the cartographic/colonial drive (fueled by property-thinking) to know and dominate, but also an epistemological challenge to history writing.

[25]"Sarat Chandra Sing vs Kshitish Chandra Roy," 220.

Nabadvip as a historical problem

According to Bhattacharyya, property-thinking gave raise not only to a stark demarcation of the limits between land and water; it also produced the displacement of a particular kind of temporality which took into account the movement and seasonality of tides, the monsoon and other phenomena that contributed to the waning and swelling of the rivers in the region.[26] This 'tidal temporality,' argues Bhattacharyya, was only conserved in almanacs published regionally; they wove preoccupations about the tides, the rainy season and other natural phenomena together with concerns about the influence of cosmological forces like the digits of the moon (understood as an astrological as well as an astronomical agent) or the Zodiac signs, etc. However, it was not only space which became fixed during the nineteenth century. Almanacs might have taken into account the cosmological-cum-natural influences on rivers and on their cycles, but in the nineteenth century the historical changes that the rivers had undergone became not merely a cartographic or administrative problem, but a historical one too. Let us return to the traveler who encountered in the ruin-less landscape of Nadia a sight to behold, for his description of the place illustrates this point.

Bholanath Chandra, or Bholanauth Chunder according to the orthography in the original book, was born in 1822 in a Baidya Bengali family that had been devoted to Chaitanya's branch of Vaishnavism, though later they became part of the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal. In 1866 he began to publish in the weekly *Englishman's Saturday Journal* his extended travelogue through India titled *Travels of a Hindoo*, which was described as a pure, unfiltered description of the geography and history of India by a *bona fide* 'Hindoo' wanderer.[27]In

[26]Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta*, 16.

[27]Bholanath's position as an English-educated Hindu man (he studied at Hindu College in Calcutta) has attracted the attention of scholars since the first apparition of his travelogue. For example the editor of his book stated that Bholanath "looked upon every scene with Hindoo eyes, and indulged in trains of thought and association which only find expression in Native society, and are wholly foreign to European ideas." See Bholanauth Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, 1:xii; Christopher Bayly called the travelogue a "new syncretic form of western travelogue which still retains echoes of the charisma of Hindu place." C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 312; See Avishek Ray, "The Discursivity of the 'Hindu' Gaze: Reading Bholanauth Chunder's Travelogue," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, April 26, 2020, for a discussion on the communal undertones of Bholanath's so-called syncretic gaze upon India.

February of 1845, Bholanath made the first trip from Chitpur, near present day Kolkata, to Birbhum, passing along Nabadvip. He traveled along the Bhagirathi river upstream, but when he passed Shantipur (downstream from Nabadvip) he pointed out that the silting of the river prevented the navigation upstream from that point. Bholanath noted that the journey from there onwards would have to be by foot, since the bore— the swelling tide that goes against the river flow—did not come up to that point anymore; in Sir William Jones' times, Bholanath remarked, the bore would go up the river till Nadia, but not anymore.[28] When he arrived in Nadia (Nabadvip), he noted that the ancient city was but a shadow of its own self. "Throughout Bengal," he stated, "Nuddea [Nadia] is celebrated as the great seat of Hindoo learning and orthodoxy—the most sacred place of Hindoo retreat. The Choitunya Bhagabut states:—'No place is equal to Nuddea in earth, because Choitunya was there incarnated. No one can tell the wealth of Nuddea." Bholanath, just after describing the social composition and the fall of grace of the brahmins in Nabadvip, provides the reader with a reason for the general decay of the region: "the caprices and changes of the river have not left a trace of old Nuddea. It is now partly *chur land*, and partly the bed of the stream that flows to the north of the town."[29]

As stated in the introduction of the previous chapter, I choose to read Bholanath's encounter with the ruin-less landscape of Nabadvip as an 'out of time' experience, one which contrasted with Derozio's Rajmahal poem or with Creighton's and other surveyors' descriptions of the ruins of Gaur. For Derozio, the physical presence of the ruins stressed the naturality of a historical time in which decay and progress explained historical change. In this understanding, the ruined natural landscape of the Rajmahal hills, including the battered and weathered palace of Shah Shujā, is conceptually a proof of this teleological and stagist understanding of historical change. The heavy elements of nostalgia in the poem only stress the inevitability/naturality of this historical temporality. The descriptions of the ruins of Gaur written and published during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

[28]Bholanauth Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, 1:23.
[29]Bholanauth Chunder, 1:25.

had noted and highlighted the destructive power of the rivers in Bengal. Rivers, it was clear, had had agency in shaping the landscape and the history of Bengal for centuries. For example, the somewhat premature ruination of Gaur had been caused by the silting of the river, converting the city's water bodies into cesspools, breeding diseases that afflicted the inhabitants of Gaur. Taken together, an understanding of historical change premised on teleology and stagism and the inevitability and powerlessness against shifting river courses, made encounters with the shifting riverine landscape of Bengal elicit a particular sense of historical temporality where a ruined landscape came to be seen as nothing but 'natural.'

In Nabadvip, however, Bholanath's encounter with the riverine landscape was somewhat different. Like everywhere else in Bengal, the Bhagirathi river had changed its course around Nabadvip due most probably to the silting of its main channel. Bholanath described how the river, in Old Nadia's times, ran to the west of the city and not to the east, as it does in the present day: "the Ganges formerly held a westerly course, and old Nuddea was on the same side with Krishnanagur. Fifty years ago it was swept away by the river, and the 'handsome Mahomedam College,' that, in 1805, says Lord Valentia, 'was for three hours in sight, and bore from us at every point of the compass during the time,' has been washed away and engulfed in the stream."[30] This was of course nothing new, except that in changing its course the Bhagirathi had muddled, literally and metaphorically, the historical past of the region and of Bengal itself. Supposedly, two major events in the history of Bengal had taken place on the banks of the Bhagirathi in the region of Nadia: the fall of the Sena dynasty, the last Hindu power to rule over the country, and the birth of the Vaishnava reformer, Chaitanya. Yet, the vestiges and traces of these historical events were nowhere to be found. Both of these events could be located perfectly in Bengal's timeline: the fall of the Sena dynasty occurred at the very beginning of the thirteenth century CE, while the birth of Chaitanya took place in the sixteenth century CE. The issue was that neither the famed capital of Lakṣamaṇasena, the last Hindu king of Bengal, nor the birthplace of Chaitanya were able

[30]Bholanauth Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, 1:25.

to be located by historians, archaeologists or even devotes of the saint, Chaitanya.

In the thirteenth century CE, the Persian writer Menhaj-e Seraj moved to India and he established himself in Delhi, working for the Mamluk Sultanate. There, at the end of his life, he composed a book on the Islamic kingdoms in India, called *Ṭabaqat-e Naseri*, or "The Nasarean Tables," in honor of the Delhi, Sultan Naser-al-Din Abu'l-Mozaffar. Seraj had visited Bengal around 1245 CE, during the period in which he travelled throughout India compiling information for his book. One of the chapters in the *Ṭabaqat-e Naseri* deals with the history and exploits of the Afghan conqueror Muhammad-i Bakhtyar Khalji, who was a general of the Ghurid Empire in Central Asia. There, Seraj describes the fall of the last Sena King, Lakshmana, who ascended to the throne in 1178 CE. Seraj says that Lakshamanasena "was a very great Rae [sic], and had been on the throne for a period of eighty years." But he also said that the "seat of government" of Lakṣmaṇasena was "the city of Nudiah."[31] The spelling of Lakṣmaṇa's capital city in the Persian text has directed scholars to identify it with the town of Nabadvip, which is also known as Nadia, or Nuddea in many English sources, *Nadiẏā* in Bangla.[32] According to this text, Bhaktiyar approached Nadia with his army, but since he knew that the old Hindu Raja was waiting for him (the astrologers of the King had alerted him but he decided to ignore them, according to the *Ṭabaqat-e Naseri*), he hid his

[31] Abu 'Umar Minhāj al-Din 'Uthmān ibn Sirāj al-Dīn, *Tabaḳāt-i-Nāsiri, a General History of the Muhammadan Dynastics of Asia, Including Hindustān, from A.H. 194 (810 A.D.) to A.H. 658 (1260 A.D.) and the Irruption of the Infidel Mughals into Islām;* trans. Henry George Raverty, Bibliotheca Indica, (London: Printed by Gilbert & Rivington, 1881), 554.

[32] The question on the name and meaning of Nabadvip and Nadia has been a contested issue since the nineteenth century, probably even earlier than that. Kumudnath Mallick, who wrote in 1911 a general history of the Nadia district, explains that there are several interpretations for the name of Nadia. One is that it means 'nine islands,' and he cites the eighteenth-century poet Narahari Cakrabarty, who composed a Bangla text called *Bhaktiratnākar*. Narahari provides the name of the nine islands that comprised Nabadvip, noting that while there were nine islands, Nabadvip should be taken as a single town. Another origin for the name is that a Tantric mendicant came to the site of the town and lit nine lamps, hence *Nava-dvīpa*. Kumud Nath Mallik, *Nadiẏā-kāhinī* (1317; Rāṇāghāṭa: s.n., 1911); However, it was not clear whether those islands were meant to be real or metaphorical. It seems that Vaishnava devotees took those islands as signaling a sort of celestial geography without necessarily having a real geographical location in the human world. See the appendix of Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī et al., *Śrī Śrī Nabadvīpadhāma-granthamālā* (Māẏāpura: Śrīmat Sundarānanda Bidyābinoda, 1941), for an image of the nine islands arranged according to this celestial geography. Rarhi notes other possible origins for the name. 'Nava' can mean either nine or new, so the idea of a 'new island' formed by the silting of the river would make sense. Rāṛhī and Caudhurī, *Nabadvīpa-mahimā*, 16.

army in a nearby forest and approached the city with only eighteen riders. At the gates of the palace of Nadia, Bhaktiyar presented himself and his troupe as merchants, wishing to meet the king to pay their respects. Once inside, the invaders quickly started to suppress the meagre defenses of the palace. Hearing the commotion, the old King quickly left the palace and escaped towards the east. Bhaktiyar then ransacked the city, went further into Bengal and finally established his own capital in Lakṣmaṇāvatī or Laukhnati, the second capital of the Sena dynasty, which then was moved to Gaura.[33]

As we saw in the previous sections, this singular event marked the beginning of the Islamicate period in Bengal. When Bholanath visited Nabadvip during the nineteenth century, he—at the end a brahmoist—did not lose the opportunity to blame the fall of the Sena dynasty on Lakṣamaṇa Sena, described as an "old and imbecile" monarch who could not prevent the fall of Bengal even when the signs were very clear. For Bholanath, history could not have been any different, for the downfall of the last Hindu kingdom in Bengal was foretold, not by astrologers, but rather by the King's reliance on "Brahmin learning and Brahmin idolatry, brahmin courtiers and Brahmin astrologers" who "had superinduced that paralysis and helplessness and lethargy, under which the last Hindoo monarchs yielded, one by one, to the first violent shock from without."[34]

But what for centuries had been an accepted and unchallenged fact, that the capital of the Sena dynasty had stood in Nabadvip, in the nineteenth and twentieth century it became a historical problem. The issue revolves around the identification of Seraj's *Nudiah* with Nabadvip, for it has been argued that the unassuming town that Bholanath encountered could not have been the site of the Sena capital.[35] The issue then became one of historical evidence. Bholanath had been surprised by the lack of ruins in the landscape of Nabadvip, but the explanation that he encountered, that the river had taken away most human structures since long, sufficed for him as a good explanation, and he did not question the received

[33]'Uthmān ibn Sirāj al-Dīn, *Tabaḳāt-i-Nāsiri*, 557–59.

[34]Bholanauth Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, 1:28.

[35]Abul Kalam Muhammad Zakariah, "Muhammad Bakhtiyar's Conquest of Nūdīah," *Journal of the Varendra Research Museum* 6 (1982): 57–72.

knowledge about Nabadvip being the old capital of the Sena dynasty. Even today, scholars would either repeat this piece of received knowledge, or would rebuke it entirely, citing the lack of historical evidence as the proof that in the site of the actual town of Nabadvip there was never a Sena capital. For example, Richard Eaton begins his *The Rise of Islam* citing Zakariah's article, noting that Seraj's 'Nudiah' must be another town.[36] Zakariah's article tries to make a circular argument at times about the impossible identification of Nabadvip with 'Nudiah.' Although Zakariah relies on some epigraphic evidence to stress the absence of a mention of Nabadvip in Sena copperplates, in reality his argument is based rather on exactly the same reason why Bholanath was surprised: the lack of ruins in the landscape, though the final reasoning for Bholanath and Zakariah is quite different. While Zakariah admits that the river could have caused destruction, that other ruins exist in Bengal from the Sena period is proof that in Nabadvip, had it been the capital of the Senas, at least *some* structures should remain.[37] However, for all these arguments based on the lack of evidence, other scholars still identify Nudiah with Nabadvip, some because of scholarly inertia, others actually provide arguments for this identification.[38] The point to which I want to get here is not whether the identification of Nudiah-Nabadvip is warranted.[39] Rather, I want to point

[36]Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, xxi.

[37]Zakariah, "Muhammad Bakhtiyar's Conquest of Nūdīah," 63; Prof. Syed Ejaz Hussain of Vishwabharati University in Shantiniketan also believes that Seraj's Nudiah cannot possibly be identified with Nabadvip. Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate*, 8. In a personal conversation with Prof. Hussain, he listed a number of reasons for this conclusion, like the absence of minted coins from the conquerors or of copper plates by the Senas in the site of Nabadvip.

[38]Sudipta Sen, for example, makes this identification in his recent book on the history of the Ganges, though he does not dwell on the point. Sudipta Sen, *Ganges the Many Pasts of an Indian River* (2019), 257; Aniruddha Ray does make an argument for the identification Nudiha-Nabadvip, stating that no structures of the Sena period exist today because the river took them away. Aniruddha Ray, *Towns and Cities of Medieval India: A Brief Survey* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2015), 210–17.

[39]Besides, I find Zakariah's use of existing evidence, like the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* itself, too narrow. Zakariah tends to take at face value, without any chance of interpretation, the existing evidence of the period, as if the texts, coins and copper plates of the region and the period were simple statements of facts. A much more nuanced approach to the epigraphical evidence of the period is found in Caudhurī, *Dynastic History of Bengal, c. 750-1200 A.D.*, 204-64. Caudhuri does not problematize the identification Nudiah-Nabadvip, but he does stress that the inscriptions and copper plates of the Senas, especially of Lakṣmaṇa and his successors, were written in a moment of political turmoil and have to be read as political statements. For example, Caudhuri shows that despite Lakshmanasena major loss of control over Gaura and Rarh in Bengal, his descendants still called themselves *Gauḍeśvara*, "Lords of Gaur," even though they only controlled a corner in South-east Bengal.

out that the historical conundrum of the lack of historical evidence in Nabadvip, used as proof of both the impossibility or the assertion of the identification Nudiah-Nabadvip, shows that the changing river, which throughout Bengali history has not only shifted but destroyed many human structures, became a contentious point in discussing a historical problem.

Fluvial amnesia: fixing time in the landscape

On the 12th February 1874, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, George Campbell (1824-1892, in office 1871-1874), passed a resolution rearranging the borders of two neighboring districts, which had as its sole goal to expedite the administration of the area. The policy was simple: three villages in the Nadia district—Babla-Ari, Kalinagar, and Mahishuria—were to be transferred to the district of Burdwan [Bardhaman], which lies to the west of Nadia up to this day. There was, however, another town that was to be turned over to the neighboring district, the historical town of Nabadvip.

The transfer of Nabadvip from Nadia to Burdwan had been attempted before, in 1863, but locals opposed the change of district for the town.[40] The reason for the transfer of jurisdiction of 1874 for the town of Nabadvip was not completely out of reason, or so the administration thought. For a long time, the boundaries of the district of Nadia had been demarcated by natural limits: on the north, the river Padma was the boundary; the Northwest limit was marked by the Jalangi river; the West by the Bhagirathi, separating the districts of Burdwan and Hooghly from Nadia. East and South had no natural boundary.[41] Thus, on the grounds of "having a clearly defined natural boundary of a large river," and since in 1874 the Bhagirathi river flowed to the east of Nabadvip, Campbell's administration started the process of transferring.[42]

[40] James Long also refers to another attempt of the colonial administration to transfer Nabadvip to the district of Bardhaman. That attempt took place around the time of Long's writing his article. He mentions this when talking about the invasion of Bhaktiyar and how the town used to be on the other side of the river, on the same side as Krishnanagar. Long, "The Banks of the Bhagirathi," 422.

[41] J.H. E. Garrett, *Bengal District Gazetteers - Nadia* (1910), 1.

[42] *Retransfer of Nobodeep from Burdwan to Nuddea*, Proceedings, Bengal Revenue 6-10 (Calcutta, Septem-

However, as we saw in the previous chapter, a river changing dramatically its course in Bengal was definitely not a novelty.[43] In fact, the Bhagirathi had changed its course near Nabadvip several times throughout the centuries, but it was difficult to know exactly when these changes had taken place, for a good number of course shifts were temporary. On top of that, maps of the region before the nineteenth century were not reliable, since most maps before 1780 relied on traveler accounts and not on actual surveys on the ground. For example, figure 2.2 presents a seventeenth-century Dutch map of the region of Nadia, showing Nabadvip as an island in the middle of the Bhagirathi. However, it is not clear whether it was been an actual island at that point in time, or it had been reported to be an island, which was a common occurrence since one of the theories behind the name of the town was that it was either a new island or that there were nine islands.

In contrast to this, the documented occurrences of the Bhagirathi changing its course were repeated constantly in the administrative literature of the region. For example, W.W. Hunter included the account of Bholanath Chandra, who had reported in the mid-nineteenth century that the Bhagirathi river had shifted its course and flowed to the east of Nabadvip:

> The Bhagirathi once held a westerly course, and old Nadiya was on the same side with Krishnagar; but about the beginning of this century the stream changed and swept the ancient town away. The modern Nadiya is prettily situated at the junction of the Bhagirathi and Jalangi, surrounded by sand-banks, bleak and desolate in summer, but during the rainy season a sheet of bright green.[44]

The resolution of 1874 was strongly objected to by the inhabitants of Nabadvip, as the

ber 1874), 74.

[43]This was one of the arguments presented against the transfer: "Nobodeep, as its name implies, was originally a new island; it was surrounded on all sides by water, the Bhagiruthee flowing in the north, and after making two channels on the east and west, ran in the south in one stream. For the last hundred years the western channel has ceased to be navigable, except during the rains, but on that account it has not been brought nearer to Burdwan; the change in the course of the river, on which His Honor the late Lieutenant-Governor laid stress, and which it would seem led him to order its transfer to Burdwan, if it could be called a change, has not thus been new." *Retransfer of Nobodeep from Burdwan to Nuddea*, 74

[44]William Wilson Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. II (London: Trübner, 1875), 106.

Figure 2.2: "The Ganges. 1735. MS." in *Inventaris der Verzameling Karten berustende in het Rijks Archief." 2 vols 8vo.'s Gravenhague (The Hague) 1867, MS.*, The British Library, IOR/X/414/260. Nabadvip appears as an island.

paper trail in the archive suggests.[45] Interestingly, the objections were not made on territorial or administrative grounds: it was clear that the Bhagirathi had moved and that Nabadvip was located on the west bank of the river, nobody disputed that. Instead, the local people appealed to the historical sense of the town, in that Nabadvip had always been part of the cultural landscape of the region of Nadia.

> Nobodeep has from time immemorial formed a part of the district of Nuddea, which has derived its name from the island: by ancient traditions and associations it is closely identified with that district: as a seat of learning, consecrated by the

[45]Compare figures 2.3 and 2.4 to see the proposed transfer of Nabadvip to the Bardhaman district. The town of Nabadvip appears as 'Nuddea' in the maps.

memory of some of the most celebrated Sanscrit pundits, and as the scene of the early labors of the great religious reformer (Chaitanna), it fills a page in Indian history, of which the people of Nobodeep are justly proud: and its dissociation from that district and annexation to that of Burdwan, to which it is not allied by any ties whatever (physical, moral, or historical), offers a serious violence to the cherished feelings and sentiments of the people of Nobodeep and Nuddea generally.[46]

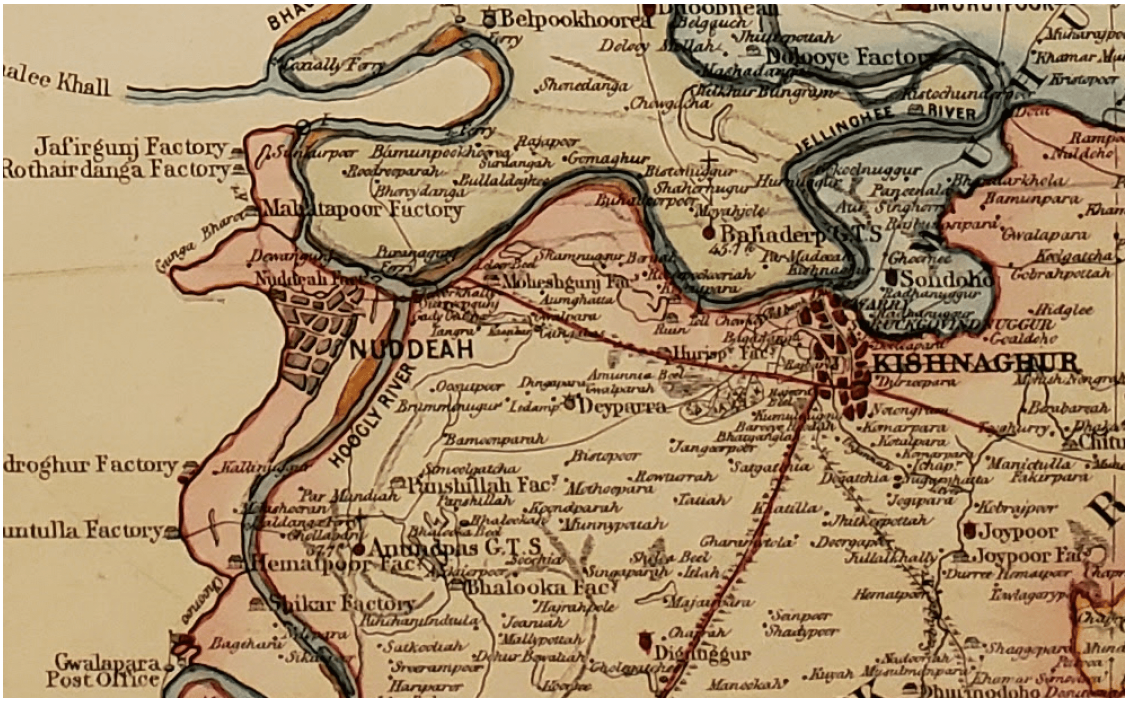

Figure 2.3: Nabadvip as part of the Nadia District, slice of District of Nuddea. 1851 to 1855. Scale, 4 miles to 1 inch; size, 38 inches by 26. MS. The British Library IOR/X/1189/2

In the end, Richard Temple, the Governor-Lieutenant of Bengal after Campbell's death, acquiesced to rescind the transfer of Nabadvip on nineteenth September 1874. While it was originally framed as a merely administrative procedure, supposedly with the aim of making it easier for the inhabitants of Nabadvip to access government services in Bardhaman, the opposition of the inhabitants of the towns appealing to a historical sense of belonging was a new development. This points to a different engagement with the history of the region, and especially with relation to the shifting rivers. Before, a shifting river was just an event of

[46] *Retransfer of Nobodeep from Burdwan to Nuddea*, 75.

Figure 2.4: Nabadvip as part of Bardhaman, the river being the natural border, slice of District Nuddeah. S.G.O. Calcutta, 1874. Scale, 4 miles to 1 nich; size 25 inches by 40, The British Library IOR/X/1190

everyday life in Bengal. But by the second half of the nineteenth century, a natural event like the river shifting was treated as an historical event, that is, as an event in time. But to treat a river changing as a historical event was also a way to downplay the historical agency of shifting rivers in Bengal: the petition of the inhabitants of Nabadvip seems to say that the natural history of the river did not determine in any way the (human) history of Nadia, for its historical ties to the region were still intact.

Conclusion: stagnant waters

During the nineteenth century, advances in techniques and technologies of mapping, the multiplication of regional river surveys, and the introduction of technologies that could aid to prevent and even revert the perpetual process of silting of channels and rivers, created a different relation of the colonial administration with the ever-changing landscape of Bengal. Rennell, Colebrooke and others had stressed that the nature of the rivers in Bengal was to change course, because of the composition of the soil, the works of the tides and the shifting amount of water discharged every year through the delta, which increased in spring after the thawing of snow and ice in the Himalayas and in the rainy season when the monsoon arrived in Eastern India and significantly decreased in the fall and winter months. During the nineteenth century, however, the colonial administration sought to intervene directly on the course of rivers, trying to make them navigable all year round.

This was an attempt to "fix" the landscape, understood in both senses of the term. First, the colonial administration tried to amend or repair silting and ever shifting rivers so that ships and boats could navigate up and down some channels throughout the year; the seasonal variance observed in the water level was not to be a hindrance anymore. Second, it meant to cement or bind the waters to a particular channel, by directing the waters of a stream towards a particular channel or by dragging and cleaning the silt that accumulated around the apex of channels.

This meant as well that the now fixed landscape could be read in a historicist vocabulary. The rivers that aided the navigation and the continued movement of shipments were fundamentally different from the silting channels, which became an embodiment of the decay of the land, coded in temporal terms. An imperial gazetteer described in this way the rivers of Central Bengal, the district of Nadia included: "The northern tract is characteristic of the upper delta of Central Bengal, a land of dead and dying rivers, whose beds are out of reach of the scour of the tides, and of great rice swamps, which will never now be filled, because the rivers which should perform this office are locked into their channels by the high banks

of silt which they have deposited."[47]

In 1888, William Wilson Hunter, the Scottish statistician who was in charge of the research, compilation and publication of the *Imperial Gazetteers of India*, wrote an article titled "A river of ruined capitals," exploring the history of the Bhaghirathi-Hooghly river and the capital cities that had been built along its banks for millennia.[48] In the article, Hunter establishes a fundamental difference between India and England. England, the country but also the political formation known as the British Empire, had been influenced by the natural configuration of the island, the physical geography was only acknowledged by Hunter as an *initial* factor. In India, on the contrary, nature had exerted for much longer an overwhelming force on human conditions, but also on history. The following quote illustrates this point:

> Mountains and rivers and regions of forest set barriers to human ambition in India, barriers against which the most powerful Mughal sovereign in vain shattered his dynasty. The same isolating influences which forbad a universal dominion, tended also to perpetuate local institutions, race, animosities, and exclusive creeds. The conception of India as a whole, or of its races as a united people, is a conception of the British brain. The realization of that conception is the great task of British rule. For in India man no longer confronts the forces of nature with bare arms. Science, which is in England a clam pursuit, is to our countrymen in the East an instrument of empire. It has overtopped the mountains, spanned the rivers, and pierced the forests which divided kingdom from kingdom. It has thrown down the landmarks of isolation which nature had set up, and is clasping together with bands of iron the peoples and provinces of a united India.[49]

Hunter's article spells clearly that the difference between England and India was to be understood in temporal terms, for it was the triumph of the "universal" values of Enlightenment, of modernity, which allowed the British administration to finally conquer what for centuries defeated the despotic rulers of India: nature. But with 'Science' on the side of the British, not only the relation to the landscape changed in Bengal, also the understanding

[47]James Sutherland Cotton, Sir Richard Burn, and Sir William Stevenson Meyer, *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), vol. XXIV, 67.

[48]W. W. Hunter, "A River of Ruined Capitals," *The Nineteenth century: a monthly review* 23, no. 131 (January 1888): 40–53.

[49]Hunter, 40.

of history and historical change, for then the powerlessness of previous rulers *vis à vis* the forces of nature was seen as a marker of the backwardness of the so called medieval period. The fixation of fluvial temporalities in Bengal gave way to this particular understanding of historical change.

Chapter 3

Feudal Pasts, Modern Biographies: the Nadia Raj as a Historical Agent

Since the nineteenth century, the epochal change that took place in Bengal between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been described by scholars, administrators and intellectuals with a vocabulary that stresses a fundamental tension between historical periods. For example, Caroline Forbes on her major work on the history of the Positivist movement in Bengal described in the following way the advent of modernity:

> Bengal, and particularly its principal city, Calcutta, had been the first area in India to experience the impact of British rule. Calcutta, the capital of British India from 1773 to 1911, the second largest city in the British Empire, was the centre of interaction between the British rulers and their Indian subjects. Land reform, new economic opportunities, Western education and property laws, and a new spirit of individualism contributed to the growth of intellectual and social activities which were to affect all of India. Without the constraining influence of a traditional landed and religious elite, characteristic of rural India, a new

middle class arose which would transform Calcutta within a century.[1]

In this brief description, we see the major tropes that have played a role in conceptualizing the coming of the modern age in Bengal: a rotting feudal past, personified in the figure of the landed gentry; adoption of Western modern values by the educated classes; and the onset of the colonial legal and territorial system. Decay versus improvement, old against new; these binaries appeared regularly in modern scholarly discussions. Literary historian Sushil Kumar De, for example, argued that the changes sustained throughout the nineteenth century signified a decline in religious and cultural life, while historians like R.C. Majumdar expressed amazement at the "leap from the medieval to the modern age."[2] Whether bemoaning the fortune of traditional knowledge systems or extolling the marvels of Western-induced progress, these descriptions present a narrative where antagonistic societal forces—hailing from different temporal periods, the medieval and the modern—and their cultural productions clashed in different fields of Bengali society, revealing at the same time the disruptive character of colonialism and the 'natural' process of corruption of the 'old regime.'

Forbes' description of Calcutta as the landing place of English enlightenment not only posits Calcutta as the bridgehead of epochal change, but demarcates as well a geographical distinction based on a socio-cultural distance and difference between Calcutta, the colonial city, and the outside of it, usually referred to as the *mofussil*, a Persian word for province.[3] The *mofussil*, where the landed gentry was the most important political actor, came to mean a cultural space with different customs, etiquette, and a diametrically different outlook from the new institutions that the enlightened mentality of the new, English-educated middle

[1]Geraldine Hancock Forbes, *Positivism in Bengal: A Case Study in the Transmission and Assimilation of an Ideology* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates Publications, 1975), 2.

[2]Sushil Kumar De, *Bengali Literature In The Nineteenth Century (1757-1857)* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1940), 24–30; R. C. Majumdar, *Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960), 21.

[3]The border between these two cultural spaces, the civilized and the backwards, was thought to be the "Maratha ditch," a three-mile moat excavated outside Calcutta supposedly as protection from Maratha raids. See Joshua Ehrlich, "The Meanings of a Port City Boundary: Calcutta's Maratha Ditch, c. 1700 – 1950," *Past & Present*, January 7, 2022, for a detailed analysis of the historical changes that the Maratha Ditch saw as a place of meaning-making for the colonial city of Calcutta.

class of colonial Calcutta was creating, like the Hindu College. In 1839, an article in the *Asiatic Journal* identified two opposing spaces in colonial Bengal: the *mofussil* and the *ditch*, which referred to the Maratha ditch, dug supposedly to avert and deter the charges of the Marathi forces that assailed Bengal in the eighteenth century. The inhabitants of these places engaged with each other in a somewhat innocuous but harsh banter. "The *Moffusilites* and the Ditchers" the article stated, "have agreed to hate each other with great cordiality. This dislike originated, in the first instance, in the arrogance and assumptions of the Ditchers, who despised the Mofussilites as barbarous and uncouth, living entirely out of the pale of civilized society."[4] This means that the descriptions of the Bengali landed gentry in the early nineteenth century by English administrators followed a historicist pattern: a series of labels laid upon this social class that denoted at the same time their moral and temporal backwardness. Among these historicist indictments against the old rural aristocracy of the country, the idea of them being 'feudal' was a usual way of describing this class. As Sudipta Sen has argued, this appellation "provided valuable justification for wresting privileges of revenue away from the *rājās* and *zamindars* by undermining the moral basis of their autonomy."[5]

This chapter explores the place and role that the region of Nadia had in the emergence of the developmental and historicist vocabulary that aimed to separate Bengal's enlightened colonial modernity from its perceived despotic, decaying, feudal past. I focus on the use of the word 'feudal' to describe Nadia's history when discussing its political past and in particular the history of the dynasty that started with Bhavānanda Majumdar in the sixteenth century, whose most notorious scion was Krishnachandra Ray. The word 'feudal' and the morphological derivations of the word 'feud,' have lived two parallel conceptual lives, as a noun and as an adjective. As an adjective, as Susan Reynolds has argued, it has come to represent "any system or behaviour that is seen as hierarchical and oppressive;" as a noun, the

[4]"The Mofussil and the Ditch," *Asiatic Journal* 28 (January-April 1839): 36.

[5]Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and Making of the Colonial Marketplace* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 132.

idea of feudalism has been deployed to draw historical comparisons between the premodern world of Europe and other places.[6] Rather than arguing for or against the appropriateness of feudalism as a historical category for the past Bengal, this chapter traces the imbrication of these two uses of the word 'feudal' in Nadia, as an adjective and as a noun.[7]

This chapter starts by analyzing the use of the feudal as an adjective to signal the moral decay of the Nadia Raj in the premodern period. I look specifically at one well-known episode that took place in the nineteenth century and that pitted against each other two different groups of Hindu Bengali society: the Hindu widow remarriage debate. I show how the past of Nadia played an important role in defining the distance, coded in moralistic terms, between the premodern past and the modern times of Bengal. By looking at the widow remarriage debate, I also argue in the last sections that the moral indictments place upon Nadia's past was predicated upon a displacement of the notion of authority of *zamindars* and petty *rājās*, a displacement that took place in the late eighteenth century. In the last section, I offer a reading of a series of texts that, I argue, show how this displacement of authority took place during the preparations for the Permanent Settlement of 1793, the moment in which the Company settled, *in perpetuo,* not only the tax rate of the landowners of Bengal, but also the assertion to power and authority of the *rājās* and *zamindars* in Bengal, by fixing the notion of sovereignty in Bengal in the feudal past of the region.[8]

[6]Susan Reynolds, *The Middle Ages without Feudalism: Essays in Criticism and Comparison on the Medieval West* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Variorum, 2012), 191.

[7]Since the 1960s, there has been a steady scholarly production on the historiography of feudalism, largely fueled by the problem in Marxist theory of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. See T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin, *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, Past and Present Publications (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1985), for a compilation of articles discussing diverging theoretical explanations for historical development outside of the Marxist discussion, which usually focused on the problematic of the modes of production in pre-capitalist Europe and elsewhere. In the case of India, the compiled volume Harbans Mukhia, *The Feudalism Debate* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), presents different responses to the historiographical question on the fitness of the category of feudalism applied to the Indian case.

[8]The classic work on the matter is, of course, Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal.*

The rise of *Ātmacarit*: modern biographies in ancient sites

Bholanath Chandra's travel book, analyzed in the previous chapters, is full of quaint stories from the places he visited, adding a local color to his narration. One of these stories involves the *Rājā* of Nadia, Krishnachandra Ray, and a somewhat bizarre wedding ceremony that took place at the behest of the *Rājā*. On his way to Benares through the Hooghly-Ganges river, Bholanath reached the town of Guptipara in the Hooghly District, in present day West Bengal, which he described as a "seat of Hindoo learning that has produced some remarkable scholars," but, he added, the town was actually better known for its band of mischievous monkeys than for its scholars.[9] One day, tells Bholanath, the *Rājā* of Nadia procured some monkeys from Guptipara and had them married in Krishnanagar. For the occasion, the *Rājā* invited pandits from Nabadvip, Guptipara, Ula and Santipur, all famous sites of Sanskritic learning, and treated them to a feast which, Bholanath remarks, cost "about half a lakh." In his 1907 biography of Ramtanu Lahiri, Shibnath Shastri told a similar story, but this time ascribing the extravagant gesture to Īśvar Candra Ray, who was the grandson of Krishnachandra and was the head of the Nadia Raj from 1788 till 1802. Shastri said of Īśvar Candra that "he was very extravagant, and loose in his morals. He is said to have spent more than a lakh of rupees on the marriage of a pet monkey."[10]

Of course, the veracity of these stories is hard to prove. Most likely, this was but one of the many popular stories that circulated in the region, aimed at poking fun at different subjects. And, as anyone slightly familiar with popular Bengali culture of the nineteenth century would know, *Rājā* Krishnachandra, who in the nineteenth century attained a somewhat of a cultural hero status, was the subject of many of those humorous stories, though usually

[9]"The former [the monkeys] swarm here in large numbers, and are mischievous enough to break women's water-pots. It has become a native proverb that to ask a man whether he comes from Gooptiparah, is as much as to call him a monkey." Bholanauth Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, 1:19.

[10]Sibnath Sastri and Roper Lethbridge, *Ramtanu Lahiri, Brahman and Reformer: A History of the Renaissance in Bengal; from the Bengali of Pandit Swanath Sastri* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1907), 7.

alongside another character, Gopāl Bhāṁr, the mythical jester of the royal court of Nadia.[11] In fact, Bholanath's framing of the story seems to try to make fun at the same time of Krishnachandra and the pandits invited to the monkey wedding. He said: "If one were to comment upon this now, he must suspect the Rajah [sic] to have found a kinship between the two, or he would not have confounded Pundits with monkeys."[12]

What do these descriptions of a bizarre ceremony carried out by members of the Nadia Raj family reveal about the idea of the medieval in Bengal during the nineteenth century? These stories about monkeys getting married were mere anecdotes in larger narratives that aimed at giving an overview of the familial history of the ruling house of Nadia. Yet, the framing of the stories, especially in Shastri's telling, stresses the notion of the moral bankruptcy of the royal family of Nadia, noting the stratospheric amount of money wasted in such a bizarre ceremony, but also the willingness of pandits to cater to any royal whim regardless of its supposed irrationality, as long as enough money was provided.[13] Both Bholanath Chandra and Shibnath Shastri were members of the Brahmo Samaj, a reformist monotheistic movement within Hinduism that posited 'Reason', pitted against traditional religion which they thought was mere 'superstition,' at the center of this new understanding of religion.[14]

[11]The existence of Gopāl Bhāṁr as an actual historical figure has been a matter of debate since the nineteenth century. Notable historians like Sukumar Sen and Suniti Kumar Chatterjee have seriously doubted his existence, pointing out that no record mentioning Gopāl exists, and that Bharatchandra did not mention him in the *Annadāmaṅgal* when describing the *sabhā* of Krishnachandra with all his courtiers in the poem. Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra, who worked as the principal administrator of the Nadia Raj family during the nineteenth century, believed that Gopāl had indeed existed, since the stories about him and Krishnachandra were part of the family lore. Yet, as Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandracandra himself explained, in all the papers and records kept at the royal palace, not a single mention of Gopāl could be found. Curiously, the historian Nagendranath Vasu recorded a tradition that put Gopāl Bhāṁr's birthplace in Guptipara, probably part of the regional endeavor to cast Guptipara inhabitants as mischievous, as described by Bholanath. See Cakrabartī, *Mahārājā Kṛṣṇacandra*, 59-64, for a detailed description of different historians' take on the debate around Gopāl Bhāṁr.

[12]Bholanauth Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, 1:19.

[13]I have tried to find more information on these monkey weddings to see if they were part of some ritual, festivity, or something along those lines, but so far nothing has come up. Joel Bourdeaux mentions a recent (2007) biographical novel titled *Mahārājendra Bahādur Kṛṣṇacandra Ray* that also provides an account of the monkey wedding, but this novel is merely repeating what the texts analyzed here conveyed. Bordeaux, "The Mythic King," 38.

[14]Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 312. Bayly quotes some passages from Bholanath's account in which the author tries to distance himself of the "dreamy religious speculations" of Brahmins and tries to provide positive facts about the history and local traditions of the regions he visited and depicted in his work.

Thus, it is not surprising to find in these accounts descriptions of the Nadia Raj coded in moral and temporalizing terms, as if its morality was a function of the times the Nadia Raj inhabited.

This section deals with three biographical and autobiographical texts of some notable people who lived or were born in the region of Nadia in the nineteenth century. First, the biography of Ramtanu Lahiri (1813-1898) written by Shibnath Shastri (1847-1919) titled *Rāmtanu Lāhiṛī o Tatkālīn Baṅgasamāj*, published in 1907 and translated the following year into English under the rather long and descriptive title "Ramtanu Lahiri, Brahman and Reformer: a History of the Renaissance in Bengal." Second, the autobiography of Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra Ray (1820-1885), titled *Ātmajīvan carita* and credited as one of the first autobiographies written in Bengali. Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra belonged to a family that was connected to the royal family of Nadia, since most male members of the family worked at the administration of the Nadia *zamindari*. Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra began his career at the Nadia Raj as music teacher, but soon he was elevated to the position of *diwan* of the *zamindari*, though by the time he occupied that position, the amount of land under the tenure of the royal family had been significantly reduced. The third text I analyze here is the historical account that Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra wrote on the Nadia Raj family, named *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalicarita*, which is not to be mistaken for the Sanskrit text with the same name translated and published by Wilhelm Pertsch in Berlin in 1852.[15] Since he worked as the *diwan* for the Nadia Raj and he was personally close to several *rājās* of the family, Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra had access not only to the oral memory of the family, but also to the written records kept at the royal palace in Krishnanagar. The subjects of these biographies identified themselves with the progressive movements that tried to implement social reforms on what they perceived was the stagnant and backwards Bengali society of their times; they were enthusiast participants of progressive ideals during the period known as the Bengal Renaissance.[16] These subjects had adopted, for example, English education

[15]On the Sanskrit *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalicarita*, see below.

[16]The classic work on the Bengal Renaissance is David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renais-*

as the path forward for Bengali society; they had also supported the efforts of Rammohan Ray and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar regarding the situation of (high-caste Hindu) women and what they thought were pernicious traditions like *sati*, the burning of widows, and the ritual and legal prohibition of Hindu widow remarriage.

Contemporary scholarship has focused mainly on the emergence of the autobiography as a new textual genre that becomes possible when new forms of societal behaviors and social mores based on reformist movements within Bengali Hindu society began to take hold of the urban, cultured Bengali middle classes. Sudipta Kaviraj, studying the autobiography of Shibnath Shastri, has argued that the autobiographical genre, along with the social novel and (modern) lyric poetry, became not only a new textual genre but also a new form of writing by which these newly minted modern subjects began their experimentation with novel moral values. "What people admired," states Kaviraj about Shastri, "were not the texts he wrote, but the life he authored, the events that constituted it, the principles that structured it, gave it its peculiar form and direction, and its historic meaning."[17] Thus, what was valuable in the autobiography of Kārtikeẏacandra Ray or the biography of Lahiri written by Shastri was not the uniqueness of the subject's life, but rather the desirability of conducting such a life and, above all, the attainability by any individual of the ideals of such a life.[18]

However, instead of focusing on the outlook, ideas and mentality that defined them as modern subjects, I trace in their narratives the place that Krishnanagar and Nadia had in these accounts. What I aim to read in these texts are the tensions between the perceived 'feudal' past of the region and the processes of transition into a modern age as seen in the anxieties vocalized by these modern subjects in their biographies and autobiographies. In particular, I analyze how the contrast between the past of the Nadia region—deemed as the background against which these biographies of new, modern subjects were projected—and

sance. The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835 (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969), which frames the cultural, social and religious tensions lived in Bengali society in this period in terms of a process of negotiation between tradition and modernity.

[17]Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Invention of Private Life: Reading of Sibnath Sastri's Autobiography," in *The Invention of Private Life : Literature and Ideas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 305.

[18]Kaviraj, 304.

the emergence of these new subjectivities, was coded in moral terms. As we will see, in these texts there is an unresolved tension in coding this interaction between the new subjectivities and the past of the region in terms of morality. These texts definitively presented an indictment against the moral excesses and failures of the past kings of Nadia, but at the same time they stressed that choosing a progressive stance based on moral reasoning was a personal choice only available through modern English education.

Shibnath Shastri was a well-known reformer and active member of the Brahmo Samaj, the social reformist organization which was established around 1828 by another well-known reformer, Raja Rammohan Roy.[19] While Shastri did not become a prominent figure in the history and historiography of the Bengal Renaissance like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Keshabchandra Sen, Debendranath Tagore, Dinabandhu Mitra, among others, all close acquaintances and friends of Shastri, his biography of Ramtanu became a staple in sociological and historical literature of the Bengal Renaissance.[20] In Lahiri's biography, the region of Nadia and especially the city of Krishnanagar appear as an important scenario for the development of Lahiri's life and career as an educator and a reformist.

Shastri's biography of Lahiri, who was a native of Krishnanagar, starts with a brief history of the Nadia Raj family. "The Hindu biographer" states Shastri, "usually introduces his hero with a description of his ancestry, the place or places chiefly associated with the history of his family, and the persons who more or less influenced his life and character."[21] With this, Shastri was not merely following the conventions of purported 'Hindu' biographies, but he was also establishing a connection between the Lahiri family and the history of Nadia. Shastri described Nadia as the civilizational apex of Bengal Hinduism: "in those days Krishnanagar was the chief city in Bengal; and the principal seat of learning and civilization, owing to the power and public spirit of its *rajas*."[22]

[19]For a historical overview of the Brahmo Samaj and its members, see Shastri's own account of the association. Śibanātha Śāstrī, *A History of the Brahmo Samaj* (Calcutta: R. Chatterji, 1911).

[20]Kaviraj, "The Invention of Private Life," 313.

[21]Sastri and Lethbridge, *Ramtanu Lahiri*, 1.

[22]Sastri and Lethbridge, 3.

The engagement with the history of the Nadia Raj seems to have two goals in Shastri's telling of Lahiri's life. First, it shows the actual connections that the family of Lahiri, who was also part of Deoẏān's family, had with the *rājās* of Nadia, in a way partaking of the fame and prestige of family and its ancestors. As we saw, the *rājās* of Nadia were depicted in a favorable light, as champions of Hindu religion and learning, at least up to Krishnachandra Ray, who ascended to the throne of Nadia in 1728 CE. For Shastri, Krishnachandra was a "Vikramaditya in appreciating and rewarding merit" and in surrounding himself with "men of learning, poets, musicians and great wits." Since the family of Ramtanu Lahiri had installed themselves and thrived in Krishnanagar thanks to the *rājās* of Nadia, it is easy to see how the Chakravartis of Nadia(later on the Rays, the family of Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra) derived some cultural and political prestige from their proximity to the rulers of Nadia.

But it also had a second goal, which was to highlight the contrast of the modern subject position of Lahiri versus the royal family as a position rooted in morality and personal choice. Despite all his accomplishments as head of the Hindu *samāj* in Bengal, Krishnachandra had been also, remarked Shastri, a man who had remained indifferent to the social ailments of his own country, because the *Rājā* "instead of alleviating the burden of priestly rule laid on the people, made it heavier."[23] This dual character of Krishnachandra, i.e. being an excellent patron of fine arts and scholarship while also being a ruler bogged down by the superstitious beliefs of traditional Hinduism (as opposed to the rational, monotheistic version that the Brahmo Samaj promoted) was coded in these biographies in moral terms: Krishnachandra's obliviousness to the social ills of Nadia was presented in these biographical texts as a failure of morality. There was, however, a tension in this way of presenting Krishnachandra, for the morality question did not hinge on a matter of good versus evil, but instead on a distance between the subject position available to our biography writers and Krishnachandra. In a way, it was about the difference of the discursive possibilities between a modern, disembodied subject position and the premodern position of a king. Thus, the question of morality was

[23]Sastri and Lethbridge, *Ramtanu Lahiri*, 7.

coded in these texts inadvertently in a temporal frame.

In order to understand why this failure of morality was coded in temporal terms, we need to take a closer look at how the question of morality appears in these texts framed by the rise of the personal experience of assessing one's own past, but *vis à vis* the region's past. In Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra's autobiography, *Ātmajīvana carita*, published and edited by his son Dvijendralal Ray in 1887 after Kārtikeẏacandra Ray's death, we find a first-hand account of the social changes that took place in Bengal during the nineteenth century. Much like the biography of Ramtanu Lahiri, Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra's *Atmājīvancarita* has garnered attention thanks to the sociological descriptions of Bengali society of that time. In the month of May 1897, the newspaper *Indian Mirror* published a notice of the publication of the autobiography, stressing the narrative of societal change: "the bulk of the Falgoon number of the journal *Sahitya* is taken up by the autobiography of the late Babu Kartikeya Chandra Roy Dewan of the Nuddea Raj. This is a very interesting contribution in as much as it presents a graphic account of the men and manners of a nearly bygone age."[24]

Two things are stressed in this narrative of the changing times: first, the change of the material conditions of the region; and two, the change of the mentality of the people living through those times. For example, in chapter two of his autobiography, Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra discusses the education he received, still focused on Sanskrit, but also on Persian. Kārtikeẏacandra Ray explains that while the English East India Company administration had reached everywhere, the salaries paid to those who knew English were still very low since most of the administration was still carried out in Persian, at least in the *mofussil*. This meant that for families outside Calcutta, it still made sense for parents to have their children learn Persian. Thus, Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra describes meticulously his Persian education reading the classics of Persian literature. First, he said, he was directed to Saadi's works, starting with the *Pandnāmā*, a book of morals (*upadeśapustaka*) written in verse; next, both the *Gulistan* and the *Bustan* of the same author. Afterwards, the *Zulekha*

[24]Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra Rāẏa, *Ātma-jībana carita* (Kalikātā: Iṇḍiẏāna Ayāsōsiẏētēda Pābalisiṃ Cōṃ. Prāibhēta, 1956), i.

of Jami was presented to the students.[25]

Yet, for all this knowledge of Persian literature, Kārtikeẏacandra Ray was not necessarily in a better position when it came to getting work at the courts. In 1837, the colonial administration passed Act XXIX, which gave the Governor-General the power to do away with any legal dispensation that required Persian as the official language for judicial or administrative matters, instead elevating the local vernaculars to this position.[26] Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra claims that this bit of news, which he read in the *Government Gazette*, left him with a certain sadness, but with the determination to thus learn English, which would be probably better paid.[27] At first, he confesses, the idea of receiving an English education was not very appealing to him, for he could see that it entailed a change of mentality to some degree. Unsurprisingly, his first encounters with English education were mediated by Ramtanu Lahiri. He describes the whole experience as requiring some adjustment:

> At first, Śrīprasād and I had proper devotion on the local customary idolatrous religion (*pauttalika dharma*). We, following the rules, did not take even a bit of water without doing *pujā* to our familial deities: I revered the thirty-three Gods and Goddesses, and I believed in ghosts (*preta, pretinī*). When Ramtanu Babu used to talk about the falsehood of the idolatrous religion, we would think that English texts and English company had rendered him mad. At first, we would laugh internally at his words, and we did not trust on what we read on books about the earth's shape, its revolutions and gravity. We thought that the travels of Cook Saheb were unfounded.[28]

However, as his English education continued, a mental revolution started to take shape. He states: "customs/beliefs (*saṁskāra*) that are transmitted from generation to generation, beliefs that most of the men in the country held for good, and beliefs that were deeply carved in my own heart, to abruptly remove them is not an easy matter. However, with time everything can change."[29] At last, Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra remembers, English education

[25]Rāẏa, *Ātma-jībana carita*, 12.
[26]Christopher Rolland King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994), 54.
[27]Rāẏa, *Ātma-jībana carita*, 37.
[28]Rāẏa, 41.
[29]Rāẏa, 41.

gave him a desire to debate every matter, to distance himself from the "idolatrous religion" that was passed down to him by his ancestors. According to his own description, his moving away from the tradition in which he had been brought up meant that he had rejected falsehood, corruption and sensuousness. Importantly, this change of mentality meant the creation of a new self, but this new subjectivity could only be created in a critical exercise of looking anew at the past and the present. But, as Sudipta Kaviraj states, the creation of the 'personal' was punctuated by different textual genres that stressed not only the description of the lives of their subjects but "an evaluative commentary on the fictional lives of characters" that was directed not only to the interiority of the individual, but to the social life in which the new subject developed as well. This in the case of novels, but the same can be said about autobiographies or biographies.[30] Put in another way, the 'personal' only emerges from this critical evaluation of the life of an individual within society. To this, I extend the notion that the emergence of the 'personal' in these biographies and autobiographies is also shaped by critically re-evaluating the past in which the subject was formed. In the case of the texts studied in this section, this means that the discursive possibilities of the new subjectivity that Shastri and Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra described was punctuated by the past of Nadia and Krishnanagar.

Kārtikeẏacandra Ray and Lahiri spoke about idolatry and superstition when dealing with the past of the region, but one of the main subjects against which they define this new subjectivity was what is arguably one of the harshest and most iconic struggles of the enlightened middle classes of Bengal: the plight of Hindu women. The birth of the personal, the reevaluation of one's own subjective past *vis à vis* the past of Krishnanagar, can be seen in this story that Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra said happened in his family.

> Once, my sister's daughter, my niece, got a fever. She must have been around four or five years old. She was, unfortunately, a *kulīn* daughter, and on top of that she was the youngest to three brothers. Because her brother was a *kulīn* son,

[30]Kaviraj, "The Invention of Private Life," 304.

> he was adored the most, and furthermore, of her three male siblings, he was the only one alive. Therefore, everybody's attention was set on him. When the fever was afflicting her, a terrible thirst overcome her, and she started demanding water constantly. However, she was given none during the night, and even in the morning, while waiting for the physician, she was given none. At around four o' clock the physician came, took the girl's and the boy's pulse and gave them medicine. Each time the girl asked for water, I gave her water mixed with medicines, giving her some comfort. However, it was clear that the pecking-order of their birth was maintained in giving them medicine: first the boy would take medicine, and then the girl would be given medicine. At that moment I was still standing there, and the girl still said "water, water!," I could hear that. At that time, I was thirteen or fourteen years old. To learn her condition, I touched her body and took her pulse: her body had this tremendous heat and her pulse was nowhere to be found. At that moment, neither father nor my eldest uncle were there. Thus, I went out to fetch my father and inform him, but I sat down near a tree first. However, as long as her body was engulfed by the fever, I could not just stay there sitting. When the medic saw her, he could not see any foreboding signs of death, and even when she was about to die, he could not see any sufficient signs of the impending calamity. She only cried "water water," the only thing that was kept from her. I believe that if she had been given some water, even just five minutes before, this tragedy would not have happened. If this girl had not been a girl, if she had been a boy, her parents and relatives would be devastated, their grief would know no boundaries.[31]

The plight of Kārtikeẏacandra Ray's niece, however, was not a mere familial matter, it was one of the perceived ailments of Bengali Hindu society that had been maintained since medieval times in Bengal: Kulinism. Kulinism was a social institution in Hindu Bengal that policed and tried to maintain the ritual status of the different high-castes through intermarriage. At a practical level, it meant a series of rules and precepts, put forward by a *ghaṭak*, a genealogist with ample knowledge about the marriage history of different families and the resulting change in ritual status, and enforced by the head or heads of the *jāti* or by someone regarded as having the highest ritual status.[32] Kulinism was also to blame for the

[31]Rāẏa, *Ātma-jībana carita*, 21-22. The story is also framed in an anti-religious and pro-science narrative that stressed what Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra saw as the stupidity of religious sanctioned treatment for life-threatening diseases. Just before this story, Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra narrates that a well-known pandit of Nabadvip once fell ill with a high fever. Being denied water, the pandit feigned going to a latrine, and there he drank water from the 'impure hole,' pushed by the thirst. The story, of course, was also meant to showcase the hypocrisy of the people who upheld the indictments that put so much pain upon others.

[32]See Ronald B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture: A History of Caste and Clan in Middle Period Bengal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), for a thorough description of the rules and

most notorious offense of the old regime against Hindu women, the impossibility of them to marry again as widows. H.H. Risley, in his exhaustive description of the ranks, lineages and mores of the different Bengali *jātis* considers the issue of widow marriage as one of the traits of Kulinism in Bengal.[33]

As Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, such displays of compassion for others' suffering, compassion rooted not on filial or familial closeness but on "the position of a generalized and necessarily disembodied observer," were at the forefront of an incipient social criticism in Bengal during the nineteenth century and, adds Chakrabarty, "is what marks the beginning of the modern self."[34] Moreover, if we take a look at the arguments advanced by figures like Rammohan Roy against the *sati* ritual (around the decades of 1820, 1830) or Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar against the ritual and legal prohibition against widow remarriage, we see that both these figures of the Bengali Enlightenment put 'Reason' at the center of the universal ability to feel compassion for the suffering of other disembodied subjects. Thus, we can see in Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra and Lahiri the coming together of a new, modern self. On one hand, this new self, which is supposed to be a universal subject position, is capable of recognizing suffering as a non-existential category, as Chakrabarty explains, and thus is capable of compassion for subjects beyond their most intimate circle. On the other, we also find in Kārtikeẏacandra Ray, Lahiri and Shastri a new self whose subject position is that of the autobiography or biography with goals of social critique, as a role model to which *anyone* can access. This new self was at play in Kārtikeẏacandra Ray's and Lahiri's (as told by Shastri)

precepts of Kulin marriage, based on Sanskrit and Bengali *kula-pāñjika*, genealogical books kept by families and *ghaṭaks*. For an analysis of the social function of *ghaṭaks* and the changes and eventual demise of Kulinism in nineteenth century Bengal, see Rochona. Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 25–32.

[33]Risley described a sort of Sanskritization process for social rank among different groups in Bengal. For example: "Just as Ballal Sen appraised the virtues of the Brahmans of his day and allotted them graded rank accordingly, so Rájbansi opinion has seized upon the one tangible quality of having refrained from countenancing widow-marriage, and has made this the test of social respectability. Families of whom it can be said that none of their widows have been allowed to take second husbands rank in Rájbansi circles as Kulins. Their members are spoken of as mahat or 'great' and people who wish to marry their daughters have to pay a substantial bride-price for the privilege." H. H. Risley, *Tribes And Castes Of Bengal*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1891), 495.

[34]Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 119.

stance on the social ills of nineteenth century Bengal. While Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra refers in this story to someone close to him, in actuality he identifies Kulinism as the root of the tragedy for the little girl in his family, but he is able to extend that same position to all women in Bengal: "Holy Kaulinya [kulinism]! due to your oppression of good part of the country of Bengal this unnatural and cruel event took place, and even today it repeats, be it Muslim or a Maharashtrian, by whom it is not carried out? This is the root of this terrible event: it is not the extent of the stupidity of the people of this country or of the physicians, it is the pervasiveness of Kulinism."[35]

I return now to the original question on the moral distance between these new subjectivities and the past of Nadia and Krishnanagar. Taking these two streams or discursive possibilities of the new self together, we can see how a moral re-evaluation of their own selves hinged on the recognition of the role the past played as another set of discursive possibilities. That is, the ideation of the past of the region as morally deficient, especially in the figure of Krishnachandra, is another discourse that shaped the subjectivities these modern selves were creating for themselves. I argue that the moral indictment that Shastri and Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra laid on Krishnanagar's past, especially on the figure of Krishnachandra Ray, was predicated upon a temporal divide, a medieval/modern one, and not on a morally good/evil binary. However, we cannot assume that the consciousness about the past of the region emerged simply through the "consciousness of a new age." The processes by which the ideation of this past was formed are the subject of the next section.

This ideation of Nadia's and Krishnanagar's pasts took shape when looking at the history of one of the major debates around social reform in Bengal that confronted the English-educated, progressive parts of middle-class Hindu society in Calcutta against the defenders of traditionalist views and opposed mainly to colonial interference on social, cultural and religious matters of Hindus: the widow remarriage debate. As we will see in the next section, the stance that the modern selves of Kārtikeẏacandra Ray, Lahiri, and Shastri took on this

[35]Rāẏa, *Ātma-jīẏbana carita*, 22.

social issue, was also informed by the past of Krishnanagar and the Nadia Raj.

Parāśara 4.28: medievality as amorality

In January of 1855, Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar published a small Bengali article advocating for the cause of remarriage of Hindu widows in the journal *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā* founded by Debendranath Tagore, a notorious Brahmoist and father of the Nobel laurate poet Rabindranath Tagore. Just a couple of weeks later, seeing that it was gaining momentum within Bengali society especially in Calcutta, Vidyasagar published a booklet titled *Vidhavā-vivāha pracalita haoẏā ucita kinā etadviṣaẏaka prastāva* (A Proposition on the Question of Whether to Promote Widow Marriage) usually known in Bengali as *Vidhavā Vivāha* and in English as *Hindu Widow Remarriage.* As Brian Hatcher has argued, *Vidhavā-Vivāha* was a monumental endeavor of traditional Sanskrit exegesis and commentary upon a matter intimately tied to questions of social reform and critique within Bengali Hindu society. It was "an epochal work in the history of modern India," for it stirred public opinion in favor of the cause it defended and directly influenced the passing of Act XV in 1856, which granted Hindu widows the legal right to marry again.[36] Vidyasagar, closely reading Hindu law to demonstrate that widow marriage conformed to the dictates of *Dharmaśāstra*, put at the heart of his argument a Sanskrit *śloka* that referred exactly to this problematic:

> *naṣṭe mṛte pravrajite klīve ca patite patau*
> *pañcasvāpatsu nārīṇāṁ patiranyo vidhīyate*
>
> the husband having disappeared, dead, become an ascetic, impotent, or degraded,
> on the occasion of these five calamities, it is prescribed for women [to take] another husband.[37]

[36]Brian A. Hatcher, "Introduction," in *Hindu Widow Marriage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 2.

[37]Parāśara, *Parāśara-Smṛtiḥ*, Bibliotheca Indica ; (Asiatic Society, 1890), 4.28v, my translation.

This is *śloka* 4.28 of the *Parāśara-smṛti*, a dharmashastra text composed between the seventh and eighth century CE and dealing mainly with matters of *ācāra* (proper conduct) and *prāyascitta* (penance).[38] Its use by Vidyasagar has been presented as something of a eureka moment, but the truth is that this particular *śloka* had had a long history in Bengal by the time Vidyasagar published his pamphlet.[39] As we will see, this history was also connected to Nadia and the Nadia Raj family.

In 1842, the newspaper *The Bengal Spectator* ran an article on the situation of Hindu widows, citing an event that had supposedly taken place some ninety years earlier, where *śloka* 4.28 had been brought to attention first. According to the article in *The Bengal Spectator*, in 1756 the *Rājā* of Vikrampur (near present day Dhaka), Mahārāja Rājvallabha, consulted a group of pandits on the issue of widow marriage, since his own daughter had been recently widowed. The pandits, after some deliberation, agreed that this question could be resolved by resorting to the aforementioned *śloka*. The newspaper, however, only mentioned that "The Rajah did not, however, act upon this opinion, and the question has for a long time been in a state of dormancy."[40]

Probably around the publication of this article, Śrīścandra, the heir of the Nadia Raj who had ascended to the throne in 1841 CE, also tried to tackle the question of Hindu remarriage. But he did it in the same way that *Rājā* Rājvallabha had tried to do it almost a century ago, by trying to have it sanctioned by the pandits of Nabadvip:

> Siris Chandra on attaining his majority devoted his attention to the affairs of the Raj. At first he tried to recover the lost parganas. Then he organised a

[38]Patrick Olivelle calls this text "a very brief and somewhat mediocre text whose existence in the manuscript tradition is probably due to the great commentary on it, the Pārāśara-Mādhavīya, written by the fourteenth century scholar Mādhava." See Patrick Olivelle, "Social and Literary History of Dharmaśāstra: The Foundational Texts," in *Hindu Law: A New History of Dharmaśāstra*, First edition, ed. Patrick Olivelle and Donald R. Davis, The Oxford History of Hinduism (Oxford, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 28.

[39]Hatcher refers to a couple of Vidyasagar's biographies where the pandit stumbles upon this particular *śloka* on his quest for scriptural basis of his arguments. See Hatcher, "Introduction," 50n63.

[40]The 1842 Bengal Spectator article is cited in "Marriage of Hindu Widows," *Calcutta Review*, July-December 1855, 358.

> philanthropic society, of which he was the president, the chief object of which was to move Government to restore to their former owners those rent-free lands which it had deprived them of. He did not stop here in his good work. He tried every means to ameliorate the social condition of the people of lower Bengal. Having read the Hindu Shastras with learned Brahmans, he tried to glean from them passages sanctioning the remarriage of widows. He would have succeeded in this noble work, but for the strong opposition of the Nadia pandits.[41]

What is the connection between these two events? The *Bengal Spectator* article did not provide the full context, but it seems that throughout Bengal it was well-known that *Rājā* Rājvallabha had been unsuccessful in marrying his widowed daughter because of the staunch opposition to it by *Rājā* Krishnachandra of Nadia and the pandits of Nabadvip. Rājvallabha was a Vaidya by caste and had climbed the administrative ladder of Mughal Bengal rapidly, reaching the position of Diwan of Dhaka.[42] Thus, while he had acquired means and power, he was ritually beneath Krishnachandra Ray, who was then considered the head of the Hindu *Samāj* in Bengal. According to the story, Krishnachandra plainly refused to allow the marriage of Rājvallabha's widowed daughter, dismissing Rājvallabha's shastric indictment (based on *Parāśara* 4.28) on account of his own Pandit's shastric advice.[43]

As R.M Majumdar has pointed out, there is no evidence to prove that these stories were true.[44] However, this story clearly circulated throughout Bengal in the nineteenth century and was reproduced by multiple texts. The story is mentioned in the 1855 *Calcutta Journal* article as a precursor of the debate raging that year, with Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar leading the charge. In the Bengali *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvali carita*, Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra presented an extended and highly detailed version of the story, which he claimed he heard from the mouth of Śivacandra.

[41]Sastri and Lethbridge, *Ramtanu Lahiri*, 8.

[42]R. C. Majumdar, *Maharaja Rajballabh* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1947).

[43]A further story that also circulated during the nineteenth century argued that Krishnachandra also had opposed Rājvallabha's attempt to reinstate the use of the sacred thread for Vaidyas of Eastern Bengal. See Cakrabartī, *Mahārājā Kṛṣṇacandra*, 271-272 for a description of different stories telling the interactions between Krishnachandra and Rājvallabha.

[44]Majumdar, *Maharaja Rajballabh*, 91.

In the high circles of Vikrampur's and Nabadvip's societies this story circulates even to this day: the renowned *Rājā* Rājvallabha of Vikrampur, with his heart extremely afflicted at seeing his young daughter suffer under premature widowhood, resolved to bring into practice the marriage of widows. Approaching several pandits from different regions, East and West, he obtained a settled rule [*vyavasthā*] stipulating that the śāstras were not opposed to widow marriage. To obtain the same ruling from the pandits in Nabadvip, Rājvallabha sent some pandits to the court of Raja Krishnachandra. At that time, Rājvallabha was the Nawab of Dhaka and a very powerful courtier.[45] Therefore, he thought: "Once I obtain a favorable ruling from pandits of different regions, if I petition *Rājā* Krishnachandra then I will get easily a positive ruling even from the pandits of Nabadvip." The pandits sent by Rājvallabha reached the palace of Krishnachandra. He welcomed them cordially and promised them to try, to the best of his abilities, to fulfill the desire of their patron. After that, Krishnachandra showed, in secret, the *vyavasthā* that had been sent to the most prominent pandits of his court and of Nabadvip. Having read it, the pandits declared "This ruling is fully sanctioned by the śāstras." In hearing this, Krishnachandra, with his mind inflamed by malice [*īrṣādagdhacitta*], retorted: "Even if this *vyavasthā* is not opposed to the śāstras, this conduct/custom [*vyavahāra*] is, thus Rājvallabha will be disappointed. That a *vaidya* would try to bring into use a custom that has been always not in use, is by all means unbearable. However, the might of Rājvallabha is such that, right now, I cannot irritate him by any means. Therefore, to keep him content, I will request [in public] you to approve this *vyavasthā*, but you will oppose this; I will scold you but you will reply that at the petition of the Mahārāja or of any other person" A couple of days later, Rājvallabha's pandits went to the assembly of *Rājā* Krishnachandra. There, he addressed the pandits of Nabadvip: "*Rājā* Rājvallabha has sent this *vyavasthā*, and it is clearly sanctioned by the śāstras. And even if it is not, regardless, he has asked me for this, thus you all need to approve this ruling." The Nabadvip pandits, acting according to Krishnachandra's secret command, raised all kinds of objections, and declared the *vyavasthā* opposed to the scriptures. The pandits sent by Rājvallabha went back, disappointed, to their own country. Rājvallabha did not catch on Krishnachandra's slyness, and he desisted on this important project.[46]

The use of *īrṣā*, meaning 'envy' or 'malice,' to describe Krishnachandra's state of mind is telling, for Kārtikeẏacandra Ray is clearly advancing a moral indictment on Krishnachandra's behavior. In fact, the strong contrast between Krishnachandra and Rājvallabha seems to center upon the moral character of each one. On one hand, Rājvallabha reacts at *seeing* his young daughter suffer under widowhood [*svīẏa taruṇavaẏaskā tanaẏār vaidhavya yantraṇā*

[45] In reality he was appointed Diwan of Dhaka by Nawazish Muhammad, nephew and son-in-law of Alivardi Khan, see Majumdar, *Maharaja Rajballabh*, 6–8.

[46] Deoẏàn Kārtikeẏacandra Ray, *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcarita* (Kolkata: Nutan Sanskrit Jantra, 1876), 156.

darśane]; on the other, Krishnachandra reacts with malice, *īrṣā*, and challenges even the resolution of his own pandits, who had upheld the ruling as *sampūrṇa śāstrasammata*, fully complying with the śāstras. However, if we believe Kārtikeẏacandra Ray's assertion that he heard this story from the mouth of one of the descendants of Krishnachandra, then we can see how the framing of the story in terms of morality hinges ultimately upon a medieval/feudal divide. I argue here, that this medieval/modern divide is predicated upon two temporal displacements visible in this story: the universalization and atemporalization of a particular sense of morality; and the erasure/forgetting of quarrelling notions of authority.

First, we can see in the story the projection of moral reasoning into the past of Bengal, effectively turning morality into a universal and timeless category. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, the capacity for feeling compassion for a suffering subject is not a characteristic of modern thought, but the ability to acknowledge a suffering subject as a subject position, that is, feeling compassion for someone outside your nearest circle—and to acknowledge that suffering is not an existential category but a transient human condition, are indeed marks of modern thought.[47] In that sense, we could argue that Rājvallabha was not an enlightened subject, for he set about to resolve the terrible situation of widowhood only because his own daughter suffered under it, not because of a recognition of a suffering widow as a subject position. However, Chakrabarty continues, the historiography of moral reasoning in nineteenth century Bengal had a fundamental tension, for in biographies of figures like Rammohan Roy and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar the genealogy of their own moral reasoning was at the same time attributed to their encounter with Western thought and to their own innate abilities for feeling compassion, which his biographers rooted in an Indic conception pertaining rather to the theory of *rasa*: the quality of having a *hṛdaya*, a heart.[48] This of course stressed the exceptionalism of these figures, rendering the universality of moral reasoning less attainable as a universal category.

However problematic it was for biographers of Roy and Vidyasagar that these figures'

[47]Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 125.
[48]Chakrabarty, 129.

capacity for a generalized universal compassion stemmed from two contradictory sources, i.e. the European theory of a universal capacity for moral reasoning and the idea of the exceptional character of these god-like figures, this did not represent the same conundrum for Kārtikeẏacandra Ray and Shastri. Kārtikeẏacandra Ray and Shastri, both progressive, modern biographers, showed with the episode between Krishnachandra and Rājvallabha that compassion, while indeed born out of (modern) moral reasoning, existed in some form in the premodern past of Bengal, which proved its universal and timeless character. The story of Rājvallabha, as it circulated in Bengal throughout the nineteenth century, created somewhat of a prehistory for the widow remarriage movement, which in turn placed compassion for widows in a metonymical relationship with progressive thought and social reform. For example, the 1855 *Calcutta Journal* referred to the Rājvallabha's story as the first attempt to implement social reforms in the country. In the same way but a hundred years later, the historian R.M Majumdar, who was a descendant of Rājvallabha's family, also credited the king of Vikrampur with progressive opinions, not belonging to his time and age:

> It will thus appear that Rajaballabh secured the approval of the orthodox pandits and also the Shastric injunction in favor of widow remarriage, as early as 1756 A.D., and this tradition influenced the views of the social reformers a century later. The failure of Rajballabh is said to have been mainly due to the opposition of Maharaja Krishnachandra, but of this we have no definite evidence. In any case this episode in the life of Rajballabh shows the liberality of his views and his zeal for social reform much beyond his age.[49]

However, in positing the question of morality at the center of the dispute between Rājvallabha and Krishnachandra over widow remarriage, Shastri and Kārtikeẏacandra Ray faced a conundrum: did Krishnachandra's refusal to approve Rājvallabha's *vyavasthā* stem from immorality, or even evil? Shastri did not dwell much on the matter, only counterposing Rājvallabha's "feeling keenly for the sorrows of his young, widowed daughter" to Krishnachandra's being "indifferent to social and religious matters," which for Shastri meant

[49]Majumdar, *Maharaja Rajballabh*, 91.

not advancing a social reformist agenda, since Shastri himself mentions several instances of Krishnachandra's involvement on social and religious matters, just not in a progressive manner. For example, Shastri mentions that Krishnachandra managed to forbid the *Pirālī* Brahmans of Jessore and the Vaidyas from wearing the sacred thread of the *dvijas*.[50] The *Pirālī* Brahmins were so called because, the story goes, the ancestor of that lineage, a figure called Joyram, interacted with a Muslim fakir, a *Pir*. The Tagore family belonged to this branch. Another story that circulated in Bengal throughout the nineteenth century was that Krishnachandra had refused an offer of Rs. 500,000 to dine in the house of one of the members of the family, which would have reinstated the family's ritual status. According to the story, recorded in several texts, Krishnachandra refused the offer as the *Samājapati* of Bengali Hindus.[51]

Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra provided more reasons for Krishnachandra's negative, basing Krishnachandra's decision on his role as *Samājapati*. Thus, we can see in the *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvali carita* that for Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra, Krishnachandra's decision was not based on evil or pure immorality, but on upholding conduct properly sanctioned by the *śāstras*. Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra explained: "in his time, there were many pandits that were well-versed in all the śāstras, and because he [Krishnachandra] was widely recognized as a well-learned man on all shastric matters, in this way he held over the Hindu society of his time some authority."[52] Even in the case of widow remarriage, it was not that Krishnachandra was oblivious to their suffering, it was that the only sanctioned way to alleviate the suffering widows was through shastric rituals: "for the unfortunate widows, the scriptural ruling of *anukalpa* during the fasting of *Ekādaśī* was the liberation of their unending torture of widowhood; he [Krishnachandra] was not interested in extremely urgent matters like the prohibition of customs like *sati*, polygamy or child brides."[53] In fact, Kārtikeẏacandra Ray's description of Krishnachandra's engagement with the situation of the widows seems to indicate that Kr-

[50]Sastri and Lethbridge, *Ramtanu Lahiri*.
[51]Bordeaux, "The Mythic King," 86.
[52]Ray, *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcarita*, 154.
[53]Ray, 154.

ishnachandra was at fault for not being able to generalize both the plight of the widows and the ways to alleviate their suffering. Krishnachandra, added Kārtikeẏacandra Ray, was only interested in ways to ease the widows' pain that were sanctioned by shastric rules, like the fasting of *Ekādaśī*, the prohibition of eating some foods, or even the procedure of *anukalpa*, using substitutions for some food items during a fast, which could alleviate the feeling of hunger during the three days of *Ekādaśī*.

This approach of Krishnachandra towards the plight of the widows, as told by Shastri, has an echo on the life of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. In his biography of Vidyasagar, Biharilal Sarkar locates Vidyasagar's interest on the issue of widow remarriage on Vidyasagar's childhood:

> In the village of Vīrasiṁha, Vidyasagar had a childhood friend whom he loved deeply, this girl was his neighbor. This girl and Vidyasagar used to be together all the time when they were kids, until Vidyasagar went to Kolkata to study and the girl was married. However, after only a few months, the girl became a widow. Sometime after this had happened, Vidyasagar went back to Virasimha for a holiday. While he was there, he would go around his neighborhood asking everybody whether and what they had eaten; such was his nature. One day, he came to know that his childhood friend had not eaten yet: that day was *Ekādaśī*, widows were not fed that day. Hearing this, Vidysagar broke down crying. From that day onwards, he remained resolved on liberating widows from this calamity. At that time, Vidyasagar was thirteen or fourteen years old.[54]

In Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra's account of Krishnachandra's approach to the problem of widow suffering, the king is not presented as impervious to the plight of widows; it is rather that Krishnachandra believed that the only proper way to alleviate their suffering was through shastric-ordained methods, like the provision of *anukalpa* in the fasting of *Ekādaśī*. Resorting to *anukalpa*, people fasting could substitute some food items for others, and in fact they could consume some allowed food items which would not be considered as breaking the fast. In that sense, this episode of course highlights the idea that Vidyasagar's commitment to the cause of Hindu widows stemmed from his own, natural compassion,

[54]Bihārīlāla Sarakāra, *Bidyāsāgara* (Kalikātā: Nabapatra Prakāśana, 1982), 278.

contrasting heavily with Krishnachandra's pragmatic approach to the same issue. However, despite the anecdotal nature of these scenes, they illuminate a tension present in the retelling of Rājvallabha's pandits at Krishnanagar court: while it seems that for Shastri and Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra the counterposition between Rājvallabha's incipient "modern" compassion and Krishnachandra's shastric-informed traditional stance is a token of a medieval/modern divide grounded purely on morality, what separates the two kings is the different sources of their authority.

If we are to believe Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra's retelling of the story, which he supposedly heard from one of the descendants of Krishnachandra, what was at the root of the conflict presented to him by the pandits of Rājvallabha was rather a conundrum between *law* and *custom*. Though framed rather in moral terms, Krishnachandra's reply to his own pandits hinges upon this very issue, for he says: "even if the *vyavasthā* is sanctioned by the śāstras, this is a custom [*vyavahāra*] not current in this country." Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra put emphasis on this tension, for he supplied another anecdote to illustrate the point:

> There is a curious story circulating in this country. When the pandits of Rājvallabha visited Krishnanagar, a whole feast was sent to them from the palace. Along with different food items, some veal was also sent to them. Seeing the veal, the pandits, astonished, asked one of the King's officer "what's the reason for this veal?" The employee replied: "for your consumption." The pandits then said: "we do not eat this meat." To which the officer replied: "Why not? To eat this meat is not forbidden by the śāstras" The pandits responded: "True, to eat this meat is certainly not forbidden by the śāstras. However, in this country, to eat this meat is not a custom [*vyavahāra nāi*]" The officer then asked: "You are averse to eat this because is not customary, even though it is accepted in the śāstras, but you want to substantiate widow marriage in this region even when it has been out of fashion for a long time and it is forbidden by custom?" The pandits remained silent, unable to answer.[55]

Of course, the way the contrast between the story of Vidyasagar and the stories of Krishnachadra is presented in nineteenth century texts aims to highlight the recognition of the innate cruel nature of the institution of widowhood as it was practiced in Bengal

[55]Ray, *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcarita*, 156.

in premodern times. Yet, the question of authority, of what is most authoritative in a given case, *vyavasthā* or *vyavahāra*, is taken up by no other than Vidyasagar himself in his pamphlet advocating for Hindu widow remarriage. Vidyasagar starts his discussion on the validity of widow marriage by introducing this specific conundrum, saying that many debates have been held but none goes to the heart of the matter, to inquire about the validity of this specific custom, for which he uses the word *prathā* instead of *ācāra* or even *vyavahāra*. At the beginning of his exposition, Vidyasagar's argument might look somewhat circular, he says: "If we are to consider the topic of widow marriage we must first of all recognize that it is not a custom promoted in this land. Hence, if widows are to be given in marriage, it will be necessary to institute a new custom."[56] The only reason given to introduce this new practice is being able to see now "the great misfortune caused by our failure to promote the custom of widow marriage."[57] This is, of course, the moral framing which Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra, Shastri and the biographers of Vidyasagar usually extol, but Vidyasagar goes beyond the circularity of "it has to be done because it is good." What follows is a very schematic summary of Vidyasagar's argument, which is very methodical in detailing and responding to the counter-arguments that the opponents of widow remarriage advanced.

First, he demonstrates that it is indeed the *Parāśara smṛti* which is the authoritative śāstra for his age, following *Manu* 1.85 which dictates that dharma declines in every subsequent cosmological age and thus the dharmic injunctions of each age are different.[58] That the Kali Yuga was the current age for either Krishnachandra or Vidyasagar was not a point of contention in this discussion, but rather what was most authoritative. Following *Parāśara* 1.24, Vidyasagar establishes that the proper *Dharma-smṛti* for the Kali age is that of *Parāśara*. Having established that, he goes on to quote the famous *Parāśara* 4.28 as proof that the adequate *Dharma-smṛti* for the age sanctioned as lawful the marriage of

[56]Īśvaracandra Bidyāsāgara, *Hindu Widow Marriage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 58. Unless noted, the following translations from the Bangla original are by Brian Hatcher.

[57]Bidyāsāgara, 58.

[58]*anye kṛtayuge dharmāstretāyāṁ dvāpare 'pare/ anye kaliyuge nṛṇāṁ yugahrāsānurūpataḥ* "In agreement with the decay of the ages, the injuctions [*dharma*] for men in the Kṛta age are of one kind, in Treta they are different, in Dvāpara they are different, and in the Kali age they are different."

widows. Since some objections had been raised before, citing other treatises that seemed to contradict the resolution that widow marriage was lawful, Vidyasagar goes on to discuss what is the most authoritative text when there is an apparent contradiction. In the particular case of widow remarriage, when it was argued that such a practice was not current in the region, Vidyasagar cites *Vaśiṣṭha-dharmasūtra* 1.3-4, which Vidyasagar renders like this:

> *loke pretya vā vihito dharmaḥ*
> *tadalābhe śiṣṭācāraḥ pramāṇam*
>
> In this world and the next, dharma [that which is ordained by śāstra] is to be followed,
> If it is not accessible, then a good practice is the authority [to be followed]

Vidyasagar ends here his argumentation, only adding at the end an appeal to recognize the evils of this social institution, to acknowledge the life-long pain that early widowhood imposes upon Hindu women. A couple of months after Vidyasagar published his pamphlet, an anonymous reader with progressive leanings wrote in the *Calcutta Review* a long piece on the widow remarriage debate. Extoling Vidyasagar's attempts as a good deed, the piece then goes on to criticize Vidysagar's approach, stating that despite all the logic and "subtleties of a dialectician" displayed, true change would come only from the diffusion of "moral influence," which means doing away with all the methods to which Vidyasagar had resorted:

> Which then we ask is a better ground to stand upon—the authority of ancient codes which in many parts are at variance with justice, or the authority of the eternal, immutable, unmistakable principles of natural reason and right, the standard of virtue which the Shasters profess to represent? It is possible that the authority of the Shaster, if rendered subservient to the determination of a question, may be productive of immediate good results, but there can be no mistake that it will be on an *insecure* basis to be shaken by an ordinary blast, while the sanction of the moral principles rightly inculcated and applied, cannot but eventually triumph.[59]

[59] *Calcutta Review*, "Marriage of Hindu Widows," 363.

The *Calcutta Review* piece ends arguing: "We consider the deprivation of Hindu widows of the freedom to marry, an unjust prohibition, and is calculated to operate prejudicially on their elevation as *rational* and *moral beings*."[60]

With the *Hindu Widow Marriage* pamphlet, Vidyasagar tried to put an end to the century-long debate about the shastric fitness of widow remarriage. This debate had hardly started with the encounter between Krishnachandra and Rājvallabha's pandits, but it was definitely in the historical and social memory of Bengalis when the agitations around widow remarriage cropped up around the middle of the century. And it was certainly referenced when pointing out the temporal distance between Krishnachandra, embodying the middle ages, and the modern age from which Shastri and Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra wrote. However, in centering the history of this shastric debate purely around the ability or inability to recognize widowhood as a social evil, the nineteenth centuries biographies framed the different arguments advanced by Krishnachandra and his pandits and Vidyasagar as a temporal divide revolving around morality and not around divergent sources of authority.[61]

Daud Ali has shown, following Nicholas Dirks, that in India the contradictory relationship of colonial modernity with the premodern past meant a complete dismantlement and reconstitution of the 'political,' in parallel to the enlightened European critiques of dynastic

[60] *Calcutta Review*, "Marriage of Hindu Widows," 364. Emphasis in the original.

[61] Bharatchandra's *Annadāmaṅgal*, first performed in 1752, contains probably the first mention of the widow marriage issue in connection with Krishnachandra's court. In the third book of the trilogy, the issue is framed as a discussion on the merits and vices of Hinduism and Islam. Each is championed respectively by Bhavānanda Majumdar, the historical founder of the Nadia Raj dynasty, and the Emperor Jahangir. Enumerating several absurdities espoused by Hinduism, Jahangir states: *āra dekha nārīra khasama mari yāẏa / nikā nāhi diẏā rāṁḍha kari rākhe tāẏa // phala hetu phula tāra māse māse phuṭe / vīja vinā naṣṭa haẏa se pāpa ki chuṭe. //* "And furthermore, [when] the husband of a woman dies, not giving [her] in marriage again, she remains a widow. For the purpose of [producing] fruit, her flower blooms month by month, but without a seed it is destroyed, what's the redemption for this sin?" Bharatchandra's retort to this, in the voice of Bhavānanda, is argumentatively disappointing, but poetically very ingenious: *khaśama chāḍiẏā yevā nikā kare rāṁḍa / eke chāḍi gāi yena dhare āra ṣāṁḍa. //* "the widow that remarries anyone, forsaking her husband, is like a cow that leaves a bull to take another." Bhāratacandra Rāẏa et al., *In Praise of Annada, Vol. 2*, vol. 12, Murty Classical Library of India ; (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 459, 466, my translation. This of course does not prove that widow remarriage was necessarily an ongoing legal/religious preoccupation in the court of Krishnachandra, but it does show that the criticism of the treatment of Hindu widows was something that Krishnachandra had at least heard before. Moreover, while Bhavānanda's reply to the emperor is lacking in argumentative strength, it does show that Krishnachandra's refusal to Rājvallabha's petition was not a knee-jerk reaction stemming merely from an uncritical role of leader of the Hindu *Samāj*.

absolutism and feudalism that saw in the *ancien régime* a period of decay and decadence.[62] In this sense, Krishnachandra's attempt to thwart a reform based on a shastric injuction put forward by a rival *rājā* was read by nineteenth century authors as yet another token of Krishnachandra's and Nadia's medievality. In the next section, I present other examples of how texts created in a particular political context were read in the same way, as devoid of any other paratextuality other than one reflecting purely medieval values. Paraphrasing Kathleen Davis when she discusses the *Libri Feodurum* –a compilation of laws describing feudal practice in twelfth century Lombardy and which is the corner stone for modern historiographical understanding and conception of the idea of feudalism as a universal category–I will argue that these texts must be understood "as politically situated arguments, not as transparent evidence of longstanding "medieval" practice."[63]

The Nadia Raj: familial history as political history

In the last sections, we saw how nineteenth century writers struggled to strike a balance between denouncing what they considered the decadent excesses and profoundly oblivious moral sense of the kings of Nadia and presenting the history of Nadia and of its royal family as a hallowed place of learning, culture and power. There was, however, a conundrum in presenting Nadia and its *rājās* in such a positive light, in that it belied a particularly insidious colonial historiographic trope: the identification of the 'Muslim' period of Indian history with the medieval dark ages of Europe. If the dark or middle ages of India under Muslim rule meant the deterioration of India's social and cultural life, how to explain that one of the most productive and celebrated periods in Bengali literature and culture before the colonial period coincided with the rule of Islamic dynasties in Bengal?[64] In order to address this conundrum, colonial and nationalist historiography portrayed the petty *rājās*

[62]Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

[63]Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 28.

[64]Bhatia, "Images of Navadwip: Place, Evidence and Inspiration," 169.

that governed over *zamindaris* in Bengal as independent rulers and as upholders of Hindu culture and traditions. For example, Shibnath Shastri stated that Bengal under the Sultans and later under the Mughals had been essentially an independent region:

> When the country was under the Muhammadan rule, these Rajas, in defiance of the risk of incurring the displeasure of their rulers, defended the cause of Hindu religion and learning. At the time of which we are speaking, the Hindu Rajas were to some extent free from Imperial interference. As long as they punctually paid the revenue, they might do much as they liked in their own territories. They had armies, courts, and ministers of their own; and men of merit flocked to their palaces for rewards and distinctions.[65]

At some point between 1754 and 1756, *Rājā* Krishnachandra Ray called pandits from all over India to perform some Vedic sacrifices at his court in Nadia. The only notice we have of this event is found in the *Mahārāja Kṛṣṇacandra Rayasya caritram*, a Bengali text composed in 1801 by Rājīvlocan Mukhopādhyāẏ. This was one of the first Bengali texts composed at the behest of the authorities at the Fort William College. Krishnachandra asked his pandits what sacrifices had his ancestors performed, since they had also been *rājās* like him. When he heard that no one had performed any sacrifice, he decided to carry out one, and asked his pandits to deliberate on which one would be suitable for him. After some consideration, the pandits replied that two Vedic sacrifices were appropriate: *agnihotra* and *vājapeya*.[66] The *agnihotra* was a sacrifice performed daily by offering *ghee* to the fire; as a brahmin, Krishnachandra could perform the sacrifice, which was denied to kshatriyas.[67] The second Vedic sacrifice had larger implications. P.V. Kane mentions that it could be performed by brahmins and kshatriyas, but not by a vaisya. Moreover, this rite was undertaken by

[65]Sastri and Lethbridge, *Ramtanu Lahiri*, 2.

[66]Rājīvlocan Mukhopādhyāẏ, *Śrī Mahārājā Kṛṣṇacandra Rāyasya Caritra* (Landana: [s.n.], 1811), 27.

[67]David L. Curley, *Poetry and History: Bengali Maṅgal-kābya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2008), 216; According to Goldstücker, there are two kinds of *agnihotra* sacrifice: *nitya* and *kāmya*. The first one has to be performed twice daily, at sunrise to Surya and at sunset to Agni. The second one, the "voluntary" *agnihotra,* occurs only occasionally and is performed to attain a particular goal. Though there are no details in the 1801 text, most probably Krishnachandra performed the latter, with aims of attaining overlordship. *Agnihotra*, in *A Dictionary, Sanskrit and English* (London: David Nutt Publisher, 1856), 13, by Theodor Goldstücker.

someone trying to attain overlordship (*ādhipatya*) or *svārājya*, which Kane describes as "the position of Indra or uncontrolled dominion."[68] Because it could be performed by brahmins and kshatriyas, there was a tension within the definitions of the ritual, for it was never clear if it was a preparatory sacrifice or it was an end in itself. According to Julius Eggeling, who translated the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa*, the *vājapeya* sacrifice occupies a peculiar position in the discussion of sacrifices in the *Śatapatha*. Since it is discussed between the *agniṣṭoma* and the *rājasuya*, at some places the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* states that the *vājapeya* is superior to the *rājasūya*, which can only be performed by a kshatriya.[69]

It would seem from this event, that the notion of Hindu *rājās* being independent rulers, or at least trying to be, was not a mere romantic fantasy of the nineteenth century. However, any claim to overlordship in the second half of the eighteenth century in Bengal could never be straightforward, with so many actors—the English, the puppet *Nawab* installed by the Company, other *zamindars* and *rājās*, etc—competing for power and authority. What does the *vājapeya* sacrifice of Krishnachandra reveal about the notions of authority and/or sovereignty in the rarefied political climate of Bengal? In this section, I read some texts that discussed the problem of authority and sovereignty, but which were later considered as texts with either pure documentary value or espousing dated notions of kingship and history writing. I argue here that these texts were used to argue for the existence of the feudal as an underlying system in the land and revenue administration of Bengal that predated the establishment of the Company's own settlement with the landlords and, in doing so, these texts were eventually stripped of their political character.

These texts, the Sanskrit *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcaritam* —which is not to be confused with Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra's Bangla text—the Bangla *Mahārāj Kṛṣṇacandra Rayasya caritram*, the Bangla *Rājā Pratāpāditya Caritra*, and an English manuscript titled *History of Kissen-nagur, the Zemindary of Raja Kisten-Chund*, all presented a narrative of an impor-

[68]Pāṇḍuraṅga Vāmana Kāṇe, *History of Dharmaśāstra : (Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law in India)*, Government Oriental Series. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1930), vol. II, part 2, 1207.

[69]Eggeling Julius Tr., *The Satapatha-brahmana Part. 3* (1894), xxiv.

tant historical event that took place in Bengal during the sixteenth century, a period that would be known in Bengal historiography as the rebellion of the *Bārō Bhũiyā*, or twelve landlords. The episode that the texts discussed here portray is the rise and fall of the most salient of the *bārō Bhũiyā*, *Rājā* Pratāpāditya, which centuries later—at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century—would become a romantic figure among Bengalis for supposedly representing the independent streak of Bengal against the Mughal empire.[70]

The following are the historical events of the rebellion. In 1572, Daud Khan Karrani, the last of the rulers of the Afghan Karrani dynasty in Bengal, ascended to the throne after killing a usurper, a man known only as Hansu, who was his brother-in-law and had killed his elder brother, Bayazid Khan Karrani. When Daud ascended, he quickly decided to break the allegiance his father, Suleiman Khan Karrani, had pledged to the Mughal emperor. In Daud's time, the emperor was Akbar, who did not take the news very well. After 1572, for four years a series of military campaigns of the Mughal army against Daud and his generals took place in Eastern India. Finally, in the year 1576 the Mughal general Hussain Quli Beg defeated, captured and killed Daud in the battle of Rajmahal, which started an increased Mughal presence in Bengal, though not without conflicts. At some point during the reign of Daud, two brothers, whose family was part of the Kayasthas of Eastern Bengal, Srihari and Janakiballaha, were conferred the titles of King Vikramaditya and Raja Vasanta Ray respectively by Daud, since they had become important figures in his court. When Daud realized that the war against the Mughals was surely to be lost, he sent both brothers to the maritime wildness of Jessore, in the region of Khulna, present day Bangladesh. They took with them not only personnel but also part of the treasury. When Daud was captured and executed, these brothers appropriated the treasury and, after pledging allegiance to the Mughal emperor, became the *zamindars* of Jessore. Śrīhari had a son, named Pratāpāditya. He ascended to the throne in 1584 and, much like Daud had done, eventually Pratāpāditya

[70]Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 139–141.

claimed to be the independent ruler of Bengal. Pratāpāditya decided to rebel against the Mughal suzerainty to which not only his father but he himself had pledged allegiance; the emperor was Jahangir at that time. The events of this rebellion ended in 1611, when the Mughal General Islam Khan defeated, captured and executed Pratāpāditya.

However, apart from Basu's *Pratāpāditya caritra*, a constellation of texts dealing with these events presented a different narrative. In this alternative version, Man Singh, a famous Hindu general in Akbar's and posteriorly Jahangir's court, was the *subahdar* designated by Jahangir to fight the rebellion of Pratāpāditya. However, this is not accurate, for Man Singh had left Bengal a few years before Pratāpāditya's rebellion even started. It was Islam Khan who commanded the attack on Jessore and on Pratāpāditya. There is another important departure in the narrative. According to this version, the Mughal General Man Singh only succeeded in defeating Pratāpāditya thanks to the help of a man named Durgādāsa, a minor Hindu landlord who offered the general and his army food and shelter from a sudden week-long storm. With Durgādāsa's assistance and intel, Man Singh was able to track down and defeat the rebel king Pratāpāditya. After these events, Man Singh supposedly took Durgādāsa to Delhi, where after an audience and—in some texts—a debate, Jahangir offered Durgādāsa land and a title, becoming then Bhavānanda Majumdar. This story is found in virtually any text pertaining to the royal family of Nadia, whether commissioned by the family, or written by European officers on the history of the Nadia Raj.

The history of the Nadia royal family is, in a way, the main theme of Bharatchandra's *Annadāmaṅgal*, with the story of Bhavānanda Majumdar being the thread that ties together the three books of the poem: the first book ends with the birth of Majumdar; the encounter between Man Singh and Majumdar frames the story of *Vidyāsundar*, book two of the *Annadāmaṅgal*; and the encounter in Delhi between Majumdar and Jahangir, and the final instauration of the cult of the goddess Annadā, is the subject matter of the third book. This version was also found in the Sanskrit *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcaritam* and it is the version

that both Rājīvlocan Mukhopādhyāẏ and Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra tell in their texts.[71] This version was so pervasive that throughout the nineteenth century and part of the twentieth it was taken as a factual record of events, and many official publications from the British colonial administration reproduced the narrative found in those texts.[72] For example, the 1910 Gazetteer of Nadia tells the Man Singh version:

> It is said that Pratāpādityā [sic] went to the court of the Emperor at Delhi, and was granted a sanad making him a Rājā, and that he thereupon returned and ousted his father. Before long he declared himself independent of the Emperor, and he succeeded in defeating several Mughal generals who were sent to bring him to subjection. Finally Mān Singh, governor of Bengal, with the assistance of Bhabānand Majmuādār [sic], one of the Rājās of Nadiā, surprised his capital and captured him; he was sent off in custody towards Delhi, but he put an end to his life on the way, preferring death to the fate which he expected was in store for him.[73]

What does it mean that several texts either commissioned by or written about the Nadia Raj family contained a fictional story about their origins, but that these texts also revolve around an important historical event in Bengal? Moreover, these texts sometimes included another story of the origins of the family, not one counterposed to the story of Bhavānanda, but rather completing it, going into the mythical past of Bengal. The 'mythical' origin of the family told the story of Bhaṭṭa Nārāẏana, one of the five brahmins whom King Adisur

[71]However, Kārtikeẏacandra Ray had suspected that at least part of the story was fictional, for he could never find a *sanad* signed by Jahangir establishing Majumdar as a *qanungo*, which is what the different texts of the Nadia Raj claimed. Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra did indeed found some *farmāns*, but none that conformed to the story of Man Singh and Majumdar. See Ray, *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcarita*, especially the appendices, where Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra reproduced the documents he found.

[72]Though Ram Ram Basu in his *Pratāpāditya caritram* (1801) had already noted that it was Islam Khan and not Man Singh the Mughal general in charge of the war against Pratāpāditya, it was only till the discovery in the twentieth century of the Persian Tarikh *Bhahāristān-i-Ghaybī* by Jadunath Sarkar that it was confirmed that Man Singh was not in charge of the expedition. See Nalini Kanta. Bhattasali, "Bengal Chiefs' Struggle for Independence in the Reign of Akbar & Jahangir," *Bengal Past And Present*, 1928, Mīrzā Nathan, Moayyidul Islam Borah, and Suryya Kumar. Bhuyan, *Bahāristān-i-Ghaybī: A History of the Mughal Wars in Assam, Cooch Behar, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa during the Reigns of Jahāngīr and Shāhjahān* (Gauhati, Assam: The Government of Assam, Dept. of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Narayani Handiqui Historical Institute, 1936).

[73]Garrett, *Bengal District Gazetteers - Nadia*, 79.

brought from Kanauj.[74] This story was the starting point of many *Kulagranthas* but also of other texts dealing with the social norms of Kulin families in Bengal. For example, the *Vallālacaritam*, a sixteenth century Sanskrit text describing the reforms among *Kulin* families in twelfth century Bengal, also contained the story of Adisur and the establishment of the five Kanauj brahmins.[75] The crafting of such a ubiquitous story in the textual production of the Nadia Raj points at an active self-fashioning of the Nadia Raj as important political players in the historical development of the political landscape in Bengal under Mughal rule. Instead of passively conveying information, these stories about the origins of the family show that the Nadia Raj tried to portray their history in a certain way: rather than pure historical fantasy, this narrative was a political fantasy.

Modern scholars have looked into this political self-fashioning and have pointed out the tensions present in these texts. For example, David Curley sees in the textual production of the Nadia Raj a site where the models of kingship and of pure political will become enacted pristinely. Curley states that while the Sanskrit *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcaritam* reflects the uneasy relationships that the forebears of Krishnachandra Ray had with the Mughal administration, the *Annadāmaṅgal* is Krishnachandra's project of a unified Hinduism that would eventually allow him to attain an 'independent' kingship, free from Mughal governance.[76] Samuel Wright argued that although the Nadia and Bishnupur Raj enacted Hindu kingship, both polities did it resorting to different models. The Nadia royal family in the 17th century used universal idioms of Hindu kingship, while the Malla Raj employed localized idioms.[77] On the *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcaritam*, Kumkum Chatterjee thought of this text as a site of confluence between Persianate and Sanskritic/Puranic elements. Kumkum Chatterjee stated that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Bengali literature had been influenced by Persian

[74]For an analysis on the historiographical debates that the fictious figure of Adisur created in nineteenth century Bengal, see Kumkum Chatterjee, "The King of Controversy: History and Nation-Making in Late Colonial India," *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 5 (2005): 1454–1475.

[75]Ānanda Bhaṭṭa, *Vallala Charita. A History of King Ballālasena of Bengal.*, trans. Mahamahopadhyay Haraprasad Sastri (Calcutta: Hare Press, 1901).

[76]Curley, *Poetry and History*, 225.

[77]Wright, "From Praśasti to Political Culture," 70.

Tarikhs and their focus on administrative and political aspects. In fact, argued Chatterjee, the first Bengali books published at the Fort William College showed this uneasy mix of being "secular narratives of political ambition, power and calculation" and being "firmly linked to a specific Mughal political administrative culture."[78]

While these scholars have stressed the tensions between the two principles of legitimacy that can be discerned in the texts, classical Hindu kingship model and Islamicate/Mughal legitimation principles, the question on the intentionality—or lack of–behind these two streams of sovereignty remains unresolved. Was it a conscious effort to walk the line between divergent legitimation principles? Or was it a "subconscious" response to the idea of empire understood as a "bureaucratic and ideological framework"? It could be, of course, both.[79] Far from answering these questions, in the next section I show how a parallel reading of two texts, the Sanskrit *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcaritam* and an English manuscript on the history of the Nadia Raj, complicates the understanding of the political aspirations of the Nadia Raj and shows how the displacement of sovereignty and political power is at the root of the "discovery" of feudalism in Bengal.

"Who is King of Bengal?" Philip Francis, Warren Hastings and Krishnachandra in dialogue

As discussed above, that *zamindars* or petty *rājās* in Bengal like Krishnachandra were important players in the political landscape of eighteenth century Bengal after Plassey,

[78]Kumkum Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India. Persianization and Mughal Culture in Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 138.

[79]As Richard Eaton showed in his monograph, even after the waning of *de facto* political and military power of the Mughals in Bengal, the rapid expansion of populated areas in Eastern Bengal during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw also the increase of revenue units by local officials that followed the Mughal administrative principles. Though that revenue most probably did not reach the center in Delhi, the use of the ideological and bureaucratic framework, argues Eaton, implied that the new areas under tax administration were also part of the Mughal ideological framework. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, 311–312.

sometimes in open competition even with the English, has been well accepted.[80] Part of the political struggle between the *rājās* and the Company concerned the flow of information about estates, tax revenue, yield amount, but also information like customs, rites, and so on. The Company's need for information became a systematic bureaucratic practice which consisted of petitioning information through letters, treatises, and visits to the sources of information, a practice that came to be well-known as 'questions to the natives.'[81] Robert Travers argues that the natives' responses to these questions "cannot be read as authentic representation of 'indigenous opinion,"' but they can, at least, "provide valuable insights into how British officials appropriated, displaced and distorted indigenous knowledge as they built the colonial state."[82] Skewing the thorny and epistemologically shaky notion of 'authentic indigenous knowledge,' the parallel reading of an English and Sanskrit text that I offer here aims to show that, far from being mere repositories and guardians of knowledge, the *rājās* of Bengal, like Krishnachandra, perhaps shared a conceptual preoccupation on questions that interested the English. In particular, I argue that the history of these two texts and their presence in the archive should be framed within the eighteenth-century efforts by officials of the East India Company to find what they called the 'ancient constitution' of India.

The search for this supposed 'ancient constitution' was rooted in two parallel causes. One, because after the battle of Plassey the Company had become the ruling power *de facto* in Bengal, the question of how to transition into a *de jure* sovereign implied knowing the institutions through which political power had been exercised in Bengal. Two, this need to cement colonial rule and achieve efficient governance required the formation and acquisition of highly specialized knowledge of the religious, linguistic and literary past of India by colonial officers, who were known as Orientalists.[83] Moreover, there were two divergent understandings of what and where the ancient constitution was to be found: Warren Hastings

[80]See for example Michael S. Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770-1880* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 49. Dodson points out that funding and supporting Sanskrit scholarship became a contested site between the Company and Krishnachandra.

[81]Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India*, 20.

[82]Travers, 20.

[83]Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture*, 20.

on one side, and Philip Francis and Edmund Burke on the other. For Francis and Burke, the landed gentry of Bengal represented the source of the ancient, legitimate rights over the land of the country, which predated the Mughal and Muslim conquests, arching deep into the 'Hindu' past of India. For Hastings, Mughal rule in India and in Bengal had meant an absolutist approach to government and governance, one in which the fountain of sovereignty could not have been the landed gentry, but the Mughal constitution itself.[84]

This dual interest can be seen in early Orientalist works like the books and translations of Alexander Dow (1735-1779). Dow's *History of Hindostan, translated from the Persian of Ferishta* (1772), was not meant only as a chronological account of the rulers of India for informative purposes, it was an enquiry into the nature of power and rule in India. Before the translation proper of Firista's book, Dow included several essays detailing his findings on the understanding of sovereignty in Bengal. In *A Dissertation Concerning the Origin and Nature of Despotism in Hindostan*, Dow set the basis for the colonial understanding of Indian society as ancient and timeless, claiming that beyond the Muslim conquests, "revolution and change are things unknown."[85] But, as Robert Travers has argued, the idea of finding the 'ancient constitution' of Bengal proved much more challenging, for the idea of the Mughal regime as a 'cultural system,' i.e. as a set of bureaucratic, legal and institutional practices, idioms and customs, persisted even after the retreat of actual Mughal institutions and officers from Bengal.[86] As Guha defined it, the corpus of texts that kickstarted Indological studies was the first attempt in modern times to study the 'East,' and to study the East in the eighteenth century was "above all to study the nature of oriental despotism."[87]

Thus, the search for the ancient constitution was a process that took decades, and which

[84]Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India*, 25.

[85]This was not particular to India according to Dow, he extended this idea of a natural inclination to despotic governments based on timelessness and changelessness to all Asia, reproducing the well-known trope of "Asian despotism" much used as a contrast to European Enlightenment during the eighteenth century. Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindostan, : From the Death of Akbar, to the Complete Settlement of the Empire under Aurungzebe. To Which Are Prefixed, I. A Dissertation on the Origin and Nature of Despotism in Hindostan. II. An Enquiry into the State of Bengal*, Eighteenth Century ; (London: printed for T. Becket and P. A. de Hondt, 1772), I, xxxv.

[86]Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India*, 20.

[87]Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal.*

troubled colonial officers all the while. In 1776, during the preparations for the Permanent Settlement of Bengal, Phillip Francis, the mastermind behind the plan, wrote a letter complaining about William Hasting's intentions of having a court of judicature without having a constitution, which pointed at the overarching problem of the lack of definition of sovereignty in Bengal, an issue that haunted the Company's presence. Francis wrote: "I see a number of streams, but no fountain. I see Laws without a Sovereign. Does any man in England know, or think it worth his while to inquire, who is King of Bengal?"[88] Almost two centuries later, Ranajit Guha established in his seminal work *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, a study on the idea of the Permanent Settlement, that Francis' main preoccupation and drive behind the Plan of Permanent Settlement was not a matter of pure fiscal policy. Philip Francis, argued Guha, had devised the plan not merely as a quick answer to petty questions of fiscal policy or merely as an extractive device to maximize revenue, but "as a contribution to the task of forming or restoring the Constitution of an Empire."[89] Ultimately, adds Guha, Francis wrote on the general problem of British power in India, the problem of sovereignty.[90] Francis' quest to find the fountain of authority, or as he put it, to know who is—metaphorically—king of Bengal, led him to deep research and recovery of this supposed 'ancient constitution' of India. That is, to find out who was the ultimate proprietor and the subject of rights under the political system of premodern India.[91] The search for the ancient constitution took colonial administrators to what they thought was the source: the princes of the country, the petty *rājās* that populated the political and administrative landscape of Bengal. During the

[88]Phillip Francis quoted in Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, 186.

[89]Guha, 115.

[90]Guha, 143.

[91]The process of finding and re-establishing the ancient constitution in India had a parallel in European historiography, especially in the attempts to locate and explain the emergence of feudalism in Europe. Renaissance and later eighteenth-century historians believed that the *feudum* was a universal institution and that it had been a constitutive part of the general pattern of European law for centuries. See J. G. A. (John Greville Agard) Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 70; These historians found in the *Libri Feodurum*, a twelfth century compilation made in Lombardy about feudal customs, the enunciation of a universal practice, and thus poured their attention on it. As Kathleen Davis has argued, the idea of the 'discovery' of feudalism in Renaissance Europe was rather a process in which describing the feudal past of Europe constituted "the possibility of its existence as a concept." Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, 42.

eighteenth century, and especially after the Company took over the *Diwani* of Bengal, there was an important debate about the nature of property in Bengal, which was intimately tied to the question of sovereignty and the sources of authority in India. Francis, following the French philosopher Voltaire, thought that the old European ideation of Asia as the place where only the King was the subject of rights, that is, that all land belonged to him, was fundamentally wrong. Hence, he saw in the *rājās* and *zamindars* the proof that underlying the Mughal governance apparatus lay the private property of *rājās*, maintained through direct inheritance.[92]

It is in this effort by colonial officers to find the source of authority that the texts discussed here are to be framed. The early colonial archive is dotted with mentions of Krishnachandra, due to his political stature and his *de facto* position as leader of the Hindu *Samāj*, as we saw in the previous sections. At some point after Plassey, colonial officers, at the behest of William Hastings, started a series of meetings with *Rājā* Krishnachandra, with mainly two purposes in mind. First, to discuss with the king the fixed rent that the *zamindari* of Nadia had to pay to the Company. And two, to gain from the King and his court full of pandits important and insightful knowledge about the ancient history of India and of Bengal.[93]

Out of these encounters, a manuscript with the history of the Nadia Raj was compiled and written probably by Hastings himself.[94] The manuscript, titled *History of Kissen-nagur,*

[92]Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, 155.

[93]A fascinating set of papers in the form of 'question to the natives' discussed above directed to Krishnachandra has been found recently in the British Library by Joshua Ehrlich. These manuscripts show the minutes of two separate meetings of English officers with the King, in which they asked the King about the deep history of Bengal. Krishnachandra, a cunning man, told the visitants exactly the kind of information they were dying to hear; he boasted of having in the royal library of the palace long lost books coeval with Alexander's invasion; he also stated that India had a deep connection with Egypt and that he owned books that could prove it. This, hypothesizes Ehrlich, was nothing but a bait and switch scheme designed to have Warren Hastings, for whom probably the minutes were compiled, lower the tax of the *zamindari*. Hastings, another crafty politician, did not fall for it. See Joshua Ehrlich, "New Lights on Raja Krishnachandra and Early Hindu-European Intellectual Exchange," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 31, no. 1 (January 2021): 159–171

[94]"History of Kissen-nagur, the Zemindary of Raja Kisten-Chund" (The British Library, Hasting Papers, Add MS 29210, 1771), Without a signature in the manuscript, Hastings' authorship is of course a hypothesis. There are, however, a couple of elements that push me to think it was indeed Hastings who authored it. First, the manuscript is found in the collection of Hastings Papers and correspondence in the British Library and is bounded along with other texts and letters that were definitely written by Hastings. Two, throughout most of the text the authorial voice consists of descriptions and statements in the third person (e.g. "Krishnachandra

the Zemindary of Raja Kisten-Chund, consists of two parts. The first part, titled "History," describes more or less the same genealogical account of the Nadia Raj discussed above, containing both the 'mythical' origin of the family with King Adisur and the 'historical' origin of the family, the story of Bhavānanda Majumdar helping Man Singh against the rebel king Pratāpāditya. Importantly, the version reproduced in this English manuscript contains the encounter between Bhavānanda with the emperor Jahangir, but unlike other versions like the *Annadāmaṅgal*, the audience between the two does not revolve around the perceived tensions between Hinduism and Islam. Here, the discussion between the two is instead centered around the proper title which was to be conferred upon Bhavānanda.[95]

As we saw above, this version of the events surrounding the rebellion of Pratāpāditya is not historically accurate, and instead could be deemed as a kind of political fantasy. Perhaps, Krishnachandra, using the constellation of texts that repeated the same version of the story, tried to ascertain his position as a lawful sovereign in front of the English appealing both to his position as head of the Hindu *Samāj*, sustained in his genealogical claims to the five brahmins brought by king Adisur, and also appealing to the rightful inclusion of his ancestors in the Mughal administrative apparatus. This is of course just an extrapolation,

did this," "The tax revenue amounts to that.") However, by the end of the manuscript, the voice shifts to the first person and to a reflexive tone. The author wonders whether the policies implemented by the Company on the taxable land of Bengal would prove disastrous. The author hopes that by the end of the year the fiscal policies levied on Bengal show a positive outcome. In fact, this last thought put in paper by the author allows dating the manuscript to the year 1771 CE, since the author refers to his then current year as the Bangla year 1179: "The conclusion of the Bengal year 1179 will determine whether we have laid a foundation in rock or in sand. Whether our settlement was the result of mature judgement and deliberation and can be realized in perpetuo." 1771 was the year Hastings was appointed Governor of Calcutta, and the consequences of the man-made famine were still felt.

[95]This is how the English manuscript tells the story of Bhavānanda's rise to *zamindar* of Nadia: "In consequence of this Mann Sing was much pleased with Doorgah and commending him carried him to the war against Pertaud [Pratāpāditya]. In that same war he displayed an [illegible] and suitable capacity and obtained a victory. The Raja highly pleased asked him what was his wish. He replied "My Zamidaree is the property of the King, let me pay a small part of the Revenue to government and obtain a charter for it from the king that it may in future prove of advantage to me." Mann Sing taking him with him to Delhi, presented him to the King Jehan Sing. He manifested his services [above: his capacity] before the throne of the Holy. The Emperor Jehan Sing [illegible] regard and generosity, conferred upon him the Zemidarree the office of Judge, and the title of Bhowânand the collector. [Majumdar] Bhowânand then addressed him "I am now a Zemidar the office of Judge I cannot hold" to this the King replied "if you cannot serve in that capacity well but a title once bestowed cannot be reversed, and dismissed him with the conferred title of Raja and collector." "History of Kissen-nagur," 28.

since devising (rather, divining) authorial intent from a text that is rather a second-hand account of a movable set of texts telling the same story is perfectly impossible. Yet, we can see that the English manuscript, in reproducing the familial history of the Nadia Raj and their political and historical ideations, does sustain a conversation with the conceptual preoccupations that haunted colonial administrators like Francis and Hastings.

This confluence of conceptual concerns on sovereignty and authority is also visible in the Sanskrit *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcaritam*. In fact, its existence in the archive, while still somewhat of a mystery, points again to the context described above on the search for the ancient constitution of India. Around 1852, a young Indology student in Germany, Wilhelm Pertsch, undertook the translation into English of a poorly known Sanskrit text from eighteenth century Bengal. As noted by Pertsch himself, he decided to translate the manuscript only when his mentor and professor, the famed Sanskritist Albrecht Weber, passed on the task to him, since Weber was busy with "numerous other and more important labors."[96] The text is divided into seven chapters of varying length. Chapters two and seven, which deal with rebellions of Hindu *rājās* and not only Pratāpāditya, are the longest ones. Chapter one starts with the known story of King Adisur and the settlement of the five Brahmins brought by him from Kanauj, and later chapters go on to describe the now familiar story of Bhavānanda Majumdar helping Man Singh fight and defeat Pratāpāditya.

There is, however, one major problem in working with the *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcaritam*, for only two manuscripts exist, both without date, colophon, copyist or author signature. While no firm information on the origins of the text can be established, its history in the archive can be illuminating. The two manuscripts of the *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcaritam* were brought into the then Royal Library of Berlin (now Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin). These manuscripts, that apparently are still extant in the library's catalogue, belong in the Chambers collection of South Asian manuscripts, a miscellaneous assemblage of hundreds of texts written in different Indian languages, mainly Sanskrit. This collection was compiled by Sir Robert Chambers

[96]Wilhelm Pertsch, "Preface," in *Kṣitīśavaṃśāvalīcaritaṃn A Chronicle of the Family of Râja Kṛishṇachandra of Navadvîpa, Bengal* (Ferd. Dümmler, 1852), i.

during his tenure in Bengal, where he held the position of Judge in the Court of Calcutta from 1774 till 1799, the year he returned to England. In 1803, he died in Britain, leaving his family the huge collection of Indian manuscripts. The family of Chambers decided to sell the collection after his death and it was finally acquired by the Prussian government, after the insistence of the academic community of Prussia, in an auction in London at Sotheby's, outbidding French collectors and even the British Museum.[97]

Unlike other British administrators, Chambers was not an Orientalist. That is, he did not engage in any kind of research of Indian texts or languages, despite contemporary characterizations of Chambers as a scholar.[98] To add to the obscurity of the story, Judge Robert Chambers is often mistaken with his brother, William Chambers, who was a Persian translator at the court of Calcutta. Perhaps it was Robert's unfamiliarity and unwillingness to learn Indian languages which was the reason behind the confusion. It is rather odd that a man who spent hundreds of pounds acquiring Indian manuscripts was, in actuality, not a scholar of Sanskrit, Persian or any other language used in the royal courts of eighteenth-century India. Though a member of the Asiatick Society, he did not write any articles or conduct any research like his peers did. He was, however, appointed president of the Asiatick Society from early 1798 to 1799. In his inauguration discourse, Robert Chambers acknowledged that he did not have a profound knowledge of any Indian language, and that his appointment as president of the Society was predicated more on sympathy than on merit.[99] There is certainly no way of knowing for sure how Chambers acquired these Sanskrit manuscripts, but we know that Chambers, as a judge in Calcutta, was also preoccupied with the question of the ancient constitution of India. In 1777, Chambers added the following note in a case he

[97]The collection was at the center of the establishment of Indology as a discipline in Germany, at a moment when European cultural centers for Indology in general, and Sanskrit in particular, were in consolidation. The acquisition of the Chambers collection by the Prussian government became an academic project that also doubled as an issue of national prestige. Academic stars like Wilhelm von Humboldt and Albert Hoefer were vocal in pointing out the importance of the acquisition of the collection as early as 1828. Indra Sengupta, *From Salon to Discipline: State, University and Indology in Germany, 1821-1914* (Heidelberg: Ergon Verlag, 2005), 127.

[98]Sengupta, 21.

[99]Robert Chambers, "A Discourse Delivered by Sir Robert Chambers, Knight, President," in *Asiatick Researches Vol. Vi* (1799), 1–5.

had ruled on:

> According to the known law of England, with respect to conquered or ceded countries, if they have already Laws and Courts of their own, the King may indeed alter and change their Institutions, or give them, absolutely or in Part, the Law of England, but till he does actually change them, the ancient Laws, including Courts and the Practice of those Courts, remain, unless contrary to the Laws of God.[100]

Could it be that the *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcaritam* was prepared in Krishnanagar as a response to the 'questions to the natives' sent by colonial officials?[101] Did Krishnachandra perhaps try to answer the questions on sovereignty and kingship showing the different streams of authority for his position as a Hindu *Rājā* and as the *Sāmaj-pati* with this text? Again, this falls too harshly on the terrain of conjecture, and thus I will not even try to advance an answer to these questions. However, we do know how colonial administrators reacted to the political fantasy presented by the Nadia Raj. In the English *History of Kissen-nagur* we can see that the story of Bhavānanda Majumdar prompted Hastings to stress what he and other colonial administrators saw as the irrationality of Mughal administration, or rather, the pure despotism that was the principle of rule for the Mughals. Thus, the genealogical narrative of the Nadia Raj functions as a fulcrum on which an indictment on the bad forms of government of the Mughal regime is placed:

> If we accept the strength and wonderful feats of the descendent Raja's, nothing is more remarkable in this genealogy than the manner in which they arised themselves to the Rajaship, nothing more conspicuous than the pusillanimity or imbecility of the government in those days; nothing that owes to mark more strongly the genesis and character of this people and their resilience [illegible] under any change. A man whose name was before unknown comes to bath in a river which superstition had sanctified, without any struggle he makes himself

[100] Justice Robert Chambers quoted in Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India*, 19.

[101] This idea was first advanced some years ago by Prof. Thibaut d'Hubert when we were reading together the *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcaritam*. Prof. d'Hubert hypothesized that this Sanskrit text had been composed in Nadia at the moment when colonial officers were demarcating the limits and sizes of the plots of taxable land.

> master of the principality; no attempts are made to dispossess him, and he and his posterity are allowed to rule quietly and with despotic sway.[102]

Whatever Krishnachandra was trying to accomplish—if anything—with the English by presenting the history of the Nadia Raj in the terms described before, it failed completely. The famine of 1770-71 devastated the country, and at the end of it the workforce of the Bengali countryside had either died, or moved to Calcutta, or become destitute.[103] Krishnachandra also lost a sizable amount of his lands as a result of the calamities that the famine had brought upon Nadia. His weakened position also left him vulnerable to the bullying of the Company, which excised a higher tax on his *zamindari* than what the lands could actually yield.[104] On top of that, the shifting of the main course of the Ganges towards the East (the Padma river) channel, a process that started in the seventeenth century, left the Hooghly/Bhagirathi channel in the West with problems of heavy silting which the increase of flow in the rainy season could not flush out. This led to waterlogging, which in turn increased the risk of malaria, and general agricultural decline.[105]

In May of 1777, Francis visited the palace of Krishnachandra at Krishnanagar. When Francis arrived, he saw in Krishnachandra the embodiment of the decay of the old rural aristocracy of the country. Francis wrote in his journal: "Visit from the old Raja, which I returned, and saw an immense Palace in ruins, and the Prince of the Country, a venerable old Man, lodged in one corner of it, in a State of Beggary and Misery, not to be believed."[106] By this time, the opposing views of empire espoused by Francis and Hastings—the former understood empire as a continuation of the ancient constitution of India, the latter as founded upon the right of conquest, exactly like the notion Hastings had of the Mughal

[102]"History of Kissen-nagur," 31.

[103]Narendra Krishna Sinha, *The Economic History Of Bengal Vol. 2* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960), 50.

[104]Hastings himself admitted as much, saying that Krishnachandra had accepted an impossible deal just for the sake of keeping his lands. Warren Hastings, "Revenue Department. November 12 1776," in *Original Minutes of the Governor-General and Council of Fort William on the Settlement and Collection of the Revenues of Bengal: With a Plan of Settlement, Recommended to the Court of Directors in January, 1776* (London : Printed for J. Debrett ..., 1782)

[105]Radhakamal Mukerjee, *The Changing Face Of Bengal* (1938), 77.

[106]Philip Francis, "Journal" (The British Library, Francis Papers, Mss Eur E23, 1777), 1r.

government—had found common ground in their treatment of the rural gentry: both parties deeply mistrusted the administration of the petty *rājās* of Bengal. If there was ever a chance that the *rājās*, by resisting or cooperating, could significantly hold some important role in the domain of policy making, this chance waned once the landed gentry went into crisis and survival mode, much like Krishnachandra did. While Francis continued to speak high about 'Asiatic policy,' the *rājās* and their texts were stripped of any intentionality that might locate them in the uneasy and tense conversation between ideology and policy that characterized the second half of the eighteenth century. What the texts analyzed here show, perhaps as a direct response to the 'questions to the natives,' that instead of the single fountain that Francis tried to find, in Bengal sovereignty was, much like the many rivers that carved and shaped its landscape, a matter of different streams, a veritable confluence of currents that had different origins and whose trajectories intersected at many points.

Conclusion

In the first day of the year 1846, the Krishnanagar College opened its doors to the students of the region. The College, endowed partly by Government and private donations, was established with the intention of offering modern English education to students of the region who fulfilled the age requirements, regardless of caste or religion. The original plan for the College had been different, for as early as 1811 it had been established that a Sanskrit College, dedicated to teaching Indians the 'ancient knowledge' of the śāstras, funded by the colonial government was to be established at Nadia, which had been for centuries a place of Sanskritic learning.[107] However, after the infamous "Minute on Education" by Thomas

[107]For the original document by Governor-General Lord Minto, see Lord Minto, "Lord Minto's Minute on Sanskrit College in Trihut and Nadia," in *Selections From Unpublished Records Of Government (1748 - 1767)* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1973), 731–39; See Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture*, 72-74, for a larger discussion on educational policy and Orientalism in the early nineteenth century. "Educational Movements," *The Friend of India*, November 27, 1845, no. 569, 754, mentions the perceived reasons for establishing a Sanskrit College at Nadia: "This district is the most ancient and the most renowned seat of learning in Bengal. It was in this Zillah that it was proposed to establish a College for the cultivation of Hindoo literature in times that are past, and if the Oriental influences which once predominated in the

Macaulay in 1835, these plans were abandoned. In November 1845, *The Friend of India* ran a small article about the upcoming College, noting a meeting of "the most wealthy and influential Native landholders of the district" that had taken place at Krishnanagar:

> At the head of the list stands the Raja Shreeschunder Roy, the great grandson of the very truly illustrious Raja Krishnu Chunder Roy, the Maecenas of the last century in Bengal, whose memory is held in fresh and grateful remembrance throughout the country for his liberal patronage of learning and learned men. Though his efforts were directed to the encouragement of Sungskrit literature, and its professors, we must do him the justice to say that this was considered, at the time, the highest object which could be pursued by men in power, and that he stood alone in his elevated views above the common heard of Rajas. The education of the people was then, as it had always been, unknown in India. It comes exclusively in the track of Christian Governments. The family principality of Kishnagur was broken up after his death, by the extravagance of his successors, and the tightness of our revenue laws. Calcutta baboos and Calcutta banians now enjoy the fairest share of those rich estates, and the representative of this distinguished family is reduced to a comparative pittance; out of which however he has generously contributed 3000 Rs.[108]

This small paragraph in an 1845 newspaper article summarizes how the nineteenth century looked upon the past of the region of Nadia, its ruling family and their history. While praising Shrischandra Ray for his progressive outlook, the article also points out the dwindling material conditions of the family, noting the difference and distance between the two *rājās*. The distance is of course temporal in a pure arithmetic sense, for sixty years separate the two Kings. But the gap in time is actually more pronounced than just the number of years elapsed. While the article recognizes Krishnachandra as a great king thanks to his munificent support of Sanskritic learning and Hindu culture—an idea that Shibnath Shastri and Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra also echoed in their biographical works—the use of the adverbial phrase "at that time" highlights an insurmountable temporal distance. The temporal

Council of Education had not been happily extinguished soon after the departure of Dr. H. H. Wilson, the College now established would probably have been devoted to the cultivation of the Vedas and the Poorans and the Dursuns, instead of to the study of Milton, and Bacon and Johnson, and the sciences which have given a preeminence to Europe." For a complete history of Krishnanagar College, see Tarak Nath. Talukdar and Nirmal Kanti. Majumdar, *History and Register of Krishnagar College, 1846-1945.* (Alipore: Superintendent, Government Printing, West Bengal Press, 1950).

[108] *The Friend of India*, "Educational Movements," 755.

distance was in reality a temporal divide, a periodization device that stated that it was only possible for a king of Nadia to reach such lofty heights 'at that time.'

As discussed at the beginning, feudalism as a historical and comparative category has had a long life in South Asian historiography. Ranajit Guha has stated in the preface to the edition of his study on the history of the idea of the Permanent Settlement in Bengal, that as a student of History at Calcutta University, reading on the anti-feudal ideas of Philip Francis, he was left with the question: "how was it that the quasi-feudal land settlement of 1793 had originated from the ideas of a man who was a great admirer of the French Revolution?"[109] Kathleen Davis has shown how in Guha's book and in Francis' thought, the idea of feudalism has already achieved a spatiotemporal status that has allowed scholars since the eighteenth century to highlight the difference between Europe and India, especially in terms of political organization, while at the same time it allowed to translate this supposed difference in terms and categories parallel to the European categories; but with both India's and Europe's pasts deemed as feudal, what remains unquestioned in both Francis and Guha's thought is the very category of the feudal.[110] Of course, Francis' and Guha's 'feudal' is not the same, for Guha wrote his *A Rule of Property* with one hundred years of Marxist historiography on Feudalism in Europe and Asia behind him. Yet, while even Marx himself was wary of categorizing Indian society as feudal, in reality the categories to analyze the past of Europe and India even in Marxist terms were already loaded towards a historicist view that, as said before, stressed the difference while maintaining the common ground which was feudalism itself.[111]

In this chapter, I traced the trajectory of the history of Krishnanagar in relation to the emergence of a vocabulary used to express the tensions and anxieties of the transition

[109]Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, xiii.

[110]Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, 69.

[111]For example, Irfan Habib mounted a defense of the idea of Indian feudalism in order to maintain Marxist analytical categories in studying the past of India. Habib said: "there is little real 'exceptionalism' in Indian history. It too is one of exploitation and class contradictions, generating cyclical movements, which Marx had postulated for social evolution in general." Irfan Habib, "Classifying Pre-colonial India," in Mukhia, *The Feudalism Debate*, 195.

process from a past deemed feudal to the modern age. The category of feudal became an identifier for a certain type of European past and non-European presents, one which was persistently associated with ideas of subjugation and, more importantly, with the idea of the 'Middle Ages'. This association with the 'Middle Ages', a relationship that was increasingly naturalized in historicist discourses and narratives, allowed feudalism to become, as Kathleen Davis has shown, "a temporal marker, a tick on the clock of development."[112] Francis' endeavor, and in general the adoption or deployment of the feudal or the 'Middle Ages' as analytical and historical categories in Bengal, has been mostly seen as a one-way street, as Francis importing notions about Feudalism in Europe and applying them to rural Bengal, and at the same time, subjecting the past and present of India to a historicist and developmental sense of historical change that cast the past and present of India akin to the feudal past of Europe. This chapter showed how Krishnanagar and its past became feudal, embodying the 'Middle Ages,' in great part due to the displacement of Krishnanagar's political history into the field of morality, seeing in the Nadia Raj's assertions to power, authority and sovereignty enactments of failed, decayed morality of the 'Middle Ages'. This chapter and the following deal with the processes by which these categories were adopted, but also contested.

[112]Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, 24.

Chapter 4

Nadia as Literary *Yugānta*: Bharatchandra Ray and the periodization predicament in Bengali literary history

On the 23rd of June 1757, a hundred miles to the north of Kolkata at the field of Palāśī, or Plassey as it was to be known in the Western world, the British troops under the command of Robert Clive faced in battle the combined forces of the French army in Bengal and the soldiers of Siraj-ud Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal. After the smoke of the guns had dissipated, the army of Clive stood victorious over the loyal soldiers of the Nawab, who himself had fled the encounter after being surprised by a sudden attack of British troops and by the calculated inaction of his own commanders, especially of his main collaborator, Mir Jafar.

The battle itself was no more than a skirmish, with limited casualties on both sides. But in colonial and nationalist historiography, the aftermath of the battle marked the beginning of an epochal change in Bengal that would ultimately lead to the full establishment of British rule over Bengal and over all of South Asia.[1]

Five years earlier and thirty-four miles south of Plassey, in Krishnanagar, another epochal change for the history of Bengal took place, but this time not in a battlefield, but at the royal court of a local but powerful *zamindar*. In 1752, the poet laureate of the Nadia Raj, Bharatchandra Ray 'Gunakar,' presented for the first time the famous Bangla poem *Annadāmaṅgal*. The poem is composed of three different parts, which in general terms narrate the ascent of the family of Krishnachandra to their position as *Rājās* of Nadia. The first book tells the story, with some Puranic elements, of the goddess Annapurna descending to earth to establish her cult. It ends with the birth of Bhavānanda Majumdar, the historical founder of the Nadia Raj. The second book tells the story of *Vidyāsundar*, an archetypal courtly story that had a long history in Eastern India.[2] This story is framed within the larger history of the Nadia Raj, presented as a separate narration told to the Mughal general Man Singh when he came into Bengal to suppress the rebellion of the Kayastha king, Pratāpāditya. The last book tells the events surrounding the Mughal emperor's bestowal of *zamindari* rights of the region of Nadia to Bhavānanda Majumdar. According to the text, he received this honor and the lands because of the blessing from the goddess Annadā herself and because of the help he provided to the Mughal general Man Singh. How the *Annadāmaṅgal* became the pivot of epochal change in the literary history of Bengali is the focus of this chapter.

This chapter investigates two parallel processes. First, it looks at the role that the literary work of the *poet laureate* of the Nadia Raj, Bharatchandra Ray Gunakar, played in the temporalization and periodization of Bengali literary history. Secondly, it studies the rise

[1]"Thursday the 23rd of June, 1757 exactly one year and two days after the Nawab's capture of Calcutta, witnessed a battle which was destined to revolutionise the life of India, and indirectly and slowly, that of the eastern hemisphere." See Jadunath Sarkar, *The History of Bengal. Muslim Period. 1200 A.D.-1757 A.D.*, vol. 2 (Dacca: The University of Dacca, 1943), 490.

[2]Thibaut d'Hubert, "Literary History of Bengal," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, February 26, 2018,

of chronology as the main organizational principle in Bengali literary history throughout the nineteenth century. The deployment of chronology upon the Indian past during the colonial period entailed the construction of a single, universal timeline between India and Europe: a search for 'landmarks' in Indian time and history ensued, one that could allow Orientalist scholars to find a common sense of time and history between Europe and India.[3] While the construction of a common timeline based on biblical genealogies was discarded soon enough in the late eighteenth century, the ideas of Indian history and chronology found in the premodern literary and scientific tradition of South Asia, mainly written in Sanskrit, clashed with the new ideas about the nature of time being developed in Europe at that moment, especially with the discovery of 'deep time' based on the geological findings on the true extent of Earth's age, which soon became the gold standard for the naturalization of time.[4] This prompted European scholars to disregard Indian history writing and Indian chronology as preposterous and as machinations of a uncivilized mind.[5] From the colonial encounter with different traditions of history writing and time-reckoning and the discovery of deep time emerged an understanding of time as an empty, natural and universal space shared by everyone despite different geographies. Chronology, then, was understood as an empty timeline where human history developed. But in reality it occluded a historicist understanding of time that justified the uneven and developmental progress of nations and peoples through time, where Europe was at the forefront.[6] It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that scholars, especially from India, challenged definitely the indictment

[3]Probably the most famous instance of this is the effort undertaken by William Jones to try and find in Sanskrit texts stories similar to the ones in the Bible. The search for a common timeline started with an attempt to prove a common lineage for all nations on Earth, what Thomas Trautmann has described as the 'Mosaic ethnology' project. See Thomas R. Trautmann, *Languages and Nations the Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), , especially chapter one.

[4]Andrew Shryock, Thomas R Trautmann, and Clive Gamble, "Imagining the Human in Deep Time," in *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present* (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 2011), 21–54.

[5]Most famously James Mill, *The History of British India, Vol. I* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1817), See below in this chapter for an early Bengali critique of James Mill's arguments against Indian history and periodization.

[6]The seminal work of Johannes Fabian explains the process by which Europe spatialized temporality, putting itself at the forefront of a chronology in which modern nations and ancient regions could coexist at the same time, making the present of the world outside Europe akin to Europe's feudal past. See Fabian, *Time and the Other*.

that the nineteenth century placed upon Indian time, proving that Indian history and its reckoning responded to different sensibilities to time and its passing, a sensibility that had to be historicized in order to understand the difference between Indian and European time.[7]

In the case of the literary past of Bengal however, modern scholarship has not paid careful attention to the development and adoption of chronology as the organizational principle of its history. This is probably because modern scholarship has centered its attention on the monumental task that the Bengali intelligentsia undertook in the second half of the nineteenth century: to equate the different temporalities of Bengali literature with the time of the nation. Paraphrasing Sheldon Pollock in his edited volume on South Asian literary cultures, the nineteenth-century project of writing the literary history of Bengali language as the history of the Bengali national consciousness meant a temporal understanding where the nation is at the same time both the departure and the arrival point.[8] Thus, it is not a surprise that modern scholarship, when studying the writing and conceptualization of literary

[7]See Thomas R. Trautmann, "Indian Time, European Time," in *Time: Histories and Ethnologies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), for a detailed account on the colonial discussions during the nineteenth century about the nature of Indian time; see Romila Thapar, *Time as a Metaphor of History: Early India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), for an analysis of the sensibilities shown by premodern Indian texts to time and its reckoning. What Romila Thapar describes as the main sensibility that prompted premodern Indian texts to record the passing of time, i.e. dynastic changes and developments, has been summarized and conceptualized elsewhere as 'dynastic time' to explain the change in time reckoning and appreciation in the Seleucid empire; see Paul J. Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), this way of reasoning—that there are parallels to be explored between premodern conceptions of time—might put an end to still surviving ideations of premodern Indian time as particular, and it could open the way to comparative histories of historicity and temporalities in the premodern age.

[8]Sheldon Pollock, "Introduction," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 12; The idea of literary history as the biography of the nation has been present since the inception of the genre. In *The History of English Poetry,* (1774) Thomas Warton (1728 - 1790) advanced the nation as the place and time where the literary history of a language should begin. Warton justified leaving Anglo-Saxon literature, also known as 'Old English', out of the scope of English literary history, for before the Norman conquest, there was no English nation. Warton agued: "the beginning of these annals seems therefore to be most properly dated from that era, [the Norman conquest] when our national character began to dawn." Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry, from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century. To Which Are Prefixed, Two Dissertations. (I) On the Origin of Romantic Fiction in Europe. (II) On the Introduction of Learning into England*, in collab. with University of California Libraries, vol. 1 (London: J. Dodsley, 1774), vi; Warton's work has been considered "the first history of English literature in form" and among the first literary histories of European languages produced. See Rene Wellek, *The Rise Of English Literary History* (1941), for a brief historical overview of Warton's book and other literary histories that came after this one.

histories in South Asia, has mainly focused on historicizing the nation and its ideation.[9]

This chapter explores two sets of debates that, I argue, run parallel to each other. First, the processes and discussions by which chronology gradually became the organizational principle for Bengali literary history, and secondly the operations of temporalization and periodization of such history which, I argue, rested on Bharatchandra's work. By the term 'chronology,' I mean the function by which the distinct temporalities of Bengali literature were transformed into history. That is, the transformation of the literary past of Bengal into a non-discontinuous and coherent historical temporality. However, the almost metonymical relationship between the literary and the nation in modern scholarship assumes that chronology and periodization are just another function of the 'modern' as the configuration of the nation. In this understanding, the modern nation has to imagine a past for itself that is both the cradle and the high noon of an unchanging Bengali nation while suppressing the turbulent political history of Bengal, but also a point in time from which the nation breaks itself free from its own past in order to become fully modern. In this chapter, I aim to suspend the conceptual weight that the 'nation' has had when looking at the rise of chronology as the main organizational principle in Bengali literary history.[10]

[9]See Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhāratendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth-Century Banaras* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), seminal work on the hinduization of Hindi literary tradition. See Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), history of the Tamil movement at the end of the nineteenth century. Rosinka Chaudhuri, *The Literary Thing: History, Poetry, and the Making of a Modern Cultural Sphere* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), has criticized modern scholarship's heavy dependence on the novel to explain the spring into existence of literary modernity in colonial Bengal. However, Chaudhuri's argument still revolves around the forging of the idea of the 'national' in modern Bengali literary culture.

[10]The conceptual weight that the nation carries when writing literary history has come under fire in the last decades, especially in academic fields pertaining to the non-European world, and has given rise to different attempts to unravel the deeply entangled metaphorical (and literal) borders that the 'national' as an analytical category has imposed upon the geographical, literary, historical and imagination of South Asian pasts. For example, Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi has coined the idea of 'homeless texts of modernity' to discuss not only the texts but the literary cultures that were stuck in a limbo when the idea of "history with borders" or "literature with borders" were deployed upon the premodern past of South Asia. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography*, St. Antony's Series (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), 8; see also Thibaut d'Hubert, *In the Shade of the Golden Palace: Alaol and Middle Bengali Poetics in Arakan*, South Asia Research (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), for a critical approach to the work of seventeenth-century poet Alaol, who wrote Middle Bengali poetry while a courtier in the kingdom of Arakan. D'Hubert calls for a reformulation of the very limited boundaries of the cultural geography of Middle Bengali poetry, which has so far left behind many texts that

The aim of this chapter is twofold. First, this chapter delineates something of a 'pre-history' of Bengali literary history before the nationalist streak of writing all kinds of history—not only political—appeared in the public arena. This nationalist period of literary historiography became stronger especially after 1870 when the Bengali intellectual Bankimchandra Chatterjee vigorously claimed the need for an Indian history written by Indians, and saw its zenith with the publication in 1896 of the book *Baṅgabhāṣā o Sāhitya* by the scholar Dineshchandra Sen. This chapter explores the period before this, from the early nineteenth century to 1871, the year of publication of *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣā o Bāṅgālā Sāhitya-viṣayak prastāva* (A proposition on Bengali Language and Bengali literature) by the literary historian Rāmagati Nyāẏaratna, which is usually considered the first work of literary historiography of Bengali language to provide a full chronological treatment of it.[11] The works presented here, written in Bangla and English, have mostly fallen outside the attention of modern scholarship or, in the case of Ishwarchandra Gupta, have been considered 'precursors' but not fully engaging in the kind of historical thinking that scholars after 1870 would deploy in the literary histories of Bengali. A close reading of these texts reveals a much more rich and complex history of Bengali literary history than the usual teleological understandings of it. These texts reveal an early preoccupation for locating the literary past of Bengal and for ascertaining what was old and what was new at that time. Historicizing chronology by looking at the debates, idioms and ideation of *prācīna* (ancient, old) and *adhunā* (current), I argue, allows us to escape the teleology of the nation and understand how different and distinct pasts were imagined.

Secondly, I argue that at every step in these heterogeneous temporal horizons imagined for the literary past of Bengal throughout the nineteenth century, the idea and site of Nadia, its poets and its royal court, became again and again a coalescing site where the streams of the old and the new met and departed separate ways. Thus, in this chapter I explore

fall outside the current borders of modern nations.

[11] Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay in the preface of Rāmagati Nyāẏaratna, *Bāṅgālā bhāshā o Bāṅgālā sāhityabishaẏaka prastāba*, Natuna saṃskaraṇa. (Kalikātā: Suprīma Buka Ḍisṭribiuṭārsa, 1991).

the different and sometimes conflicting ways of imagining and conceptualizing the end of an era, showing the heterogeneity of these temporal horizons that posited Nadia not only as a metaphor but as the actual site in which the different temporalities of Bengali literary history had taken place.

A literary interregnum: old and new after Bharatchandra (1760-1830)

When the poet Bharatchandra died in 1760, a new era of Bengali literary history began, some scholars have argued. Yet, the period immediately after the poet's death has been harder to conceptualize. According to some literary historians, this was a moment of such flux that few of the literary genres that were in vogue during that period made it fully into the nineteenth century. The literary historian Sushil Kumar De called this period the "literary interregnum" of Bengali literature, alluding to the dearth of big names and big oeuvres in the literary field until the emergence of modern poetry in Calcutta with the works of Derozio around 1830.[12] Two major approaches to this period have existed in Bengali literary history. On one hand, throughout the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth, this period was seen as a literary desert only inhabited by decaying and derivative attempts to copy the old style of poetry by gangs of illiterate, coarse and vulgar poets.[13] In 1877, the statistician William Wilson Hunter described in less than five pages the literary history of Bengal, noting that during the first half of the nineteenth century there was only one writer, Rammohan Roy, worthy of mentioning. For Hunter, all other writers and poets were not worthy of entering the annals of literary history.[14] According to this line of thought, all the poets of good fame and renown had lived and developed their entire oeuvre after 1850, from

[12]De, *Bengali Literature*, 302.

[13]See for example what De said about the Kabiwallas: "they were the most considerable pretenders in the literary field; and if the mantle of the old authors did not exactly suit their narrow shoulders, they attempted in the main to echo the sentiment and ideas of old-world poetry." De, 273.

[14]William Wilson Hunter, *The Indian Empire: Its Peoples, History, and Products*, in collab. with University of California Libraries (London : Trübner & co., 1886), 353.

Ishwar Gupta to Bankimchandra.[15] On the other hand, and much more recently, scholars have conceptualized the first half of the nineteenth century as a space where the old and the new clashed; a moment of radical breaks with premodern literary practices, but also a moment still incapable of letting go of styles and language forms of the old tradition.[16] In that sense, in the impossibility of textual genres to set themselves free from older literary and textual practices, this period is seen teleologically as merely the pre-stage of literary modernity that would start with Derozio and would take full form from the second half of the nineteenth century onward.[17]

However, this period was not the literary desert that Hunter and Dutt had described. Undoubtedly, there was an intense process of transformation of traditional genres that took place under the enormous pressure of colonial modernity and under the auspices of "new rich" families that had made their fortune thanks to their ties with the British in early colonial Calcutta. A form of poetry known as *kabigān*, sung by singers known as *kabiwāllās* or *kabiyjāls*, had been present in the literary landscape of Bengal for more than a century, becoming particularly important in the period from 1760 to 1830. The songs of this genre were performed in public gatherings in the form of a confrontation between two rival groups of kabiyans, asking and answering questions in turns.[18] In the same way, the genres known

[15]This was a common understanding at that time. Hunter, by his own admission, lifted information freely from a small booklet titled "The literature of Bengal" that had appeared in 1877, authored by Arcy Dae, which was a *nom de plume* for Romeschandra Dutt, a literary historian who twenty years later published a longer book of the same name. This book, "The literature of Bengal," was the first English book on Bengali literary history and, just like Hunter's, it almost glossed over a fifty-year period, from Bharatchandra to Isvarcandra Gupta, only stopping in Rammohan Roy since he was deemed the harbinger of a new era. "No renowned poet appeared in Bengal in the first half of the nineteenth century, and Iswar Chandra [Gupta] was the reigning king of the literary world in his day," claimed Dutta. Romesh Chunder Dutt, *The Literature Of Bengal* (1895), 156.

[16]See Dušan Zbavitel, *Bengali Literature*, vol. v. 9. A History of Indian Literature ; v. 9 : Modern Indo-Aryan Literatures ; Fasc. 3 (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 1976), 209. Zbavitel calls this period "an unprecedented confrontation of the traditional with the new, of the domestic with the foreign." When talking about Nidhubabu's compositions, Zbavitel states: "it is completely free from any religious implications, singing of profane love, mostly as if uttered by a woman separated from her lover. In this respect, it forms a kind of bridge between the old and modern phases of Bengali culture.".

[17]Hans Harder, "The Modern Babu and the Metropolis: Reassessing Early Bengali Narrative Prose (1821 - 1862)," in *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 359.

[18]Zbavitel, *Bengali Literature*, 205. A representation of these gatherings can be seen in the 1967 Bengali Film "Antony Firingee."

as *ākhṛāi* and *hāph ākhṛāi* were performed at public gatherings, with the same format as kabigans, a series of answers and questions between dueling groups. Important *kabiwāllā* names were linked to these prestigious and influential families: Haru Ṭhakur, one of the most well-known *kabiwāllās* in the second half of the eighteenth century, flourished under the patronage of Raja Nabakrishna Deb, the landlord of Shobbazar who owned, among other things, a great extent of the land where the city of Kolkata stands today.[19] This period also saw the emergence of new literary styles and genres like the *nakśā*, satirical prose texts that functioned as 'corrective mirrors' for society, pointing out the twisting of social mores, especially in Calcutta where newly minted fortunes and especially the new order of social strata under British rule gave way to hitherto-unknown forms of mostly urban sociability.[20] This genre has received an enormous amount of attention in modern scholarship, focusing especially on the appearance of new literary characters never found before, like the laughable *Nabababus* and *Nababibis* of Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay, a cartoonish version of the English-educated, religious reformist, forward-looking, upper-caste Hindu men and women who opposed the backwardness of what they perceived as 'traditional' society. These characters announced the advent of new sociological categories that were to define the onset of full Bengali colonial modernity during the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, the adaptation of existing forms of literary practices and the emergence of new genres not only belies the claim that up until the 1830s Bengali literature was scarce and derivative, it also shows that this moment in South Asia between the so called early modern period and the full achievement of colonial modernity, as Partha Chatterjee has argued, was loaded with developments and "historical possibilities of transition not teleologically predetermined by the ascendancy of the colonial modern."[21]

Even if we look at this period not as a teleologically determined moment in time, the question around the construction, valorization and revalorization of the past remains: what

[19]De, *Bengali Literature*, 276.

[20]Harder, "The Modern Babu," 375.

[21]Partha Chatterjee, "Introduction: History in the Vernacular," in *History in the Vernacular*, ed. Raziuddin. Aquil (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2008), 5.

were the processes by which a certain past started to be configured as past? Contemporary scholarship has not raised this question in the case of Bengali literature, instead taking the past and its periodization as already existing. Take, for example, the question around historicality in Bengali literature, which puts the emphasis on the emergence of a new consciousness that somehow 'breaks' with the past. However, the question of historicality does not interrogate periodization processes; instead, it asks when did a distinct historical consciousness emerge in Bengali literature. Rosinka Chaudhuri argues that the transformation of traditional themes prompted by the emergence of an early modern/modern historical consciousness began in the first decades of the nineteenth century, when figures like the fictional Antony Firingi and the poet Rāmanidhi Gupta, known as 'Nidhubabu,' participated in the *kabigān* contests, a time that was not completely modern yet but also not premodern.[22] According to Chaudhuri, historicality in Bengali literature reached its zenith with the figure of Derozio who famously declared that whatever was there in the past of India was not literature, seeing the past as completely past, without the possibility of conflating past and present in a single historical moment as it had been the marker of premodern poetry.[23] According to this frame of reference, on the other side of the spectrum lay poets like Gaṅgārām, author of the *Mahārāṣṭa Purāṇa* (ca. 1752), a historical account in verse of the Maratha raids in Bengal, and Bharatchandra, who mixed historical events with Puranic narratives. The ability of these poets, argues Chaudhuri, of conflating mythical and historical time seamlessly in a single work puts them in the same temporality inhabited by the Santal rebels in 1885.[24]

But the question of historicality in Bengali literature does not problematize chronology, instead it takes it for granted again. For example, this is illustrated by the changing status

[22]Chaudhuri, "Three Poets in Search of History. Calcutta, 1752-1859," 212.

[23]Chaudhuri, 195.

[24]Chaudhuri, "Three Poets in Search of History. Calcutta, 1752-1859," 205; The choice of the Santals to show a kind of 'baseline' for the lack of historicality is in itself another example of taking chronology and periodization for granted. In this case, the construction of the Santals as primitive and outside of history goes unquestioned. This issue has been brought into attention by Prathama Banerjee, who shows how the presence of the 'primitive' in Bengali colonial modernity is what enabled the imagination of temporalities as chronology. Prathama Banerjee, *Politics of Time: "Primitives" and History-Writing in a Colonial Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.

of Bharatchandra in books published after his death in 1760. In Nathaniel Brassey Halhed's *Grammar of the Bengali language*, published in 1778, Halhed affirmed that, for the sake of the purity of the language, he only quoted from "the most authentic and ancient compositions," after which he proceeded to quote extensively from Bharatchandra's *Annadāmaṅgal*.[25] At the end of the *Grammar* Halhed warned the reader that Bangla had lost its purity, for the "modern [Hindu] Bengalese," argued Halhed, "have been forced to debase the purity of their native dialect, by the necessity of addressing themselves to their Mahommedan Rulers."[26] Halhed then quotes a letter written by a Hindu Bengali man asking for judicial intervention on a matter of some misappropriated lands. What Halhed wanted to point out was the common usage of Persian words, interspersed and blended with Sanskrit words and Bengali grammar. Thus, in quoting the *Annadāmaṅgal*, Halhed posited this text as a paragon of both purity and antiquity. Disregarding the fact that the *Annadāmaṅgal* was not even thirty years old at the time of publishing his *Grammar*, Halhed based his interpretation of what it meant to be pure and antique on the extensive use by Bharatchandra of Sanskrit meters to write Bengali verses, which ironically was not a pure and ancient practice but a major departure from the *maṅgalkāvya* tradition that favored heavily the use of *paẏār* and *tripadī* meters. The 'purity' of Bharatchandra's language, in Halhed's understanding, also comes into question when we attend to the conscious choices that Bharatchandra made regarding language, for he not only used Bangla and Sanskrit words and meters, he also interspersed Hindi verses and Persian words in his compositions. In fact, the conscious ways by which Bharatchandra related to actually older traditions went unnoticed by Halhed. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee argues that the use of *Braj-bhāṣā* in the *Annadāmaṅgal* to portray the dialogue between the king of Bardhaman (Burdwan, adjacent to Nadia) and the court bard was a conscious way to demarcate the courtly character of the setting. According to Chatterjee, the use of a language from the west side of the Indian territory was an echo of the use of the *Avahaṭṭa* Prakrit by Eastern authors to convey a courtly atmosphere, a

[25]Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, *A Grammar Of The Bengal Language* (Hooghly, Bengal, 1778), xxii.
[26]Halhed, 208.

practice that remained in use until the fifteenth century CE with the poet Vidyāpati in Mithila.[27] In fact, Bharatchandra's choice to compose the *Vidyāsundar*, the most famous poem in the trilogy of the *Annadāmaṅgal*, was already an intervention in the literary field of Eastern India, where for centuries the story of prince Sundara and princess Vidyā, written in vernacular languages but highly mindful of Sanskritic tropes, had been used to denote the "cultural refinement and distinction through knowledge and wit" of courtly culture.[28] Contrast Halhed's treatment of Bharatchandra with the place that Rāmagati Nyāẏaratna, author of the first chronological literary history of Bengali in 1871, accorded the Bengali poet, as the first poet of the *idānīntana kāla*, the present or modern age.[29]

This seemingly nonsensical temporality, in which antiquity would lie half a lifetime before modernity, shows that Halhed's understanding of the temporality of Bengali literature was not based on a strict, quantitative chronology but rather on a particular understanding of Indian history of which Orientalist scholars partook widely. This understanding posited India as a repository of ancient and most refined knowledge, but at the same time it portrayed its present as both a pale shadow of what it used to be and as a living anachronism, a patent sign of its political and moral decay, in stark contrast to Europe's self-assumed position at the forefront of universal history. Halhed's positioning of Bharatchandra, however, was not going to find a home with scholars of Bengali literature. In fact, it would take more than a hundred years till Bengali literary history returned to Bharatchandra as the classical figure that Halhed thought him to be, though not as a sign of purity but as the embodiment of the moral decay and corruption of the eighteenth century. In the following decades after Halhed's *Grammar*, the dispute around the new and the old in Bengali literature was kept alive in books and articles without reaching a definite conclusion, which shows the flexible nature of the imagined literary pasts of Bengal. In the next section I analyze one of these articulations of the temporality of Bengali literature, another one in which Bharatchandra

[27]Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1926), 115.

[28]D'Hubert, "Literary History of Bengal."

[29]Nyāẏaratna, *Bāṅgālā Bhāshā*.

was still the central point between the different temporal dimensions of Bengali literature.

"Though years have past": Kashiprasad Ghosh at the crossroad of historical thinking (1830)

In 1829, two articles appeared in the Calcutta Literary Gazette which presented for the first time in English a historical-cum-literary critical account of Bengali literature. The first article, "On Bengallee poetry," is a cursory review of poetry and versification written in Bangla, more in the tone of literary criticism than of history. The second article "On Bengallee Writers," published a few months later, begins with a quick review of the major developments in Bengali prose during the decades preceding the publication of the article. At the beginning, the article criticized the Bangla publications of the Serampoore Mission by the artificiality of the language, which sometimes were straight, literal translations of English idioms rendered into Bengali, like the translation of the Bible. Even Bengali texts not translated from English were deemed as deficient, like the first history book written in Bangla the *Rājāvali* of Mṛtyuñjaẏa Vidyālankāra, a pandit at the Fort William College, and the *Puruṣaparikṣā*, a translation into Bangla from Vidyāpati's original Sanskrit work published in 1815 and edited by Haraprasād Roy. "In fact," argued the author of these articles, "the language of all Bengallee publications at Serampore is very defective and called by the natives 'Serampore Bengallee.'"[30] However, throughout the second (and longest) part of the article, the author incorporated into the text a brief account of the literary history of Bengal. The author of these articles was Kashiprasad Ghosh, a somewhat neglected figure in Bengali literary history, even though he, along with Derozio, has been credited as the first Indian poet to write in English. Ghosh was born into a *Kulin* Kayastha family in 1809 in Kidderpore, near Calcutta. He entered Hindu College in 1821 where he was constantly among the first, if not the first, of his class in subjects like Mathematics and

[30]Kasiprasad Ghosh, "On Bengallee Works and Writers," *The India Gazette* (Calcutta), January 27, 1830.

Persian grammar, among others.[31] He began writing poetry in English during his college years, and in 1831 he composed and published a set of poems titled *The Shair and Other Poems*.

The essay "On Bengallee Writers" has received little attention in contemporary scholarship. Rosinka Chaudhuri sees in this piece the first example of literary criticism on Bengali literature written in English. However, despite this essay containing historical data about Bangla literature, Chaudhuri argues that it cannot be conceptualized as having a historiographical concern, for the distinction between literary criticism and literary history was not yet fully operational at that point.[32] At best, it is an essay whose main preoccupation is to illustrate or differentiate good and bad Bengali literature, interspersed with historical data. Somewhat differently, Sheldon Pollock mentions in the introduction to the edited volume "Literary Cultures in History" that Ghosh's article was a precursor to the definitely historiographically-minded work of Rāmagati Nyāẏaratna, noting that there was "a certain precocity to this indigenous production," in that even the literary histories of European literatures were only being developed at that point.[33] What should we make of this essay? Was this work not imbued with historical thinking as Chaudhuri seems to argue? Or was it a precursor of the global field, as Pollock maintains? In both cases, it should be noted, Ghosh's article has a marginal presence, a literal footnote in the history of Bengali literary history.

Compared to later literary histories, the article lacks a concern for historical inquiry: it provides no firm dates of compositions, only approximate distance in years from the moment Ghosh was writing; it is not even thorough in its exposition, it merely notes three or four important works which Ghosh chose based on popularity. Published first in the *Calcutta Literary Magazine* and then reproduced in the *Indian Gazette*, the intended audience of the essay was most probably English-speaking foreigners in Calcutta, who were not acquainted

[31]Brajendranath Bandopadhyay, ed., *Sangbadpatre Sekaler Katha, vol.1 (1818-1830)* (1932), 50.
[32]Chaudhuri, *The Literary Thing*, xxiv.
[33]Pollock, "Introduction," 6fn6.

with the literary trends of Bengal. This is not enough to call Ghosh's article the first specimen of literary history of Bengali language. Yet, beyond the historiographical inclination (or lack of) of Ghosh, this short article presents an apprehension of the past—of the literary past of Bengal—that was different from literary endeavors to come.

How was Ghosh's account of the literary past of Bengal different? As noted above, Ghosh was preoccupied with the state of the Bengali language, as he had a serious problem with the kind of prose that had been produced and published in the Serampore Press and at Fort William College. He only had a good opinion of the prose of Rammohan Roy, but as Ghosh points out, that was not literature but essays and controversies on religion. It is through poetry with which Ghosh addressed the literary past of Bengal, offering but a brief glimpse of Bengali literature in a chronological fashion. First, Ghosh pointed out that the first Bengali poems were translations of Sanskrit works. "The first writer of celebrity," stated Ghosh, was Kṛttivās, a Brahmin who translated the *Rāmāyana* into Bengali at some point during the fifteenth century CE. The next work in Ghosh's list is Kāśīrām Dās' Bengali *Mahābhārata*, composed probably in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Not much is said about these two works, except that these are "translations" and that they indulge sometimes in "vulgarisms." There follows another set of works, Mukundarām Cakravartī's *Caṇḍīmaṅgal*, a *maṅgalkāvya* poem on the exploits and deeds of the goddess Caṇḍī, composed around 1670 CE.

Strangely enough, Ghosh believed that the *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* was another translation, though it is not clear what he thought was the original text, for the *maṅgalkāvya* tradition leaned heavily on regional cults and were based on local and regional deities, rather than focusing on long-established Puranic deities or episodes. It is likely that Ghosh believed that the *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* was a translation because of the text that he analyzes next, Bharatchandra's *Annadāmaṅgal*. The *Annadāmaṅgal* comprises three thinly-connected poems: the *Annapūrṇa* proper, the *Vidyāsundar* and the *Man-Singh*. Like the *Caṇḍīmaṅgal*, the *Annapūrṇa* tells the story of the Goddess Annadā and the exploits she devises to establish her

cult. The similarities between the texts were visible since the *Annadāmaṅgal* composition, so much that some tradition holds the idea that it was Krishnachandra Ray's direct order to Bharatchandra to come up with a poem akin to Mukundarām's *Caṇḍīmaṅgal*.[34] Thus, it is not difficult to see why Ghosh thought that both these works were translations, even without stopping to question what would be the original source.

However, when dealing with Bharatchandra, Ghosh offers another note-worthy statement regarding the state of Bengali poetry. In noting that the *Annadāmaṅgal* is made of different but loosely connected poems, Ghosh claims that Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar* was the first original composition in Bengali, ever. Since Ghosh's essay was more expository than historical, this claim is not backed by any evidence, and it is in fact amusingly wrong: of the three poems comprising the *Annadāmaṅgal*, the *Vidyāsundar* is the only one that is not an "original" composition, but rather an example of a centuries-long textual tradition in Eastern India. Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar* was not even the only *Vidyāsundar* poem written at that time and place: the poet Ramprasad Sen had also penned a *Vidyāsundar* poem, though it was not as successful as Bharatchandra's.[35]

To attribute these omissions and errors to sheer ignorance might not be the best way to deal with them. As stated above, Ghosh's aim seems to have been a general exposition of Bengali literature for the European readers of the *Indian Gazette*. In fact, Ghosh states that Hindu readers and European readers would have different aesthetic experiences reading this text. "The merits of this tale in the estimation of its Hindu readers would be very great. It abounds with many happy expressions not only poetical but humorous and witty, and from its being a picture minutely descriptive of Bengallee manners and customs with their peculiarities, is of a national character." Contrast this appreciation with the following:

[34]This was first documented by Ishwarchandra Gupta during the 1850s, when he published the biography of Bharatchandra. Gupta claimed that he had gotten all the biographical information from the surviving family of the poet. Īśvaracandra Gupta, "Kavivara Bhāratcandra Rāẏ Guṇākarer Jīvana Vṛttānta," in *Īśvara Gupta racanābalī*, ed. Śāntikumāra Dāśagupta and Haribandhu. Mukhatī (Kalikātā: Dattacaudhurī, 1381), 69.

[35]See the next chapter for a detailed analysis of the position of different *Vidyāsundar* poems in the literary history of premodern Bengal.

"To a European the merits of the work may not appear to strike so forcibly on account of his ignorance of the peculiar manners and customs of the Hindus."[36] Ghosh offers translations into English of some selected verses of the *Annadāmaṅgal*, though he warns that the European reader will not be able to fully grasp the poetic merits of the verse, even if the translation is as literal as possible. Yet, despite these different aesthetic experiences, there is a common ground in which both European and Hindu readers can meet to judge the merits of Bharatchandra's compositions: the depictions of nature in these poems. The verses that Ghosh translated, though not many, fall within two categories: descriptions of the passion towards the beloved, and what he called descriptions of nature. The longest verse that Kashiprasad Ghosh translated from the *Vidyāsundar* is a description of a lake. This is of course, no accident, since it is exactly in these poetical forms where the aesthetic experience of the European and the Hindu reader can meet:

> The city's splendour struck Sundara's eyes,
> And see! a charming lake before him lies.
> With brick-built places four for men to land;
> And on the banks four Siva's temples stand.
> In rows the mendicants are seated there,
> Besmeared with ashes, wearing matted hair.
> With groves of flowery plants the banks are bound,
> Where *Malayas* soft gale wafts odours round;
> Where cuckoos sweetly sing their cooing song,
> And humming soft the bees unnumbered throng.
> Stirred by the breeze, the waters quivering stray,
> Where male and female swans together play.[37]

For an European reader, this poem should elicit feelings stemming from the landscape and the realm of nature, since the poem emulated incidentally the English Romantic poetic

[36] Ghosh, "On Bengallee Works and Writers."

[37] The verses are found in the description that Bharatchandra presents when Prince Sundar enters the city of Bardhaman. The translation of Ghosh does not capture the onomatopoeic cadence of the original Bangla: *dekhiẏā nagaraśobhā bākhāne sundara / samukhe dekhena sarobara manohara // sāne bāndhā cāri ghāṭa śibālaẏa cāri / abadhūta jaṭābhasmadhārī sāri sāri // cāri pāḍe sucāru puṣpera upabana / gandha laẏe manda bahe malaẏa pabana // kuhu kuhu kokila kokilāgaṇa ḍāke / guna guna guñjare bhramarā jhāṁke jhāṁke // ṭala ṭala kare jala manda manda bāẏa / nānā pākṣī jalacara kheliẏā beḍāẏa //* Bhāratcandra Rāẏa, *Bhāratacandra-granthābalī* (Kalikātā: Baṅgīẏa-Sāhitya-Parishat, 1963), 216.

repertoire available to readers since the eighteenth century. On the other hand, a reader acquainted with Indic poetic symbols and figures would recognize these in several images, i.e. the buzzing bees, the amorous swans, the cooing cuckoos, and the *Malaya* breeze, the *uddīpana-vibhāvas* of Rasa theory, the "stimulant factors" of *śṛṇgārarasa*, the *rasa* for the mood of love. While not made fully explicit by Ghosh, this confluence of English Romantic attitudes towards nature in poetry and the Sringararasa images in Bharatchandra define a literary space that did not exist before in Bengali poetry, according to Ghosh's idea of the literary past of Bengal. In fact, Ghosh claimed that, while the repetition of figures and images of nature was a detriment to the merits of Bharatchandra's poetical prowess, there were still ways to fully enjoy this poem: "It has been found by experience that by perusing its [the *Vidyāsundar* poem's] parts at intervals, the reader is much more gratified than by reading the whole of it regularly."[38] Then, Ghosh adds an explanation of what *exactly* literary enjoyment is: "In a metrical tale, variety of incidents mingled with occasional flights of poetry into the regions of *nature* and *passion* is absolute necessary as it is interesting."

Without talking about eras, ages or periods; or about modern and ancient, it seems that Kashiprasad Ghosh delineated a differentiation of the literary past of Bengal from his present moment. As we saw above, Ghosh thought that the literary past of Bengal turned around translations from Sanskrit works that, while popular, lacked innovation and originality. Ghosh's appreciation of Bharatchandra put the Nadia poet at the crossroad of a literary past encumbered with Sanskrit translations and a literary present that pivoted on three key ideas: first, the idea of innovation and originality; two, the idea that this "new" literary form of Bengali language revolved around two main tenets: passion and nature; and three, the idea that this literary space could be a shared space. That is, that there was something in the literary experience of Bengali language that could partake in the same aesthetic experience of other literary histories, especially English and English Romantic poetry.

[38]Ghosh, "On Bengallee Works and Writers."

Again, Kashiprasad Ghosh did not use words like modern, or ancient to present this difference between the literary past and the literary present of Bengali literature in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Yet, his articulation of the literary past of Bengal is different from Derozio's complete negation of literary capabilities to pre-colonial Bengal, but also different from the kind of articulation of the past by literary historians that were to come decades later, who constructed a past rooted in romantic, religious identities, that became the norm in Bengali literary history later in the nineteenth century with figures like Dineshchandra Sen. The usual mechanisms of periodizatiоn, i.e. a hard chronology, a distinct separation between periods, a teleological and historicist outlook, and a natural logic to this teleology, are not present in Ghosh's article. However, there is a distinct sense of the past in Bengali literature, one in which Bharatchandra was midway, between the past and the present, thanks to his use of language, originality, and engagement with tropes of love and nature.

Ghosh closes his article pointing out that during the period of writing his article, several "original works" in Bangla were published, but these were not deemed worth of anybody's attention, since apparently they were rather controversial in nature. That is, they had been written in order to sustain a public controversy with some literary figure. Yet, he acknowledges the existence of an author who "makes a very conspicuous figure in literary merits, although he is not very popular:" Rādhāmohan Sen. Rādhāmohan Sen is now as obscure a figure as he was in Ghosh's own times, even though they were contemporaries. Born in Jorasanka, near Calcutta, to a Kayastha family, Rādhāmohan Sen's biographical details are scarce. Kashiprasad Ghosh places Sen's birth in 1764, and notes in the article that at the time of writing Sen was "sixty five years and seven months of age." Sen published his first work, "*Saṅgīta-Taraṅga*," in 1818, which was a long treatise on music, containing around 120 songs with several descriptions of *ragas* and *rāgiṇīs*.[39] A second book, *Śṛṅgāra Rasa Paddhati*, was published in 1819; and a third one, *Vidvanmodataraṅgiṇī*, was published in 1826.[40]

[39]De, *Bengali Literature*, 366.

[40]Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, "Radhamohan Sen," in *Krishnakamal Bhattcharya, Ramkamal*

This last one was a translation of a Sanskrit treatise of the same name composed by one Cirañjīva Bhaṭṭa Rāmadeva at some point in the eighteenth century.[41] Lastly, Sen produced the *Annapūrṇā-maṅgal*, which was not actually a version of Bharatchandra's famous poem, but rather a *ṭīkā,* an exposition of Bharatchandra's poem to dispel doubts about his usage of words.[42]

What is noteworthy about Ghosh's choice of Rādhāmohan Sen as the foremost literary figure for early nineteenth century Bengal is that Sen embodies perfectly Ghosh's ideas about what literature should be: the literary experience should put emphasis on images of nature and on the passionate feeling for the beloved, both of which were present in Sen's work. But more importantly than that, Ghosh's choice shows that the "new" age of Bengali literature—which Sen thought had started with Bharatchandra—was to be a site of a confluence of two different streams: English romantic poetry and Indic rasa theory, where readers familiar with one or the other, or with both, could enjoy a similar aesthetic experience. The imitative and derivative character of Bengali literature of the previous age was over, Ghosh seemed to claim. This was a new age rooted in a kind of originality that followed tradition. For example, take this verse of Rādhāmohan Sen that Ghosh translated:

A heap of ashes soon will become
My frame by love's cremation;
Wherefore upon the gale I call
By way of invocation.
That may it prove a friend to me,
And some of the ashes bearing
Scatter it o'er my loved-one's form;
This wish my heart's declaring.

Bhattcharya, Jaygopal Tarkalankar, Madanmohan Tarkalankar, Gourmohan Bidyalankar, Radhamohan Sen, Brajamohan Majumdar, Nilratna Halder, vol. 0 (Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1948), 119.

[41] Amaresh Datta, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature: Devraj to Jyoti* (Sahitya Akademi, 1988), does not give a tentative date. The translator of the text argues that the Sanskrit text was composed around a hundred years before the publication of Sen's translation, which give us a date around 1730. Ciranjiva Bhatta Ramadeva and Raja Kalee-Krishna Bahadur, *Vidvanmodatarangini With English Translation Kali Krishna Bahadur 1834* (Kolkata: Sobha-Bazar Press, 1834).

[42] Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, "Radhamohan Sen," 120.

While the gist of the poem is there, in reality the Bangla original is much more loaded with familiar Indic imagery, especially since the poem is the lament of Radha against the indifference of Krishna, a very productive genre in medieval Bengal. The Bangla original reads:

> *viraha-anale tanu halō ta bhaśmer rāśi /*
> *tāi ārādhanā rūpē samīraṇe sambhāṣi //*
> *yadi vāyu sakhā haẏyā, e bhaśma kiṁcit laiẏā /*
> *deẏa śyāmera śarīre ei mane abhilāṣī ||*

> The body turns, by the fire of *Viraha*, into a heap of ashes;
> then, calling the wind to do me a favor,
> if the wind is a friend, of these ashes taking a little,
> it [will] scatter them over Krishna's body; this is the desire in my heart.

We can see that the English translation does not make any mention of the usual elements that we find in Vaishnava poetry, which would have been immediately identified by an Indian reader. *Viraha* or 'love in separation,' the wind as a messenger, and finally the mention of Krishna's body, all these elements are conspicuously absent in the English translation. Yet, for Ghosh this did not suppose a problem, for the European reader would have still enjoyed the poem since it was still about the elements of meritorious poetry: passion and nature.

As we have seen before, Kashiprasad Ghosh's article was not a literary history in a proper academic sense, like the literary histories written after 1870. Yet, this small article offers a glimpse of a different way of articulating the literary past of Bengal with the new state of the literary inaugurated by Bharatchandra. This was not a Derozian rupture and negation of a literary past for Bengal. It was not a romantic endeavor with imagined, romantic, pure, religious identities like Dineshchandra Sen's articulation of the medieval past of Bengal, nor was it an indictment of backwardness and corruption like some colonizers hold India's premodern literature to be, like James Mill or Thomas Macaulay.

Ghosh was fully aware of periodizing devices, so his lack of engagement with a periodized literary history is not a sign that 'historicality' was not available for him. In fact, Ghosh

was keenly aware of a series of arguments leveled against Indian tradition and its supposed lack of historical thinking by James Mill. In 1827, while still a student at the Hindu College, Ghosh wrote a critical review of the first four chapters of Mill's "History of British India." The review made such a favorable impact upon the examiners of the College that they decided not only to award Ghosh a prize for it, they also resolved to publish it a few months later in the Government Gazette. Ghosh mounted his defense focusing on two subjects: Indian chronology and Indian law, especially the legal corpus that concerned the figure of the sovereign. Following pervasive ideas in Europe about Indian history, Mill stated at the beginning of chapter three, "The form of government," that: "among the Hindus, according to the Asiatic Model, the government was monarchical, and, with the usual exception of religion and its ministers, absolute. No idea of any system of rule, different from the will of a single person, appears to have entered the minds of them or their legislators."[43] Against this accusation of Absolutism, Ghosh quotes several passages of the Laws of Manu, where it can be seen that although monarchical, the form of government was not absolute, for it was restrained by people and by the law: "'that king' says another ordinance of Menu [sic], 'who through weakness of intellect, rashly oppresses his people, will, together with his family be deprived both of kingdom and life.' Although the institutes of Menu exalt a king to a divinity, and consequently seem to give him an unlimited authority, yet the limits fixed by the same institutes for him to act in, were such as become a king and the laws of a refined nation."[44]

On the abysmal span of time that the *yuga* system represented, Mill had said that "the wildness and inconsistency of the Hindu statements [on the *yugas*] evidently place them beyond the sober limits of truth and history."[45] Moreover, according to Mill, any attempt to unravel the intricacies of the *yuga* system by modern European scholars had failed miserably: "no suppositions, however gratuitous, have sufficed to establish a consistent

[43]Mill, *The History of British India, Vol. I*, 122.

[44]Kasiprasad Ghosh, "Mill's British India," in *The Days of John Company: Selections from Calcutta Gazette, 1824-1832* (Calcutta: Government Printing, 1959), 292.

[45]Mill, *The History of British India, Vol. I*, 142.

theory. Every explanation has failed. The Hindu legends still present a maze of unnatural fictions, in which a series of real events can by no artifice be traced."[46] The problem of Hindu chronology had been used already by William Jones a couple of decades earlier to advance arguments of inherent backwardness of Indian civilization. In fact, the argument about time and its reckoning in ancient India, along with the alleged lack of historical thinking, became one of the most powerful periodizing devices that portrayed India's present in the early colonial period akin to Europe's feudal past, thus denying coevalness to India.[47] Against these arguments, Ghosh tried to deflect Mill's criticism of Indian chronology by pointing out that the origins of Hindu chronology and the system of *yuga* lied in astronomical science, just like the Egyptians and the Chaldeans had done. The vast number of years represented by the *yugas*, argued Ghosh, were meant for astronomical calculations and not for historical purposes. Thus, there was no fair point of comparison between Indian and European chronologies.[48]

James Mill had famously divided Indian history in three large periods: Hindu, Muslim and English, roughly equivalent to Antiquity, Middle Ages and Modernity in Europe's history periodization. However, as Ghosh tried to prove with his review, the arguments on which this periodization rested—chronology and ancient despotism—were not able to sustain a careful examination. Ghosh's review on Mill's first four chapters makes it clear that he was aware of the periodization devices deployed by European scholars and, argued David Kopf, preceded H.H. Wilson's refutation of Mill by eleven years. However, Ghosh's review of Mill's book did not enter the annals of history as a rational criticism and denouncing of poor and shoddy scholarship, but rather as a defense of the idea of a Hindu golden age, and not even an original one for that matter.[49] What Kashiprasad Ghosh's articulation of the literary past of Bengal shows is that the encounter with historicality presupposes neither

[46]Mill, *The History of British India, Vol. I*, 142.

[47]Trautmann, "Indian Time, European Time."

[48]Ghosh, "Mill's British India," 289.

[49]Kopf explains that Ghosh had been the first to defend the idea of a 'secular' Hindu Golden Age, and that his "arguments and evidence" were "clearly derived from the work of the Calcutta Orientalists." Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, 264.

periodization nor chronology. Kashiprasad Ghosh's attempt at articulating the literary past of Bengal did not amount to a proper literary history, as we have seen. Yet, it presented a differentiation between the past and the present that was not found in other literary history books published around the same time, like De Tassy's *Histoire de la littérature hindoui et hindoustani*, which was more an encyclopedic aggregate of data on authors and oeuvres than a chronological arrangement of works.[50] Ghosh's imagination of the literary past of Bengal, centered around the figure of Bharatchandra, and his choice of Rādhāmohan Sen as the best embodiment of its present strays considerably from Derozio's refusal to acknowledge the existence of literature prior to himself in India, and from the nationalist, romantic articulation of essentialist religious identities that had to be recovered in the medieval past of Bengal, just like Dineshchandra Sen articulated the idea of the past. Kashiprasad Ghosh found that the literary field in Bengal had changed with Bharatchandra, but that change did not entail a total break with the past but rather an opportunity to be coterminous with other literary traditions, like English romantic poetry, and to extend the domain of rasa theory to converge in a single but differentiated literary stream. And while Ghosh's ideation of the past was not to survive, and in fact both him and his literary champion Rādhāmohan Sen would almost succumb to oblivion, his effort problematizes what has been for decades a teleological history of the literary history of Bengali.

A false age: Ishwarchandra Gupta's obsession with the past (1850-1855)

"In no other amusement could there be enjoyment of this world; in no other work could engagement be born; in no other matter could the mind be still. Ruminating incessantly, I could only think of old poems. If I was able to obtain a poem dear to me, then my

[50]M. (Joseph-Héliodore-Sagesse-Vertu) Garcin de Tassy and Oriental Translation Fund. n 50075112, *Histoire de la littérature hindoui et hindoustani*, in collab. with Wellcome Library (Paris: Printed under the auspices of the Oriental Translation Committee of Great Britain and Ireland, 1839).

joy knew no boundaries; at that moment it was as if I was in Brahma's presence."[51] Thus wrote Ishwarchandra Gupta about his endeavor to collect and preserve old poems around the mid-nineteenth century in Bengal, an enterprise that occupied a good part of his later years: "I have, in a way, renounced everything to focus myself only on this, what has thus become of me, only he who witnesses everything and I know." Writing at the end of his life, Ishwarchandra published the poems and bits of biographical information that he had amassed for years in his travels, and in doing so, opened a new temporal dimension to Bengali literature. His efforts against the peril of oblivion were consciously based on a novel conceptualization of *prācīna*, old. But this new ideation of the 'old' was different from the chronologically ordered Bengali literary histories that were to be written after 1870. What can Ishwarchandra Gupta's obsession with the past tell us about the temporalities of Bengali literature at play during his lifetime? What kind of past did Ishwarchandra articulate in his writings and his poems?

Ishwarchandra has come to occupy a liminal position in Bengali literary history, a place between the past and the present, the modern and the premodern. Ishwarchandra Gupta, born in March 1812 at the Kanchrapara village in 24-Parganas to a Baidya family, migrated to Calcutta while he was still a boy. Before he passed away in 1859, Ishwarchandra had already entered the annals of public memory and of the literary history of Bengal thanks to his literary work. He had been the editor of the *Samvād Prabhākar*, one of the first Bengali daily newspapers, where he constantly published highly satirical poems deriding Calcutta's society of his times, the 'Derozians.' These young Bengali men, who in most cases had been Derozio's students at Hindu College and who openly embraced Western customs, mannerisms and rebuked 'traditional' Hindu society, became Gupta's preferred targets of his satirical poems. He was also remembered for being a particularly accomplished and skilled poet who liked to partake in *kabigān* duels of poetry, where groups of poets hurled at each other poems laded with witticisms and, much to the public's delight, obscenities. In the *Samvād*

[51] Gupta, "Kavivara Bhāratcandra Rāẏ Guṇākarer Jīvana Vṛttānta," 55.

Prabhākar, he published at the end of his life the results of his poem-hunting trips, which he described in highly dramatic terms: "for almost ten years I have devoted myself to the calling of collecting ancient selections of poems and the biographies of those old poets. For this cause I have waged my money, sanity and even life. I have deprived myself of almost all worldly joys."[52] He was most probably exaggerating the impact that this collecting endeavor had in his personal life and finances, seeking to draw more interested persons in supporting him financially, for he inserted the same description of his work in all the biographies of old poets he published. He was, however, far from being a hermit or a renouncer, in reality he was a well-known public figure in the first half of the nineteenth century.

But probably what inflected the most Ishwarchandra's memory was Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's apprising of Gupta as the last 'genuine' Bengali poet to be found in Bengali literary history. As Gautam Bhadra argued, Bankimchandra's assessment of Ishwarchandra Gupta as a transitional figure between the medieval and the modern has achieved "a canonical status through verbatim endorsement by successive scholars."[53] For example, R.C. Dutt in 1874 cast Ishwarchandra's poetry as "a connecting link between the old school of Madhu Sudan and Hem Chandra."[54] Much later, J.C. Ghosh would also present Ishwarchandra Gupta as standing in the middle of the old and the new: "his historical position was that of a writer who was cast between two ages, the old and the new, and he is the bridge between the old school of poets whose first great representative was Bharatchandra and the new school of poets whose first great representative was Madhusudan. He is the last of the Kaviwālā type of poet, but is not altogether devoid of modernity."[55]

This liminal position, this duality of being either the 'last of the medieval' or the 'first of the modern' or even both at the same time, has prompted scholars since the nineteenth century and up to the present day to look at Ishwarchandra's drive to collect 'old' poems

[52]Gupta, "Kavivara Bhāratcandra Rāẏ Guṇākarer Jīvana Vṛttānta," 54.

[53]Gautam Bhadra in Milinda Banerjee, *A History of Laughter: Ishwar Gupta and Early Modern Bengal* (Kolkata: Das Gupta and Company, 2009).

[54]Dutt, *The Literature Of Bengal*, 151.

[55]J. C. Ghosh, *Bengali Literature* (1948), 134.

as a sign of a developing disciplinary historical consciousness in colonial Bengal. Rosinka Chaudhuri has argued that Ishwarchandra felt an "urgent need to historically archive this material [poems in Bangla written in the eighteenth and first decades of the nineteenth century] for the modern world that was already upon him," a preoccupation that, adds Chaudhuri, partly stemmed from the irruption of historical thinking that was available to him.[56] However, in this section I will not examine whether Ishwar Gupta's archival endeavor had its origins in historicality being available to him. As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, there is a conceptual trap in assuming that historicality creates automatically a past and an archive for it, as if the past was just there waiting to be discovered. It is those pasts, rather—the idioms, concepts, and ideas that went into imagining them—which need to be historicized.

In modern scholarship, Ishwarchandra Gupta's relation to the literary past of Bengal has been inflected by mainly two interpretations of his life. First, the enduring claim that Ishwarchandra knew no other language but a coarse form of Bangla, having had no education whatsoever. And secondly, his participation in the heated debates on social mores that fueled endless discussions in the Calcutta public sphere during the first half of the nineteenth century. The rumor of Gupta's alleged monolingualism seems to have started with the publication in 1871 of a small article by Bankimchandra. In *Bengali Literature,* Bankim wrote of Ishwarchandra:

> He was a very remarkable man. He was ignorant and uneducated. He knew no language but his own and was singularly narrow and unenlightened in his views. As a writer of light satiric verse, he occupies the first place, and he owed his success both as a poet and as an editor to this special gift. But there his merits ended. Of the higher qualities of a poet he possessed none, and his work was extremely rude and uncultivated. His writings were generally disfigured by the grossest obscenity. His popularity was chiefly owing to his perpetual alliteration and play upon words.[57]

[56]Chaudhuri, *The Literary Thing*, 38.
[57]Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, *Bankim Rachanavali (English)* (1960), 106.

This was of course a preposterous allegation, possibly written for dramatic effect, for at that time it was well known that Ishwarchandra had published in his lifetime several translations of Sanskrit plays into Bangla prose, which of course showed that he had formal training in Sanskrit grammar and literature. Whether Ishwarchandra knew Persian and English is not really known. Bhabatosh Datta, the editor of Bankimchandra's biography of Ishwar Gupta, has claimed that Gupta authored the anonymously published Bengali translations of Thomas Campbell's poem, "The Soldier's Dream," William Cowper 's poem "The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk," and Thomas Paine's essay *The Age of Reason,* all of which appeared in the *Samvād Prabhākar.*[58] But, as has been argued, there is really no conclusive proof that it was Ishwarchandra who did the translation. In fact, there was anecdotal evidence that the translations into Bangla of English news published in the newspaper were done by an assistant and not by Gupta himself.[59]

Gupta's conservative stance on social discussions of his time has cast a longer shadow upon his relationship with the literary past of Bengal. During most of his adult life, Ishwarchandra stood with what has been called a conservative agenda of Hindu society under British rule. He wrote extensively against issues that reformists tried to discuss and change in the public sphere, like widow remarriage. In fact, these debates fueled the kind of poems by which Ishwarchandra became famous: witty and pun-riddled poems that he directed against his adversaries. The heavy use of irony, *vyaṅga*, became Ishwarchandra's poetic signature, but also became a key to read his distinct articulation of Bengali literary temporalities. For example, Ishwarchandra wrote with this signature irony on the rapid change of religious and social customs in Hindu society. What happens in a world plunged into disarray? Everyone has to go out and beg for alms. In "Ācārabhraṁśa" (the fall of proprieties), Ishwarchandra laments how social customs have gone topsy-turvy. But in this poem, he addresses time itself as the harbinger of these social evils:

[58]Baṅkimacandra Caṭṭopādhyāẏa and Bhabatosha Datta, *Īśvaracandra Guptera jībanacarita o kabitva.* (Kalikātā: Jijñāsā, 1968).

[59]Alauddin. Azad, *A Study of Life and Short Poems of Iswarchandra Gupta*, vol. no. 34, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh Publication ; (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1979), 30.

ohe kāla kālarūpa karālavadana
tomāra vadanaẏukta marālavāhana
deva devī kata tumi kariẏā saṁhāra
bhāratera svādhīnatā karile āhāra
kichu bujhi nāhi pāo cāridike ceẏe
ekhana bharābe peṭa hindudharma kheẏe
dohāi dohāi kāla śāntiguṇa dhara
uṭha uṭha pāna nao ācamana kara[60]

Time, in the form of ruin/Yama, with fearful face
with your mouth shut, riding a goose
How many gods and goddesses have you killed
when you devoured India's independence
I understand that you didn't find anything anywhere else
and now eating the Hindu dharma, you will fill your belly
I beg of you, Time, appease yourself
get up, drink water, rinse your mouth.

It is easy to see how his conservative stance on the changing social norms in Calcutta might be interpreted as the source for Gupta's unfettering predilection for old poetry. However, this would be an uncritical assumption, the symmetrical opposite of Derozio and the Derozians. In this line of thought, just like Derozio had fiercely disavowed Hindu norms and precolonial literature, so Ishwarchandra and others in the *prācīna pantha* abhorred the new and embraced the old. Yet, there was nothing uncritical about Ishwarchandra Gupta's engagement with the literary past of Bengal. It seems counterintuitive, but Ishwarchandra Gupta's admiration for old Bangla poetry did not revolve around conceptualizing this literary past as a refuge from the topsy-turvy modern world described above, but rather hinged on the capacity of old Bengali poetry for novelty and variation. First, the past to which he kept coming back was not the unchanging and perennial past that Orientalist scholars had imagined for India. Chronologically speaking, Gupta's preferred past was at most one hundred years away from him, for the oldest poets he included in his *Prācīn Kabi* collection were Ramprasad Sen and Bharatchandra Ray, both of which had been active in the 1750s

[60]Īśvaracandra Gupta, Muhammada Ābadula Hāi, and Ānoẏāra Pāśā, *Iśvara Guptera kabitā saṃgraha* (Dhākā: Māolā Brothers, 1969), 180.

in the region of Nadia. Of the two poets, it was Bharatchandra who became the champion of Ishwarchandra, mainly because of Bharatchandra's mastery over two aspects that Ishwarchandra had erected as the pillars upon which *Kabitā*, poetry, had to be founded: *rasa* and *chandas*, mood and meter. For example, Gupta extols Bharatchandra's innovative use of language, combining not only Bangla and Sanskrit, but even Persian as well:

> The clarity of the poem, the neatness of the rhymes, the sweetness of the expression, the feeling [*bhāva*] and the mood [*rasa*], we are completely unable to describe all of this. Those who, having been smiled upon by God, possess poetry, scholarship and proficiency in all these matters, only them will rejoice, having grasped fully the inherent qualities of the poem. We can only say this: in Bengal, among Bengalis, and among the composers of poems in Bengali language, no other lofty person like him has ever been born. Furthermore, he composed all these poems in Sanskrit and those too are worthy of a proper description; in addition, he was able to compose poems using exclusively Persian, "Brajabuli," or Hindi and Muslim words. Or he could compose poems mixing Sanskrit, Brajabuli, Hindi and Muslim words altogether; and those poems too are of utmost quality. Such virtue is rarely seen in one and the same person at a time. Therefore, by everybody in the world, he will be considered the foremost in every way, of this there is no doubt.[61]

Thus, we can see that Ishwarchandra inhabited a temporal liminality, but one in which the literary past that he envisioned was not the literary past created by nationalist literary history decades later. Rather, playing with binaries like *prācīna* and *arvācīna*, and *nūtana* and *purātana*, and not treating them as synonyms, Ishwarchandra was able to imagine a literary temporality in which the old still had currency. For Gupta, there could be novelty in the ancient: after extoling Bharatchandra's *pāndítya* and *kabitva*, Ishwarchandra stated that his poems, which are the poems of a *prācīn kabi*, "have not become old [*purātana haila nā*], for a long time they have remained new [*cirakāla nūtan rahila*]. At all times they appear new [*sakal samajei nūtan bodh haý*], in any subject, they fascinate the heart."[62] Again, this seemingly contradictory statement about the newness of the old only appears as such if

[61] Gupta, "Kavivara Bhāratcandra Rāý Guṇākarer Jīvana Vṛttānta," 75–76.

[62] Īśvaracandra Gupta, Śāntikumāra Dāśagupta, and Haribandhu Mukhatī, *Īśvara Gupta racanābalī* (Kalikātā: Dattacaudhurī, 1381), 59.

we see in Bharatchandra's adoption of Sanskrit meters and Sanskritic images an uncritical adoption of a stale past. However, this was not a nostalgic endeavor to dwell in the past, but rather a conscious attempt to articulate differently the history of Bengali literature.

In 1885, Bankimchandra wrote an introduction to Ishwarchandra Gupta's collected poems, where he shares an anecdote that sheds light on his appreciation for Ishwarchandra Gupta and his work. Bankim tells us that one evening, during the rainy season, he was sitting near the bank of the Bhagirathi river looking at the waves and undulations of the water and the crooked reflection of the moonlight beams on it. "The realm of poetry had been established," [*kāvyer rājjya upasthito haila*] said Bankim, alluding to the many stimulant factors-like (the *uddīpana-vibhāvas* of *rasa* theory) motives present in this scene, which demanded a poem for the occasion. However, argued Bankim, not any poem would do; this was not an occasion for a poem in English, "English and the Bhagirathi do not mix;" Neither was just any Bangla poem fit for the time: "Madhusudan, Hemachandra, Nabinchandra, there was no enjoyment in any of these [poets]." This last troupe of poets are "modern" poets, contemporaries of Bankim. As a final distinction, Bankim adds: "Kālīdāsa and Bhavabhūti were too distant." At this moment, a song from a boatman rose from the river:

> *sādha āche mā mane*
> *Durgā bale prāṇ tyajiba*
> *jāhnavī-jīvane*
>
> There's a desire in my heart, mother
> [That] I will leave this life saying "Durgā,"
> This life [which is like] the Jāhnavī.

The song, which was actually not composed by Ishwarchandra Gupta, kindled in Bankim thoughts of another time, a different temporality in which the modern poets had no say, since Bengali literature during Bankim's times was "firmly installed upon the path of novelty and

progress."[63] This anecdote provides a different temporality for Ishwarchandra Gupta and his poems: he was the last of the true, 'authentic poets,' "no other authentic poet can be born nowadays," declared Bankim.[64] Thus, Bankim's longing for a poem that did not belong to the modern period, but neither to the ancient period— represented by Kalidasa and Bhavabuti—shows that, for Bankim, there was a different temporality/period inhabited by poets like Ishwarchandra Gupta. Without calling it 'medieval,' the two pillars of Bankim's ideation of the past of a Bengali national literature, an 'authentic' character free from foreign intrusion and a temporal distance that makes it inaccessible to the moderns, were built upon the work of Ishwarchandra Gupta. Thus, the canonical view of Ishwarchandra Gupta as a poet between ages was established between 1871 and 1885, in Bankim's two articles. But Bankim's appreciation of Ishwarchandra, as a poet who was irretrievably lost to time since no other like him could appear, also points to the growing confluence of literary pasts with history/chronology.

The birth of periodization: Rāmagati Nyāẏaratna and the first chronological history of Bengali literature (1872)

In the decade of 1870, the landscape of Bengali literary historiography saw the emergence of different works that showed a distinct approach to the literary past of the region. As we saw before, in 1877 the historian Romesh Chandra Dutt published, under the pen name Ar Cy Dae, *The Literature of Bengal*, a small compendium of mostly biographies of Bengali authors, ordered chronologically. But arguably the most important work of this decade was Rāmagati Nyāẏaratna's *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣā o Bāṅgālā Sāhitya-viṣaẏak prastāva* ("A Proposition Concerning the Bengali Language and Bengali Literature"), which was the first actual chronological literary history of Bengali ever produced.

[63] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa and Datta, *Īśvaracandra Guptera jībanacarita o kabitva.*, 2.
[64] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa and Datta, 2.

Rāmagati Nyāẏaratna was born near Hooghly, in July 1831, to a family of Sanskrit pandits. At Sanskrit College he followed a Sanskritic curriculum, though it is not clear if he also studied English there. He received the title of "Nyāẏaratna" in 1855, after which he was offered a job in the Normal School at Hooghly. Importantly, he was a student of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar while at Sanskrit College, and he remained a faithful follower of the teachings of Vidyasagar throughout his life. It was this close relationship to Vidyasagar and Nyāẏaratna's career as a Sanskrit scholar which have led many to cast Nyāẏaratna as having a conservative stance towards Bengali literature.

In a modern printing of Nyāẏaratna's *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣā*, the editor Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay argues that in the book we can find a historical discussion which constantly defaults to conservative attitudes. In fact, Bandyopadhyay calls Nyāẏaratna a *purātana-panthī paṇḍit*, a follower of the old-way whose "mind was formed in the tradition of the Sanskrit language and literature."[65] It was probably Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay who did the most damage to Nyāẏaratna's reputation in an article published in 1884 on the discussion about written Bengali. In this article, Bankim presents two sides to the discussion, the Sanskritists and the moderns. The Sanskritists, argues Bankim, would rather use long *tatsama* words, even if it obscures the meaning of the text. The moderns, on the other side of the spectrum, tried to reflect in their writings the language of the common speech heard in Bengal, thus doing away with highly Sanskritized vocabulary and morphology. Arguing that neither of the two should prevail in literary composition; Bankim bids for clarity of the composition and the aesthetic enjoyment to be the main reasons for choosing one form of language over the other. In this context, Bankim referred to Nyāẏaratna in highly caustic terms, accusing him of, among other things, being opposed to the use of 'simple' Bengali language in books and in quotidian life. Bankim presents Nyāẏaratna's take on the satirical novel *Ālāler gharer dulāl* (1857), one of the first novels to be written in a colloquial style of Bangla known as *calit-bhāṣā* as opposed to *sādhu-bhāṣā*, which relied more on *tatsama* words. Faithful to his

[65] Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, "Bhūmikā," in Nyāẏaratna, *Bāṅgālā Bhāshā*, i, vi.

caustic style of criticism, Bankim wrote: "We see from this how Nyayaratna's chief objection against using a common language is that fathers and sons cannot use it together. We understand that in Nyayaratna's view, fathers and sons are duty bound to converse using Sanskrit words, and not in the common tongue. Should this law come into force, we shall hear a child asking the mother for food thus: '*he mata: khadyam dehi me*."'[66]

However, Bankim's characterization of Nyāẏaratna's stance on the state of the Bengali language is somewhat of an extrapolation. Nyāẏaratna presented the same discussion as Bankim, noting that there were two parties on the subject of how to write Bengali literature, the ancient and the modern. While discussing which one is better, Nyāẏaratna reached the same conclusion as Bankim: it depends on the context, though Nyāẏaratna did put Sanskritized Bengali as the better choice when it came to education. However, Nyāẏaratna was in favor of striking a balance between the two styles of language. On responding to whether *calit-bhāṣā* should be used at all to write books, he answered: "just like eating countless sweets can make the tongue somewhat corrupted—and then we need to put a piece of ginger or some pickle in our mouth, otherwise the corruption won't disappear—in the same way this feeling will appear in our ears if we only listen to *Vidyāsagāri* works [i.e., Sanskritic]. To experiment a change, it is necessary for the readers to listen to the other kind [the modern] of works."[67] This is important, because it was language style, and not mere chronology, which was at the heart of Nyāẏaratna's proposed periodization for the literary history of Bengali language.

Nyāẏaratna divided Bengali literary history into three periods. The *ādyakāl*, whose first exponent is the Maithili poet Vidyāpati Ṭhākur (ca. 1380 1460 CE), and ends with the *Rāmāyana* version in Bengali of the fifteenth-century author Kṛttibās. The second is the *madhyakāl*, a period starting with the Vaishnava poet Vrindavan Dās (sixteenth century), author of the *Caitanya-bhāgavata*, and ending with the poet Ramprasad Sen. The last age

[66]Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, "The Bengali Language: The Language of Writing," *Indian Literature* 58 (3 (281) 2014): 28.

[67]Nyāẏaratna, *Bāṅgālā Bhāshā*, 259.

of Bengali literature in Nyāẏaratna's scheme was called *idānīntanakāla*. It started with the poet Bharatchandra and extended through Nyāẏaratna's period. The third edition of the book actually extended beyond Nyāẏaratna's own life; this edition was compiled by his son, Girīndranāth Debaśarmā. In this last edition, it was Nyāẏaratna's son who included the latest developments in Bengali literature, like the work of the literary historian Romesh Chandra Dutt. But even before his death, Nyāẏaratna had been adding into the timeline he constructed the latest developments and findings that other literary historians were uncovering. In the first chapter of the third edition—though this could have been introduced in the second edition, Nyāẏaratna or his son presented a narrative on the origin and development of the Bengali language, for which they used as one of the main sources Dineshchandra Sen's *Baṅgabhāṣā o Sāhitya*, which was published first in 1896.[68] Notably, Nyāẏaratna's arrangement of Bengali literary history allowed for the frictionless inclusion of new authors and works in cases of the discovery of old manuscripts or publication of new books, for in this system it was time and chronology the organizational principle of literary history, and works and authors were data that could be added at any point in the timeline.

That chronology was the main guiding principle in this literary history did not prevent other factors to contribute to Nyāẏaratna's arrangement. Other authors, like Ishwarchandra Gupta, had discussed notions of old and new before Nyāẏaratna, but it was Nyāẏaratna who was the first to divide the literary history of Bengal into something more than 'old' and 'new.' As we saw before, Nyāẏaratna devised three periods, roughly equivalent to the usual three periods of European historiography: ancient, middle/medieval, and modern. The guiding principle of this periodization had to do with language style. "Language," argued Nyāẏaratna, "just like any being on earth, is subject to change," and there were three stages to that continuous change: childhood (*bālya*), youth (*yauvana*), and maturity (*prauḍha*).[69] This progression was not, however, based on a biologicist idea of bodily decay, but rather on an idea of intellectual improvement and refinement as one moves throughout

[68]Dineścandra Sen, *Baṅgabhāṣā O Sāhitya* (Calcutta: Hemchandra Sen, 1896).
[69]Nyāẏaratna, *Bāṅgālā Bhāshā*, 23.

life. For the beginning of the *madhyakāl*, Nyāẏaratna presents the birth of Chaitanya in Nabadvip as the kickstart of a new era of literature, one which, he argued, could actually be construed as the true moment when Bengali literature came into being. This was because, stated Nyāẏaratna, literature in the middle era was written not for other pandits or persons who could understand Sanskrit; Vaishnava literature was written for the common people, mainly because Vaishnava poets started somewhat of a proselytist approach to religion and literature.[70]

Nyāẏaratna also located the divide between the 'middle' and the 'modern' in Nadia, with the poets Ramprasad Sen and Bharatchandra Ray. This division also illustrates how Nyāẏaratna was basing his periodization on more than mere chronology, for both authors lived in the same region at the same time, and also benefited from the patronage of Krishnachandra Ray.[71] Moreover, they both composed a version of the *Vidyāsundar* poem. On the language of these two poems is where Nyāẏaratna based his periodization. The main principle by which Nyāẏaratna placed the two contemporary authors on different sides of the middle/modern divide was the development of *chandas*, prosody. Nyāẏaratna argued that while the middle age had seen some orderliness of meters (*chander pāripāṭya*), there was no consistency throughout the three centuries of the middle age. Even Ramprasad had shown great promise, but Nyāẏaratna did not elevate him to the ranks of Bharatchandra since Ramprasad had merely copied some Sanskrit meters: "at this time [the middle age] there were all kinds of new meters in use, among them, Kabirañjan's [Ramprasad] *ṭotaka* meter is a mere imitation of Sanskrit—every foot of the verse has twelve syllables and every third syllable is *guru*; all his other meters are just variations of *paẏār* and *tripadī* meters."[72] This attention to language and meter shows that Nyāẏaratna's periodization was not a function of time or of chronology: it was a conscious effort by him to organize Bengali literary history into more than just chronological or temporal arguments.

[70]Nyāẏaratna, *Bāṅgālā Bhāshā*, 68.

[71]However, unlike Bharatchandra, Ramprasad Sen was not a court poet but a renunciant. It is said that he rejected an invitation from Krishnachandra to establish near the court.

[72]Nyāẏaratna, *Bāṅgālā Bhāshā*, 141.

In 1879, Rāj Nārāẏan Basu published a short history of Bengali language titled *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣā o Sāhitya Viṣaẏak Vaktṛtā* (A Discourse on Bengali Language and Literature), and although Basu acknowledged that his book was following on the steps of Nyāẏaratna's book, Basu presented a new periodization:

1. Vidyāpati Kāl
2. Caitanya Kāl
3. Kavi-Kaṅkaṇa Kāl
4. Rājā Kṛṣṇcandra Kāl
5. Śrī Rāmpur Misanari-diger Kāl [Missionaries of Serampore]
6. Rāmmohan Rāy Kāl
7. Tattvabodhinī Kāl
8. Vidyāsāgar Kāl
9. Maikel Madhusūdan o Bankim Kāl[73]

In 1896, Dineshchandra Sen published his magnum opus *Baṅga Bhāṣā o Sāhitya*. There, he referred to the literary production of the royal court at Nadia as the "era of Krishna Chandra" (*Kṛṣṇacandrīya yuga*), collating the literary production of the court of Nadia with what historians perceived were the decadent times of the eighteenth century. After Nyāẏaratna, the court of Nadia, and Bharatchandra in particular, were to become an inflection in the Bengali literary timeline, but in a different way. In 1911, Dineshchandra Sen offered a description of Nadia and its courtly literary production in a series of lectures he gave on the very subject that had made him famous: the development and history of Bengali literature. For Sen, the Nadia royal court and its cultural achievements were the embodiment of the politically and morally troubled times of the eighteenth century, a trope commonly found in colonial and nationalist historiography. In a section called "The court of Raja Krishna Chandra of Nadia. Vitiated Classical taste and word-painting," he explained the following:

[73]Rāj Nārāẏaṇ Basu, *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣā O Sāhitya Biṣaẏak Baktṛtā* (Kalikātā: Natūn Bāṅgālā Yantra, 1879).

> Thus in the style of poetry as well as in its spirit, the court literature of Bengal presents a striking difference to the earlier Bengali works. The style and the spirit both became depraved–the former by a vain-glorious pedantry which made descriptions grotesque by their over-drawn niceties, the serious often passing into the burlesque–and the latter by scurrilous obscenities grosser than anything in Sterne, Smollet or Wycherley and by the introduction of characters like those of Hirā mālinī and Vidu Brāhmini–accessories to illicit love of the most revolting type.[74]

Sen's description of the cultural life of Nadia at the end of the eighteenth century encapsulates roundly the nineteenth century engagement with Bengal's medieval past. For the nineteenth century Hindu Bengali cultured class, Nadia and its courtly production crystallized a contradictory approach to the medieval past, for these intellectuals had an overarching vision of Nadia as a place of cultural decay and at the same time, the cultural achievements of the court served as model. It is exactly in these narratives, where the literary and the past were discussed and conceptualized, that we see periodization and medievalism at work. After Sen's lectures on Bengali literature, the long and predominantly romantic engagement of *bhadralok* culture with the literary, cultural and political premodern past of Bengal gave way to a more institutionalized approach to the subject.[75]

The triumph of chronology: the discovery of Old Bengali (1890-1920)

In 1907, while on a research excursion across the Eastern provinces, scouring cities for old books and manuscripts, the scholar Haraprasad Shastri came across some strange manuscripts in the Durbar library in Nepal. Haraprasad Shastri, a 'traditional' Sanskrit scholar by training who had received the *upādhi* of 'Mahāmahopadhyāya' in 1898, had become librarian of

[74]Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History Of Bengali Language And Literature* (1911), 621.

[75]See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Romantic Archives: Literature and the Politics of Identity in Bengal," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004): for an analysis of this period and the emotional investment of *bhadraloks* into Bengali literature. The end of this period had to do with the rise of a professionalized discipline of Bengali language history and literature.

the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1885, following the steps of the Bengali scholar Rajendralal Mitra, who had been among the first Indians to enter the ranks of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta.[76] His duties as librarian included collecting and cataloguing manuscripts obtained by different scholars throughout Bengal, which gave him the opportunity to acquaint himself with the old literature of the region. It was his position in the Asiatic society that led him to the Durbar library in Nepal, a place he had visited a couple of years before. However, the 1907 trip would prove radically different.

The manuscripts, four in total written in Newari script, contained a host of miscellaneous verses, songs in reality, since each composition had a peculiar rhythm mentioned at the heading of each one, with a similar theme: the doctrines and teachings of what appeared to be a branch of Buddhist esoteric tradition. The first manuscript, containing 47 songs by about 23 authors, was called *Āścaryacaryācaya* or "The Collection of Marvelous Teachings," as per the fourteenth century Sanskrit commentary by someone named Munidatta that accompanied it. The rest of the manuscripts, the *Dōhā-kōṣa* of Saraha, the *Dōhā-kōṣa* of Kānha and the *Ḍākārṇava*, similar in subject to the *Āścaryacaryācaya*, were written in different dialects of the Apabhraṁśa language. Importantly, though the languages of the four manuscripts were different, the tradition itself referred to the almost incomprehensible jargon, which was both highly technical and highly esoteric, in which they were written as *sandhyā bhāṣā*, which could be translated as either 'twilight language,' from the Sanskrit word 'sandhyā,' juncture and by extension the period connecting day and night: twilight; or 'intentional language,' derived from Sanskrit *sam/+/dhā*.[77] The latter is more accepted as the correct one. The designation of *sandhyā-bhāṣā* for esoteric language was very well known even at the time of the discovery of the manuscripts. Not only did the Sanskrit commentary of the *Āścaryacaryācaya* and the commentary of the *Dohākoṣa* of Saraha make reference to *sandhyā-bhāṣā*, this same expression was found in older and well-known Buddhist texts as

[76]For the rise of the "native" scholar and the professionalization of philology, history and archaeology in nineteenth century British India see Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, 87.

[77]Zbavitel, *Bengali Literature*, 129.

the *Samādhirāja Sutra* (ca. second century CE) and the *Hevajra-tantra* (date uncertain.)[78] It was the first manuscript, the songs under the so-called *Āścaryacaryācaya* collection, that triggered a revolution in the history of Bengali language and literature.

After years of study, Haraprasad Shastri, without fully mastering the contents of the manuscript, came to the conclusion that what he had found in the Durbar Library was indeed the oldest form of Bengali language. He published the four manuscripts with a preliminary study and the Sanskrit commentary of the *Āścaryacaryācaya*, which he renamed as *Caryācaryaviniścaya* or "The Ascertainment of Good and Bad Practice."[79] He titled his book, which appeared in 1916, *Hājār bacarer purāṇa bāṅgālā bhāṣāẏ bauddhagān o dohā,* "Buddhist Songs and Couplets in a Thousand-year Old Bengali language," and though his reading of the songs and their abstruse meanings was not fully accurate, the major point that he wanted to drive home was that Bengali language was older than what the scholars and the public thought.

No other text or inscription had been found that was as old as the *caryāpad*, as these songs came to be popularly known after their discovery, seemed to be, especially since most Bengali manuscripts held in public and private collections in Bengal had been copied in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, a fact easily corroborated thanks to the copyist's signature found in most manuscripts. In 1926, Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, professor at Calcutta University, in his magnum opus, "Origin and Development of the Bengali Language," authoritatively established, after a morphological analysis of the *caryāpadas* and a comparison with other Apabhraṁśa dialects, that "the language of the caryas is the genuine vernacular of Bengal at its basis."[80] The identification of the language of this manuscript as the oldest form of Bengali language was mostly a philological and linguistic matter, but it was further shored up by the subject matter of the Bengali manuscript and the other three manuscripts found together.

[78]Muhammad Shahidullah, *Les chants mystiques de Kānha et de Saraha: les Dohākosa (en apabhraṃśa, avec les versions tibétaines) et les Caryā (en vieux-bengali) avec introduction, vocabulaires et notes*, Textes pour l'étude du bouddhisme tardif (Paris: Adrien-Maison-neuve, 1928), 9.

[79]Muhammad. Shahidullah, *Buddhist Mystic Songs, Oldest Bengali and Other Eastern Vernaculars.* (Dacca: Bengali Academy, 1966), i.

[80]Chatterji, *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, 115.

As a secondary subject of interest, Shastri's finding gave rise to a host of publications that dealt with the history and doctrines of esoteric Buddhism. These manuscripts attracted the attention of scholars studying Buddhist theology and history. However, despite the prospects that these new-found texts opened up for the study of late articulations of Buddhism as a living religion in India before the Islamic invasions suppressed Buddhism "by fire and sword," and even despite Shastri's personal interest in Buddhism's legacy and afterlife in Eastern India, the centerpiece of the *caryāpads*' discovery remained the question of the antiquity of the Bengali language.[81] Even for a book like Muhammad Shahidullah's *"Les chants mystiques,*" a study, translation and edition of the *caryāpads* undertaken as a doctoral thesis in Paris, the kernel of the discussion had to be the origin of the Bengali language, of which the *caryāpads* could offer glimpses. On top of being a morphological, grammatical and even phonological analysis of the language of the *caryāpad*, Shahidullah's book was also an introduction and a deeper reading of the esoteric doctrines of the songs. Shahidullah's endeavor to try to fully comprehend the text of the *caryās* led him to learn Tibetan, since translations of *caryā* songs—especially of songs by Kānha and Saraha—are present in the *Tengyur* Tibetan canon. Yet, as it was duly noted by Jules Bloch, the editor of the book and the supervisor of Shahidullah's doctoral dissertation, Shahidullah was "first of all, a linguist; and it is the linguist who is, actually, engaged to a full extent with the unsettling texts that date at the period of constitution of the Bengali language. It is in order to clarify the history or prehistory of his mother tongue that M. Shahidullah has become a Tibetanist, a Buddhologist, and in a certain way, a historian."[82]

It was clear to scholars that the songs, which later came to be known simply as *caryāpad* or just *caryā* (in the singular), pointed to a *terminus post quem* for the origin of Bengali

[81]Haraprasad Sastri, *Discovery Of Living Buddhism In Bengal* (1897), 3. In this work Shastri presents evidence for what he thought was a living Buddhist tradition in Bengal. Up to that point, scholars and the public in general believed in the theory of" death by (Islamic) sword" to explain the disappearance of Buddhism as a practiced, living religion in the land that saw its birth. For a historiographical analysis of this pervasive myth, see Audrey Truschke, "The Power of the Islamic Sword in Narrating the Death of Indian Buddhism," *History of Religions* 57, no. 4 (January 1, 2018): 406–435.

[82]Jules Bloch in Shahidullah, *Les chants mystiques de Kānha et de Saraha*, xi.

language, or at least an early stage of it, but one that was definitely identifiable as Bengali. The oldest text known to Bengali scholars at that time was the fourteenth century *Srī-Kṛṣṇa-kīrtana* of Baḍu Caṇḍīdās, which had been recently discovered in a cowshed in the Bankura region in 1910.[83] The *caryāpads*, however, were not at the same stage, either morphologically or thematically, as the *Srī-Kṛṣṇa-kīrtana*. The latter was composed by the end of the fourteenth century, and while it was a text unique in character and morphological features of the language, there was a visible connection with the later tradition of Vaishnava *padāvalīs* (collection of verses) singing the glories of the *līlā* of Krishna and Radha. It was determined, by looking at the morphology of the language and by studying the Tibetan *Tengyur* canon where some of these songs have been preserved, that the *caryapads* had a *terminus post-quem* around the year 1200 CE, 150 years before the *Srī-Kṛṣṇa-kīrtana*.

From then on, the *caryāpad* became the absolute anchorage point in history for Bengali language and, importantly, for the literary history of Bengali. Starting with Harapasad Shastri, and then fully crystallized in Suniti Kumar Chatterjee's book, the periodization of Bengali language and Bengali literary history was fixed and divided into three broad periods: Old, Middle and Modern Bengali. Later literary histories adhered to this periodization: Sukumar Sen's monumental collection *Bāṅgālā Sāhityer Itihās* (first edition 1940) started with the evolution of Bengali language from Prakrit, making a reference to the *caryāpads* and with the birth of Bengali culture in the Sena period.[84] J.C. Ghosh's *Bengali Literature* (1948) divided the chronology into three periods, named after the principal city of the period in question but nonetheless the same periodization scheme is there.[85] Muhammad Shahidullah's *Bāṅglā sāhityer kathā* (first edition 1953) also starts with the 'old' period that was identified with the development of Bengali language as a different language from the Prakrit *Avahaṭṭa* and whose main literary artifact were the *caryā* songs.[86]

The definitive positioning of chronology as the organizational principle of Bengali liter-

[83]D'Hubert, "Literary History of Bengal," 9.
[84]Sukumar Sen, *Bāṅgālā sāhityera itihāsa.*, [4. saṃskaraṇa] (Kalikātā: Ishṭārṇ Pābaliśārs, 1961).
[85]Ghosh, *Bengali Literature.*
[86]Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bāṃlā Sāhityera Kathā* (Ḍhākā: M. Safiyyullah, 1963).

ature took place when Haraprasad Shastri discovered the *caryās* in 1907. This discovery meant that Bengali language and literature were treated as almost the same entity, with a natural history that managed to support several claims, like a claim of antiquity but also an organic evolution through time whose endpoint was literary modernity, and thus, the nation. The historicality of languages was a development of the eighteenth century and, as Thomas Trautmann has famously claimed, it involved the colonial study of India's own tradition of language analysis.[87] Moreover, mainly because the history of languages was thought as something similar to a familial history, that is, a having genetic relationships between languages, language history came to be viewed as the history of a living being, as a biography, with birth, development and, ultimately, death.[88] That Bengali language and Bengali literature came to be seen as the same, almost biological, entity can be seen in the kind of literary histories that were written after the discovery of the *caryā*, which were just the final development of a process initiated by the harsh critics of Bharatchandra, like Dineshchandra Sen. Suddenly, the question of the 'naturality' of the *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* verses the artificiality of Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar* acquired new, biologicist, tones. Thus, it was easier, more natural, to discard Bharatchandra's experiments with Bengali language and Sanskrit poetics as vitiated, depraved attempts born out of a decayed cultural milieu as the Nadia raj was perceived.

This chapter began arguing that the localization and construction of the literary past of premodern Bengal should not be treated as the mere outcome of periodization. Modern scholars discussing Bengali literary modernity have mainly focused on the relationship between nationalist sentiments and the development of a historical, disciplinary understanding of the literary past of Bengal. They have focused mainly on the processes, ideologies, and

[87]Trautmann, *Languages and Nations*, especially chapter two.

[88]Sheldon Pollock has pointed to this language ideology developed in the eighteenth century, noting the woeful inadequacy of explaining cultural change through the metaphors and ideas of biological change. Pollock presents a set of concepts, like literization and literarization, which imply a complex set of material and social phenomena, to account for the process of vernacularization. Though Pollock also carefully reminds us that not all changes in language can be explained through a voluntarist model. Sheldon. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 499–501.

ideations that nurtured the imagination of a particular literary past for Bengal, one in which the (Hindu) nation always existed. This chapter has taken a different track. It turned to texts written between 1780 and 1870 to argue that distinct senses of the literary past of Bengal emerged around the figure of Bharatchandra, positing him and his poems, and not a chronological divide, as the locus in which past and present were articulated in Bengal. This chapter argued that chronology should not be used as a scholarly explanation to describe Bengali modernity's engagement with its literary past. Rather, it is chronology—that is, the transformation of the different temporalities of Bengali literature into non-discontinuous time, into history—that which needs to be explained historically.

Conclusion: Jayadeva and the literary history of Bengal

In 1948, Jyotish Chandra Ghosh, a student from Bengal who had earned a doctorate at Oxford University, published in London a concise book on the literary history of Bengali language, titled simply *Bengali Literature*.[89] The book covered the history of Bengali literature from the first attested texts written in Bangla–the twelfth century Buddhist *cāryapadas*—up to the year 1900, right at the appearance of the towering figure of Rabindranath Tagore in the literary landscape of Bengal. The only novelty that Ghosh introduced in his book was more cosmetic than conceptual. Ghosh decided to periodize his literary history according to the name of the three cities that, according to him, had been the most prominent and influential in a given period. Therefore, we have in Ghosh's periodization three epochs: the Gaur, the Nadiya, and the Calcutta periods, which are roughly equivalent to the Old, Middle and Modern periods of other literary histories of Bengal. Yet, Ghosh's periodizing efforts extended the idea of the Nadiya period beyond the textual production of the royal court of Krishnachandra, engulfing any kind of literature produced in Bengali and in the central region of Bengal roughly from 1500 CE to 1800 CE under this category, despite clear

[89]Ghosh, *Bengali Literature*.

stylistic and thematic differences between works.[90] In reality, what Ghosh's uncritical use of these literary and historical periods reveals is a crystallization of a particular understanding of time and its relation to the literary history of Bengal: a teleological and historicist conceptualization of the development of the literary field in Bengal paired with an idea of time in which time becomes the necessary condition of production of literature, thus making the idea that Bengali literature developed chronologically through the consecutive old, middle and modern periods, as if these periods were a function of time and literature themselves.

As stated in the introduction, this chapter has shown the imbricated process of imagining chronology and periodization for Bengali literary history on one hand, and the important role of the literary production of the Nadia Raj—especially of the poet Bharatchandra—in these processes. This is not to say that there was no sense of time or temporalities in Bengali literature prior to the period analyzed here. Temporality, however, was not rooted in chronology, but in a notion of indebtedness to past poets. In large poetic compendiums of Vaishnava verses, it is common to find verses that allude to this relationship across time, creating a sense of shared temporality with poets as old as the twelfth-century Sanskrit poet Jayadeva, who had a major role in constituting the tradition of religious songs about Krishna and Radha in Bengal, touching upon the poet Baḍu Caṇḍīdās, and the fifteenth-century Maithili poet Vidyāpati.[91] See, for example the following verse found in the *Padakalpataru*, a compendium of Vaishnava verses collected by Vaishnava-Dasa in the late eighteenth century:

jaya jaẏadeva kavinṛpati-śiromaṇi vidyāpati rasa-dhāma /
jaẏa jaẏa caṇḍidāsa rasa-śekhara akhila-bhuvane anupāma //
yākara racita madhura-rasa niramala gadya-padyamaya gīta /
prabhu mora gaura-candra āsvādilā rāẏa svarūpa sahita//

Glory to Jayadeva, the jewel and king of poets, glory to Vidyāpati, the abode of

[90]For example, the Vaishnava production during this period had little in common with Bharatchandra's courtly literature, yet they both get treated under the Nadiya/Middle period.

[91]See for example Jesse Knutson, *Into the Twilight of Sanskrit Court Poetry: The Sena Salon of Bengal and Beyond*, South Asia across the Disciplines (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 89-114, for a discussion on Caṇḍīdās's positioning towards Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda*.

rasa
Glory to Caṇḍidāsa, the crown of rasa, peerless in the whole world
Their compositions, prose, verses and songs, pure and of sweet rasa
My Lord Gauracandra [Chaitanya] enjoys, together with Svarūpta and Rāy[92]

In these verses we can see a trope in Vaishnava literature, that Chaitanya loved to listen to these kind of literary production along with his companions Svarūpa Dāmodara and Rāmānanda Rāẏ.[93] It was said that Chaitanya listened to these verses not as a *rasika* but as a *bhakta*, and thus one could argue that the sense of temporality here is more of a timelessness situation where Chaitanya and his followers are experiencing these verses as if in the eternal and utopic site of *Gupta Vṛndāvan*. But there was indeed a sense of temporal indebtedness in the tradition, beyond Chaitanya's own take on it. Famously, Vidyāpati was granted his native village Bisapī by the king Shivasimha, of the Ainwar dynasty in Mithila. In the copper plate where this gift is granted, the king bestowed upon Vidyāpati not only these lands, but the title of *abhinava-Jayadeva*, the new Jayadeva.[94] Thus, we can see that a sense of temporality has existed in Bengali literature, but one that was not rooted in periodization nor chronology. If we understand chronology, following Prathama Banerjee, as "a numerical structure whose primary imperative was not so much to thematize temporality as to ensure continuity and succession and thus, to institute identity as sameness through time," then it is clear that chronology is not a function of literature and time.[95]

However, scholars have not problematized the usage and birth of chronology and periodization, treating it as a linear, natural history. For example, Rosinka Chaudhuri provides a quick summary on the history of literary history of Bengali language and remarks:

> One of the first histories of Bengali literature in the European model is to be found in Ramgati Nyayaratna's *Bāṅgālā bhāṣā o bāṅgālā sāhitya viśaẏak prastāva*

[92]Satīśa Candra Rāya, *Śrī Śrī padakalpataru: arthāt, padakarttā Baishṇabadāsera saṅkalita*, vol. saṃ. 5, Sāhitya-parishad-granthābalī ; (Kalikātā: Baṅgiya-Sāhitya-Parishad-Mandira, 1322), vol. I, 12, v. 15.

[93]Ānandamohana. Basu, *Bāṃlā padābalīra chanda.* ([Bolapura]: [Pāramitā Prakāśana], 1968), 15.

[94]Pankaj Jha, *A Political History of Literature: Vidyapati and the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford University Press), 20; Nyāẏaratna also conveys this information, though he gives the title as *navajayadeva*. Nyāẏaratna, *Bāṅgālā Bhāshā*, 26.

[95]Banerjee, *Politics of Time*, 42.

> in 1872, succeeding Iswar Gupta's differently ordered, albeit pioneering efforts towards the collection and publication of the lives of poets between 1855 and 1859. Pending further discussion, suffice to say that this genre of the professional history of the literature of Bengal found its greatest exponent in the figure of Dīneśchandra Sen, whose nationalist Banga bhasha o sahitya in 1896 was the precursor to a whole field of the histories of Bengali language and literature produced by academics of great distinction and perspicacity. From Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay to Sukumar Sen to Asitkumar Bandyopadhyay, the story of the evolution of the Bengali language and its literature was often told in multi-volume works extending from the twelfth-century Caryapad onward into the present age.[96]

From this paragraph, it would seem that a single thread unites the effort of collecting old verses undertaken by Ishwarchandra Gupta in the first half of the nineteenth century and the deep morphological analysis and comparison of the oldest form of Bengali language in the *caryās* with other New Indo-Aryan languages carried out by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee in the 1920s. Of course, the history of the literary history of Bengali, starting in the nineteenth century and spilling over into the twentieth, is a history of institutionalization and professionalization of history, literature and philology. However, the categories, concepts and heuristic devices that scholars and institutions deployed on the literary, cultural and political past of Bengal—its periodization, for example—were not *a priori*, natural categories to which scholars had direct access. Paraphrasing Prathama Banerjee on her book about the conceptualization of the 'primitive' in Bengali historiography, this chapter addresses the idea of chronology as the presumption of Bengali literary history, and turns it into the problematic.[97]

[96]Chaudhuri, *The Literary Thing*, 24.
[97]Banerjee, *Politics of Time*, 236.

Chapter 5

Ancient Thieves, New Sensibilities? The *Vidyāsundar* Tradition at the Crossroads of Temporalities

One day, the Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824 - 1873) found himself on his way to Krishnanagar on the invitation of the *Rājā* of Nadia, Satiścandra Ray, descendant of the famed *Rājā* Krishnachandra Ray. There, among platters full of sweetmeats, promenades in the palace courtyard, and nights full of rituals devoted to the goddess, Michael felt as if he had gone back in time a hundred years. On another occasion, Michael and the *Rājā* went out for a walk. When they returned to the palace, the *Rājā* entered first, followed by Michael. Stopping at the entrance, Michael realized that this scene had most probably played out many times before in that same location, and he felt the urge to share his thoughts with his host: "I see Krishna Chandra followed by Bharatchandra." From inside, the *Rājā*

replied: "For a long time, Bharatchandra was considered by us the most prominent Bengali poet, but now you have snatched that place for yourself." While this reply made Michael happy, he was not fully satisfied. Michael had been for most of his youth an acerbic critic of Bharatchandra and his literary style, but in his later years he came to admire the old poet. Nevertheless, even when hatred turned into admiration, Michael still thought of himself as the greater poet. Thus, trying not to lag behind his putative rival and thinking of all the riches (or so he thought) that Krishnachandra had bestowed upon Bharatchandra, Michael could not help but add: "Your family gave Bharatchandra 30,000 rupees in land, what are you going to give me?"[1]

Michael embodied the two attitudes that the nineteenth-century Bengali intelligentsia had towards Bharatchandra in particular, and to courtly literature of premodern Bengal in general. On one hand, the sheer number of editions and copies printed of the *Vidyāsundar* shows that Bharatchandra's most famous work was an editorial success throughout the nineteenth century.[2] Even literary historians like Dineshchandra Sen and Romesh Chandra Dutt, among others, recognized Bharatchandra's poetical prowess. On the other hand, sometimes the same scholars who would profess a certain fascination with Bharatchandra would at the same time chastise him for being part of a depraved culture. In many cases, the nineteenth-century scholars had a terse relationship with Bharatchandra, at the same time admiring and condemning him and his work. This was part of the transformations under the pressure of colonial modernity of the cultured circles of Bengal: it created a literary field composed of old and new Bengali literature and which became an important component of the *bhadralok* investment in the cultural past of Bengal. This investment

[1]Basu, *Kabi Bhāratacandra*, 72.

[2]We saw in the previous chapter that the literary and intellectual engagement with Bharatchandra's works started quite early, around twenty years after Bharatchandra composed his *Annadāmaṅgal*, as can be seen in Halhed's copious use of verses taken from the poem to illustrate some points of Bengali grammar in his book. In print history, the *Vidyāsundar* started its modern journey in 1816, the year a Bengali man named Gangakishore Bhattacharya published the first native edition of the poem. After that, many different editions followed. The archival work that Ishwarchandra Gupta carried out in the 1850s started a transformation in the editorial history of Bharatchandra, for subsequent editions integrated into the publication the biography that Gupta had penned of the poet. For an insightful analysis of the *Vidyāsundar* in the book history of South Asia, see Roy, *Print and Publishing in Colonial Bengal*.

found fertile ground in the historical and literary medieval past of Bengal to try and claim a unified Bengali (mainly Hindu) identity.[3] For example, Dineshchandra Sen offered in 1911 the following description of the *Vidyāsundar*, already mentioned in the previous chapter.

For Sen, the courtly literature in Bengal at the end of the eighteenth century was mainly decadent, despite some redeeming features. The inclusion of what was thought as Persian influence in literature was a rather glaring sign of this corrupt world. Yet, the Persian influence was not the only culprit of this decadence. Sen thought that the whole world of courtly culture was a deviation from the truly medieval literature of Bengal, the literature of the folk; even the courtly literature with Sanskritic influence did not fare well in Sen's eyes, for what was rotten at the core for Sen was the reliance on "depraved" scenes to lure readers.[4]

Modern scholarship has focused its attention on this last aspect, on how the Bengali colonial modernity viewed medieval, courtly Bengali literature's nature as based and lewd, especially when dealing with the history of the *Vidyāsundar*. Tithi Bhattacharya, for example, describes how the printing industry in the nineteenth century gradually transformed Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar* from being a part of the *Annadāmaṅgal* into a book of its own, which had important consequences for the book itself, for it transformed the readership of the text, focusing it on the erotic scenes as a way to prop up sales.[5] While the erotic scenes in Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar* might have been a factor in the high number of reprints

[3]See below for a discussion on this point *vis à vis* the *maṅgalkāvya* genre and the perceived differences with Bharatchandra.

[4]"Not only the Naiṣādha Charitra, but Daśakumāra Charitra, Harṣa Charitra and other Sanskrit works admired in this period, abound with passages like the above, and these served as models to the Bengali writers who were in the immediate influence of the courts, and they themselves began to regale on niceties which now seems so absurd to us. The Persian poems which were favored in this age, also contain long drawn-out similes verging on the ridiculous, and the nobleman and scholars, who prided themselves on a vain-glorious pedantry, encouraged our poets to introduce similar artificial compositions in Bengali." Sen, *History Of Bengali Language And Literature*, 618.

[5]Tithi Bhattacharya, *The Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal (1848-85)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 115; however, the division of the long poem into its three constituent parts seems to predate print culture. A manuscript of the *Vidyāsundar* in the National Library of France confirms this. I thank Prof. Thibaut d'Hubert for alerting me to this fact. Bhāratcandra Rāy, "Vidyāsundara, Ou Kālikāmaṅgala, Par Bhāratacandra Rāya Guṇākara" (Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. Indien 719, 1801).

the text saw during the nineteenth century, it was certainly not the only component for its enduring presence in the public arena. For example, as we saw in the previous chapter, the *Vidyāsundar* of Bharatchandra became a site of debate for budding ideas of periodization, a place where scholars experimented with notions of 'old' and 'new.' The style of the poem, deemed either innovative or stagnant, was one of the main points of contention in the discussion of conceptualizing the old and the new.

This chapter shifts the attention from the *bhadralok* discussion on the perceived moral qualities of the poem and its reception in Hindu Bengali society to the socio-textual history of Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar* itself. Different from a history of the *Vidyāsundar* as a book or its print history, like Tapti Roy's recent book, I understand a socio-textual history of the *Vidyāsundar* as comprising also the ways the text was read and the evolution in its readership. The centrality of Bharatchandra's poem in *bhadralok* discussions about medieval moral values has somewhat occluded an important aspect of the poem's own textual history, that the poem was in fact part of a long literary tradition of writing and reappraising, in Sanskrit and in vernacular languages, the story of the *Vidyāsundar*. Rather than focusing on the genealogy of Bharatchandra's composition, I highlight the tensions in the modern understanding of authorship and translation of these Bengali and Sanskrit *Vidyāsundars* to show how these texts and the textual tradition to which they belonged were marginalized in drafting the textual history of Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar*. These tensions, I argue, were central to the conceptualization and writing of Bengali literary history and the idea of the middle ages in Bengal during the late nineteenth century.

A caveat on the methods and approach to texts in this chapter is in order. What I offer here is an interpretative approach rather than one based on textual criticism. Moreover, while the question about the language and style of Bharatchandra was at the center of nineteenth-century scholarly discussions about the periodization of medieval Bengali literature, my interpretation here is not based on literary criticism either. This means that the archival work that I undertook for this chapter was not based on doing a textual history in the

usual sense of the term. Thus, for the most part I relied on published modern editions of premodern texts. This is partly because what I am interested in here, the reading history of Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar vis à vis* other poems in the same tradition, was made more or less explicit by the authors in their own texts.[6]

A brief history of the *Vidyāsundar* in Eastern South Asia

The *Vidyāsundar* narrates the exploits and mishaps of two young lovers, the Princess Vidyā and Prince Sundar, in their quest to be allowed to be together. In Bharatchandra's poem, the story takes place in the district of Bardhaman (presently called Burdwan), a district neighboring Nadia to the West.[7] There, Princess Vidyā (Sanskrit: wisdom, magic or incantation), the daughter of king Virasimha of Bardhaman, had sworn that she would only marry the man who could defeat her in scholarly debate. When Sundar (Sanskrit: beautiful), who was a Prince of Kanchi in South India, learnt about the beauty of Vidyā, he decided to win her heart, so he packed jewels, a parrot and some manuscripts, which highlights the presentation of Sundar not only as a heroic, handsome Prince, but as a scholar as well. Arrived at Bardhaman, Sundar gets the help of a woman who sells flowers at the palace to send a Sanskrit poem hidden in a garland to Vidyā. It is the wittiness of the poem which captures the mind of the Princess Vidyā, again signaling that there is more to the attraction between

[6]This interpretative approach has another cause. My archival work was limited to the archives I could access in the United Kingdom, due to the heavy travel restrictions in place for most of my research time. Nevertheless, I do not feel this has hampered my argument: the UK archives and especially the British Library allowed me to consult several published editions of the *Annadāmaṅgal*, where I could see in some of the editorial choices the enactment and tensions of the textual history that I am trying to present here, both modern and premodern, of Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar*. It is the tension between this reading history and the way the nineteenth century tried to make sense of it which forms the core argument of this chapter.

[7]During his life, Bharatchandra ran into several problems with the *rājās* of Bardhaman. According to Ishwar Gupta, Bharatchandra's family was dispossessed of their lands by the powerful *Rājā* of Bardhaman. This forced Bharatchandra to seek employment elsewhere, and for some time traveled around Bengal for this reason. It was in Chandernagore, the French town and garrison, that *Rājā* Krishnachandra met Bharatchandra. Amazed by his poetical prowess, Krishnachandra invited the poet to reside at his court. According to some, in composing the *Vidyāsundar* Bharatchandra sought revenge against the *Rājā* of Bardhaman by placing the story there.

the two lovers than just physical appeal. Or rather, that scholarly intelligence and wittiness is conducive to tremendous passion, since the poem abounds with quite explicit sexual and erotic imagery when the two young lovers manage to get together.[8] Through a tunnel that was excavated from the flower seller woman's house to the palace, thanks to a boon from the goddess Kali, Sundar and Vidyā can meet every night. Married through the *gāndharva* rite, the Princess becomes pregnant and the king, her father, sets off to find out who the intruder is.[9] Through some ruse, Sundar is captured and brought to trial, deemed a *cor*, a thief. At this point, Sundar recites some Sanskrit verses that follow a particular formula: they all start with the phrase *adyāpi*, "even today," and are meant to convey the longing of the thief for his beloved. Importantly, these verses address and praise at the same time three different subjects: the goddess Kali, the scholarly endeavor, and the beauty of the Princess, all by referring in the Sanskrit verses to *Vidyā*.[10] The thief of love then addresses Kali directly through the recitation of a *cautiśā*.[11] At the end, the execution is cancelled when the true identity of Prince Sundar is revealed. The king accepts him as his lawful son-in-law, and the young lovers remain together and eventually move to Sundar's kingdom.

[8]This is the poem: *vasudhā vasunā loke vandate mandajātijam \ karabhoru ratiprajñe dvitīye pañcame-hapyaham*, "in this world, the earth honors a person because of their wealth even of an inferior birth. Woman with beautiful thighs and knowledgeable in passion, I am here in the second and fifth." The poem is described by Bharatchandra as a *citrakāvya*. In Sanskrit literary culture, a *citrakavyā* could be one of two things: a poem considered as a low form of poetical composition due to being *avyaṅgyam* or devoid of suggestion. See *Kāvyaprakāśa* 1.4-5 for the classification of high and low forms of poetical forms. It could also describe poems whose syllables form some kind of visual design. Most probably Bharatchandra refers to this last meaning in his poem.Bhāratcandra Rāẏa, *Bhāratacandra-granthābalī*, 235

[9]The definition of the *gāndharva* marriage can be found in Manu's code 3.32. This is Patrick Olivelle's translation: "When the girl and the groom have sex with each other voluntarily,that is the Gāndharva marriage based on sexual union and originating from love." Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, *Manu's code of law: a critical edition and translation of Manava-Dharmasastra* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 110.

[10]More on these Sanskrit verses below.

[11]A *cautiśā* is an acrostic poem in which each line starts with one of the thirty-four consonants of the Indic alphabet. As Thibaut d'Hubert has argued, the presence or absence of some letters has to do with the place that Sanskrit had in the literary and cultural horizon of the poet composing the *cautiśā*, which meant that in some cases the arrangement of letters in a *cautiśā* often followed the phonology of the vernacular.Thibaut d'Hubert, *Meaningful Rituals: Persian, Arabic and Bengali in the Nūrnāma Tradition of Eastern Bengal* (Primus Books, forthcoming), 14 In Bharatchandra's case, the *cautiśā* follows closely the arrangement of the Sanskrit alphabet. Bharatchandra starts with the letter *a* and finishes with the composite letter 'kṣ,' which is not unusual in a *cautiśā*. However, unlike other *cautiśās*, Bharatchandra's has the three sibilants and the three nasals of the Sanskrit alphabet, which shows the centrality of Sanskrit literary culture in his own compositions.

As Thibaut d'Hubert has pointed out, the *Vidyāsundar* is a quintessential courtly poem that stresses the "cultural refinement and distinction through knowledge and wit" of the courtiers.[12] While Bharatchandra's became in the nineteenth century the most well-known version of it, in reality the *Vidyāsundar* was a poem with a courtly tradition spanning several centuries. There are at least eighteen versions of the poem known so far, the oldest one attested to around 1532 CE. This poem was written by a poet named Dvija Śrīdhara, apparently at the behest of Alauddin Firuz Shah (r. 1533 CE, but only for a couple of months), son of Nasrat Shah (r. 1519-1533), and grandson of the Bengal Sultan Hussain Shah (r. 1494-1519), founder of the Hussain Shahi dynasty. The manuscript was collected in Chittagong by the philologist Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad, who noted its bad state of conservation, since a good portion of the poem was not extant, though it was later found complete in Nepal[13] Another incomplete *Vidyāsundar* poem by a poet named Śā'bārid Khān was also collected by the same scholar in Chittagong.[14] Ahmed Sharif notes in the *Granthāvalī* edition of Śā'bārid Khān's poems (all collected in Chittagong, all incomplete at the time of collection) that, thanks to the historical information about Gaur and Arakan contained in the poem it could be determined that the poem was probably composed between 1517 at the earliest, and 1586 CE.[15] Thibaut d'Hubert argues that Śrīdhara's text was reworked by Śābārid Khān, which "illustrates the transmission of literary practices from Husayn Shahi courtly circles to Arakan, which became a major center of Middle Bengali literary production in the mid-seventeenth century."[16] A manuscript recently discovered in the Durbar library of Nepal contains the complete text of Śrīdhara's *Vidyāsundar*, but the title has been changed to *Vidyāvinoda* or *Vidyāvilāpa*; both names occur in this manuscript.[17] The manuscript was

[12]D'Hubert, "Literary History of Bengal."

[13]Abdul Karim Sāhitya-biśārad, "Gauḍreśvarer Ādeśe Racita Bidyāsundar," *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* xliv, no. 1 (1937): 24.

[14]Aḥmad Sharīf, "Vidyāsundarer Kavi: Dvija Śrīdhar (1520–1532 Khṛṣṭābda) o Sābirid Khān (1517–1585 Khṛṣṭābda)," *Sāhitya Patrikā* 1, no. 1 (1957): iv.

[15]Sabirid Khan and Āhamada Śarīpha, *Śā'bārida Khānera granthābalī.* (Dhākā: Bāṅlā Ekāḍemī, 1966), iv.

[16]D'Hubert, "Literary History of Bengal."

[17]Makoto Kitada, "Bengali Drama from Nepal. Vidyāvinoda. A Romanized Text Based on the Manuscript. Report on the Research of Dramatic Manuscripts Written in Nepal of the Malla Dynasty.," April 15, 2019,

probably copied in Nepal, since it contains a mixture of Bengali, Devanagari, and Newari scripts. Thus, we can see that the *Vidyāsundar* tradition was an important component of a larger ecosystem of Middle Bengali literature.

A good number of *Vidyāsundar* poems found in eastern India are not actually stand-alone poems as Śrīdhara's or Khān's were, but they were contained within larger *maṅgalkāvya* poems dedicated to the goddess Kali. This subgenre of *maṅgalkāvya* poems is known as *Kālikāmaṅgal*. Versions of this *Kālikāmaṅgal* poem follow the main events of the story of the two young lovers delineated above, but the goddess Kali has a slightly larger presence in this tradition. Yet, beyond an initial larger presence, the goddess Kali does not intervene much in the development of the story. As Carol Salomon has noted, this meant that the poem could be turned into an eulogy for other deities, like Kaṅka's *Vidyāsundar*, whose principal deity was not Kali but the Hindu-Muslim saint Satyapīr instead.[18]

Salomon devised a taxonomy for this division, between the courtly and the more religious oriented *Vidyāsundar* poems found in the larger *Kālikāmaṅgal* poems. Salomon divides the *Vidyāsundar* poems according to the regions where most manuscripts have been found: Chittagong in Arakan, and central Bengal, the area known as Rāḍh.[19] The Chittagong tradition seems to be the oldest, with most poems dated to the sixteenth century, while in the Rāḍh tradition the manuscripts began to appear in the seventeenth century, but the majority of them were composed during the eighteenth century. Although few manuscripts of the Chittagong tradition exist now, we can surmise from recent findings that the tradition was more extended than previously thought, and that it definitely transcended the borders of Arakan. The manuscript recently discovered in the Durbar library of Nepal referenced above attests to the long line of transmission of this poem. This poem was dedicated to the king Śivasiṁha (r. 1583-1619) of the Malla dynasty in Nepal, which again points to

2.

[18]Carol Salomon and Govindadāsa, "Govindadāsa's Kālikāmaṅgal: The Vikramāditya and Vidyāsundara Sections: An Edition and Translation" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1983), 106.

[19]Salomon and Govindadāsa, 103.

its courtly character.[20] Another *Vidyāsundar* poem had been discovered in Nepal in the twentieth century, but in the form of a play and also called *Vidyāvilāpanāṭaka*.[21] It was supposedly written in Maithili by king Bhūpatīndra Malla (r. 1696-1722), as several *bhaṇitā* verses in the poem attest, and it was probably represented for the first time in 1720 CE, as indicated in the last line of the manuscript.[22] This play contains stage directions and *raga* indications, and follows many of the narrative conventions of the *Vidyāsundar* 'genre.' For example, in this *Vidyāvilāpa* the figure of the florist woman, the *mālinī*, is present and plays the role of the go-between for the two lovers, just like in Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar*. There are other similarities between recensions; the father of Princess Vidyā in both versions is called Vīrasiṁha, and Prince Sundar comes from the southern kingdom of Kanchi. However, the story takes place in Bardhaman in Bharatchandra's version, while in Bhūpatīndra's play the stage is set in Ujjain.

The similarities between recensions, specifically with Bharatchandra's version of the *Vidyāsundar*, point to a longer and wider tradition extended throughout East India, and not to a direct genealogical connection between Bharatchandra's and Bhūpatīndra's versions. Despite the many points of contact and even shared names between recensions, the *Vidyāsundar* tradition notoriously lacked self-reflexivity, except for some small gestures found in Bharatchandra's version that I will detail below. There is a distinction here to be made between self-reflexivity and acknowledgment of other *Vidyāsundars*. The latter means that there was a possibility that poets writing their own *Vidyāsundar* versions were acquainted with other versions by other authors. In fact, there are several examples that show that some *Vidyāsundar* poets did read other poets' works. The most famous example of this is Bharatchandra himself, who in his *Annadāmaṅgal* mentions the name Kālaketu,

[20]Makoto Kitada, "The Drama Vidyāvinoda by Poet Śrīdhara Found in Nepal: Probably the Earliest Bengali Version of the Vidyāsundara Story," February 17, 2021, 2.

[21]Kumar Gangananda Sinha, "On Some Maithili Dramas of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal Of The Asiatic Society Of Bengal* 20 (1924): 73–78.

[22]The last line reads "Thus concludes the seventh part of the Vidyāvilāpa Drama. On the thirteenth day on the light fortnight of the month of Bhadra of the Samvat year 840 the drama is completed." Bhūpatīndramalla, *Vidyāvilāpa; Nepālīya Maithilī nāṭaka.* (Prayaga: Akhila Bhāratīya Maithilī Sāhitya Samiti, 1965), 33.

one of the heroes in Mukundarām's *Caṇḍīmaṅgal*. Self-reflexivity, on the other hand, would mean that texts themselves were aware of the interconnected textual world of which they were part and, most importantly, of the existence of a tradition of which they were part.[23] This lack of intertextuality was not uncommon in the literary landscape of premodern Bengal. As Thibaut d'Hubert has argued, the political fragmentation of Bengal for centuries favored the development of regional literary traditions and not pan-Bengali ones, with very few exceptions. Outside the widespread use of prosodic forms like the *payār* and *tripadī*, states d'Hubert, "we see very few horizontal forms of intertextuality (i.e., from one Bengali text to another). This also appears in the total absence of what could be considered a canon of Middle Bengali poetry—each text somehow reinvented the tradition."[24]

Indications that authors possibly read other *Vidyāsundar* poems were mainly found outside the texts, like in the story that Isvarchandra Gupta unearthed about the origin of both Bharatchandra's and Ramprasad Sen's versions of the poem. As we saw in the previous chapter, the collecting endeavor drove Isvarchandra to seek the surviving families of the poets to try and collect as much information about the poets' lives as possible. It was in those archival research trips that he came to know that, according to the families, it had been Krishnachandra Ray who had directly requested both poets for a *Vidyāsundar* poem. In the case of Bharatchandra, first Krishnachandra asked for a poem like Mukundarām's *Caṇḍīmaṅgal*, another external reference to yet another textual tradition in Bengal lacking

[23] A "false positive" for self-reflexivity in the *Vidyāsundar* tradition was for decades thought to be present in Prāṇarām's version of the poem, since there was one verse at the end of it that mentioned Kṛṣṇarām's, Ramprasad Sen's and Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar* as inspiration for the poem. This led to thinking for decades that Ramprasad's poem was penned first and then Bharatchandra wrote his version, since the verse in this manuscript mentioned the order of apparition in that way. Abdul Karim, for example, refers to that verse to describe the chronology of the *Vidyāsundar* tradition. Abdul Karim, "Musalman Kabir Bidyasundar," *Bharatbarsa* i, no. 5 (1918): 633; The idea that Prāṇrām's *Vidyāsundar* was written after Bharatchandra started probably with Rāmgati Nyāyaratna and was perpetuated by Dineshchandra Sen in his work *Baṅga-bhāṣā o Sāhitya*, from which several authors have repeated this idea, even today. See for example Roy, *Print and Publishing in Colonial Bengal*, 46; however, an article published in the journal of the *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat* in 1943 showed that this was a glaring mistake. The verse containing the alleged chronological configuration of several *Vidyāsundar* poems had actually been written by the editor of the work in 1836, Rāmcandra Tarkālaṅkār Śarma, and it had been noted as such. In reality Prāṇrām had written his *Vidyāsundar* in 1666 CE. Dineshchandra Bhattacharyya, "Prāṇrām Cakrabarttīr Kālikāmaṅgal," *Sahitya Parishat Patrika* l, no. 3 (1943): 63.

[24] D'Hubert, *In the Shade of the Golden Palace*, 16.

self-reflexivity, the *maṅgalkāvya* tradition. After hearing the first part of the *Annadāmaṅgal*, Krishnachandra asked for the inclusion of a version of the *Vidyāsundar*, to which Bharatchandra complied. Although Bharatchandra and Ramprasad may have written their respective texts around the same time but maybe not exactly at the same moment, it is not known who did it first. But we can see that, whoever did it second, was aware of the first, since both poems locate the action of the story in neighboring Bardhaman (Burdwan, West Bengal), a significant departure from other versions of the poem. Only another *Vidyāsundar* placed the story in Bardhaman, that of Rādhākānta Miśra, a native of Calcutta who composed in 1767 CE a somewhat different version of a *Kālikāmaṅgal* poem, called *Śyāmār saṅgīt*.[25] However, this lack of self-referentiality in the *Vidyāsundar* tradition would give way to important questions during the nineteenth century about origins, authorship and the character of courtly literature in the premodern past of Bengal, which would come to qualify Bharatchandra's poetry as derivative and unnatural, as opposed to the naturality of the *maṅgalkāvya* tradition. In order to better understand the arguments presented against Bharatchandra in the nineteenth century, I explore in the next section the larger textual ecosystem in which the *Vidyāsundar* tradition was inserted.

Sanskrit Thieves: The *Caurapañcāśikā* tradition in South Asia

The *Vidyāsundar* tradition in Eastern India developed from the sixteenth till the nineteenth century, with most poems following the story delineated above and more or less keeping the same names for the characters and places. But this tradition had some sort of genealogical connection with a larger and older pan-Indian Sanskrit textual tradition, that of the *Caurapañcāśikā*, in that certain characteristics of the story and the place these texts held in courtly culture were similar. The Sanskrit *Caurapañcāśikā* (from here on, the *Caura*) usually

[25]Salomon and Govindadāsa, "Govindadāsa's Kālikāmaṅgal," 103.

attributed to the Kashmiri poet Bilhaṇa, is a staple Sanskrit text found all over South Asia in hundreds of manuscripts, which indicates its wide and continued readership throughout the ages. This text is known in the modern world as a collection of fifty or so Sanskrit verses written in the *vasantatilakā* meter and which convey a feeling of longing and remembrance for the beloved. Most of the verses use a formulaic phrase, *adyāpi smarāmi*, "even today I remember" to express the nostalgic feeling of *viraha*, love in separation, and to describe the beauty of a loved one. As stated above, in modern scholarship we identify the *Caura* as this collection of fifty verses, but in premodern South Asia these verses usually circulated along with a framing story, which was similar to the plot of the *Vidyāsundar* delineated above.[26] In this backstory, the hero learns about a beautiful Princess and decides to approach her, for which he poses as an instructor with the mission of educating the Princess, which allows him to make his way to the private chambers of the palace. After some time, they start a romantic relationship that is eventually discovered, the false instructor is apprehended and brought to trial. During the trial, he is called a *caura*, a thief, and condemned to die. At this moment, the thief-poet recites the fifty *adyāpi* verses in front of everybody at the court. His poetical prowess saves him, as his verses manage to soften the king's heart, enchanted with the level of poetical dexterity shown by the poet. Finally, he is liberated and given permission to lawfully marry the Princess. This is the first of the Sanskrit verses that the thief recites during his trial, and it is found in both the *Caura* and the *Vidyāsundar* traditions:

adyāpi tāṁ kanakacampakadāmagaurīṁ
phullāravindavadanāṁ tanulomarājīṁ |
suptotthitāṁ madanavihvalalālasāṅgīṁ
vidyāṁ pramādaganitām iva cintayāmi ||

Even today I remember her,
brilliant with garlands of golden champaka flowers,
her face like a bloomed lotus, a delicate line above her navel,
woke from her sleep, her body anxious for love,
She is like wisdom lost to carelessness.

[26]More on this backstory below.

We can see that there are two points of contact between the *Caura* and the *Vidyāsundar* traditions. First, the backstory of both poems is similar, except that in the *Vidyāsundar* the hero is a Prince of a southern kingdom, whereas in the *Caura* the hero of the story was usually considered to be the poet himself, Bilhaṇa. In both cases, during the trial the heroes of these traditions are called thieves, which leads to the second point of contact. In both traditions, the thief recites the *adyāpi* verses, which eventually causes his liberation, be it because the king changes his mind, or because the verses attract the attention of a deity, like in the *Kālikāmaṅgal* tradition. These parallels were very well-known in the nineteenth century, but that was actually a source of anxiety: Was Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar*, one of the most celebrated and famous work of Bengali poetry, a derivative work, a translation? If it was a translation, what was the original text? and where was it?

Because of their clear similarities, the *Caura* text was a strong candidate for being considered the original text behind the Eastern *Vidyāsundar* tradition, but this created more issues due to the highly fragmentary nature of the *Caura* tradition. In the rest of this section, I will present a brief exposition on the state of the textual edition of the *Caura* to understand why in the nineteenth century looking for the origins of the *Vidyāsundar* tradition, and in particular of Bharatchandra's version, became a site of anxiety over origins. After carefully studying a good number of manuscripts of the *Caura*, Barbara Stoler Miller concluded in her critical edition of the text that the *Caura* tradition existed in two recensions: the Northern Recension (N), characterized by verses that stress the feelings of loss, separation and even death. This recension also conveys the idea that the lover of the thief is a princess but the manuscript belonging to this recension rarely includes the backstory of Bilhaṇa seducing the young Princess/student. The Western-Southern (WS) recension does not put a lot of stress on the separation of the lovers, although it does usually contain the story of Bilhaṇa as the thief of love.[27] However, in the case of the *Caura*, the idea of a recension does not follow the usual model of critical editions that try to locate and elucidate genealogical relation-

[27]Bilhaṇa and Barbara Stoler Miller, *Phantasies of a Love-Thief: The Caurapañcāśikā Attributed to Bilhaṇa*, UNESCO Collection of Representative Works. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 7.

ships between renditions and manuscripts. This is because in the *Caura* tradition what we consider the actual text of the tradition is only the fifty or so *adyāpi* verses, and not the backstory of Bilhaṇa being a thief of love. On top of that, the verses found in each recension—which are sometimes fifty and sometimes more—are actually dramatically different in each recension: as noted by Miller, the two recensions only shared five verses.[28] This stark difference between recensions raises some problems when thinking of this text through the lens of textual criticism as developed for the edition of classical Western texts.[29]

At the beginning of the critical edition of the *Caura*, Miller poses this question: can we find a textual archetype for the *Caura* from only the four or five verses shared among recensions? More importantly, from this situation a problem becomes apparent: if the *Caura* exists in two different geographical and not temporal recensions, how did the tradition think of these highly dissimilar set of verses as a single text? Miller argues that with the evidence available, which is not scarce for there are hundreds of manuscripts of different recensions scattered across South Asia, the genealogical task of finding a single *Ur-text* is basically impossible.[30] However, the theoretical possibility of finding or reconstructing an archetype is itself framed by the idea of a pretty much firmly established authorship ascribed to Bilhaṇa. Miller shows that at least since the fourteenth century, the literary tradition had ascribed the authorship of the *Caura* to Bilhaṇa, at least outside Eastern India: in the anthology of verses *Śārṅgadharapaddhati*, verses from the *Caura* and the *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* are said to be by Bilhaṇa. Even more, in the Southern recension the backstory of Bilhaṇa as the thief-poet was sometimes called *Bilhaṇacarita*.[31] More recently, Whitney Cox has traced a longer chronology of the history of Bilhaṇa as the author of the *Caura*. Cox argues that the Sanskrit anthology *Sūktimuktāvalī* (compiled in 1258 CE) played a role in crafting a biographical idea

[28]Bilhaṇa and Miller, *Phantasies of a Love-Thief*, 6.

[29]In reality, S.N. Tadpatrikar in 1966 had advanced the idea of the *Caura* having different recensions with only five verses shared among them, though he argues the recensions are three, one more than Miller's analysis. Bilhaṇa and S. N Tadpatrikar, *Caurapañcāśikā: an Indian love lament of Bilhaṇa Kavi* (Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1946), iv.

[30]Bilhaṇa and Miller, *Phantasies of a Love-Thief*, 7.

[31]Appendix 2 in Tadpatrikar's critical edition of the *Caura* contains this story. Bilhaṇa and Tadpatrikar, *Caurapañcāśikā*, 25.

of Bilhaṇa, which could have later been appropriated in the *Śārṅgadharapaddhati* (1363 CE) and which gave way to the idea of Bilhaṇa's authorship in the *Caura* tradition.[32]

Yet, for Western textual criticism, the question of authorship is far from resolved. For the critical editions of Miller and Tadpatrikar, only the *adyāpi* verses—and only the five verses that are common to the recensions—can be considered part of the *Ur-text* of the *Caura*, if such a text even exists. But as we saw above, in some recensions like the Western-Southern, the poem was transmitted along with the backstory of Bilhaṇa as the thief of love, in a part of the poem known as *Pūrvapañcāśat* or *Bilhaṇacaritam*. So, the question arises: what to do with these backstories? Even though the legend of Bilhaṇa as a thief of love was widely known across South Asia, and even though the main points of the story had been extensively shared among recensions and versions, there is not a single text from which we can trace this backstory. When confronted with this question, Miller proposed to treat the backstory of the *Caura* as a local marker of the text, or as a localism. These localisms, which exist in virtually any manuscript, are colophons, scribal errors, vernacularisms, and scribal or idiosyncratic practices that are markers of locality and that are always present in a manuscript economy.[33] It is not that localisms are meaningless; Miller argues that these localisms allowed her to make a taxonomy of the actual existing manuscripts and from this taxonomy the idea of the two recensions of the *Caura* took place.[34]

To understand the problems raised by the critical editions of the *Caura*, especially around the question of authorship, I make a distinction between what I call here the philological and the traditional text of the *Caura*. The philological text is a text reconstructed through comparative methods by a philological approach. V.S. Sukthankar, in the preface of the critical edition of the *Ādiparvan*, warned that in a complex manuscript economy like ancient India was, the idea of classical philology, trained on the Greco-Roman world, of finding a single, unitary archetype that was at the origin of all other variations of a text was, in many

[32]Whitney Cox, "Reading Jalhaṇa Reading Bilhaṇa: Literary Criticism in a Sanskrit Anthology," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 141, no. 4 (2021): 891.

[33]Bilhaṇa and Miller, *Phantasies of a Love-Thief*, 124.

[34]Bilhaṇa and Miller, 124.

cases, impossible.[35] Nevertheless, argued Sukthankar, the aim of his philological enterprise was to obtain the oldest form of the text which was possible to reach, even though this text in reality did not ever exist in the world.[36] This is the philological text, the text that Miller and Tadpatrikar tried to reach.

On the other hand, we have the actual existing text found in manuscripts, which we know differs not only from manuscript to manuscript, but also from recension to recension. For lack of a better term, I will call this latter text throughout this chapter the "traditional text." Yet, as we saw before, while the actual existing text—or rather, texts—present wild variations among them, the *Caura* tradition in premodern South Asia unproblematically identified the author of the *Caura* as Bilhaṇa. Andrew Ollett has argued, precisely on the conceptual distance between the philological endeavor, that "the facts of authorship" and the "fantasies of authorship" of the *Caura* tradition were not simply uncritically reproduced in Medieval India regarding the *Caura* tradition. Instead, states Ollett, the assumption of authorship in the *Caura* provides an "interpretive frame" in which the scattered verses are to be located.[37] Ollett argues that this frame functions not only as a way to obtain a narrative thread in which the verses were inserted: the interpretive frame *was* part of the *Caura* text in that the frame adds a "metaliterary" significance that allows for a reading of the *Caura* beyond the narrative of the backstory, but as a love-poem that "is also about poetry itself," argues Ollett.[38] Thus, the "traditional text" included not only the *adyāpi* verses, but also necessarily the implicit or explicit understanding of Bilhaṇa's authorship of it.

The gap between "philological" texts and "traditional texts" presents the core challenge of Indic textual criticism when it comes to the *Caura* and the *Vidyāsundar*. The practice of critically editing a text, especially when trying to reconstruct an archetype, expects the localisms present in a traditional text to be removed in a critical edition. For example,

[35]Vishnu S. Sukthankar, "Prolegomenon," in *The Ādiparvan. Being the First Book of the Mahābhārata, the Great Epic of India*, vol. 1 (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933), LXXVII.

[36]Sukthankar, LXXXVI.

[37]Andrew Ollett, "Thieves in the Storehouse of Sarasvatī," *Asian Literature and Translation* 2, no. 4 (2014): 3.

[38]Ollett, 8.

nobody expects to see the colophon with the scribe's signature in the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (BORI) edition of the Mahabharata. However, in the case of the *Caura*, this becomes more complicated. Once you strip away the localisms, you end up with a skeleton of a text formed by a more or less systematic arrangement of verses dealing with the memories of a lost love. Yet, in the case of the *Caura*, the localisms are so ingrained within the legend that even in the Northern recension, which mainly contained only the verses and not the backstory, a modern reader still cannot separate the philological text from the traditional text, since the tradition and the spread of the "traditional text" was so vast that modern and traditional readers knew that the text at hand was the *Caura*.

Ollett's idea of the traditional text of the *Caura* having an interpretive frame—which, among other things, provides a metaliterary structure to the story—points to a particular usage of the poem in courtly environments as an allegorical view of the pleasures and joys of a learned life. As Whitney Cox hypothesizes, the *Caura* existed in South Asia not as a single text that was repeated and copied in different places, but rather as a constellation of verses that poets used to showcase their poetical abilities.[39] As Cox has noted, the sheer volume of manuscripts found throughout South Asia with either the *adyāpi* verses or the backstory of Bilhaṇa as the thief of love—or both—plus the lack of engagement of an important commentator with the Sanskrit *Caura*, presents the idea that this text was probably a lighthearted work to possess in a personal library, not a text that was part of any curriculum: "the *Caura* ensemble was a text of and for the village schoolmaster and his literate friends, of the iconoclast *agrahāra* denizen or the educated Jain layman with a sense of humor and a taste for racy poems.[40]

However, the interface between the philological text and the traditional text, and particularly the question of authorship, took on a different path in Bengal. While in the Gujarati and Maharashtrian vernacular recensions of the *Caura* the name of the *Caurakavi* was still

[39]Whitney Cox, "Love and Theft: "Bilhana" and the Thief's Fifty Verses," Shunga - Erotic Art in a Comparative Context (London, May 25, 2011), 3. I thank Prof. Whitney Cox for sharing the text of his talk with me.

[40]Cox, 6.

connected to Bilhaṇa, in Bengal this connection was lost, and in the place of Bilhaṇa, other names appeared. For example, in the preface to Balarām Cakravartī Kaviśekhara's *Kālikāmaṅgal*, Haraprasad Shastri mentioned that people usually ascribed authorship of the *Vidyāsundar* to the mythical poet Vararuci, but that nobody knew exactly which Vararuci had written the original text.[41] In other versions, a generic *Caurakavi* was given as the author. In Bengal, the many *Vidyāsundar* poems that appeared from the fifteenth century onwards carried the signature of their authors in the *bhaṇitā* verses of the poem. None of these authors made any claims to originality, but they did not acknowledge that there was a tradition either. This was not problematic in reality. It only became a problem during the nineteenth century, when the question of the originality and authorship of the many Bengali *Vidyāsundar* poems, and in particular of Bharatchandra's version, became another battlefield on the continuing debates around clashing ideas of medieval Bengali literary cultures.

In the next section, I take a look at the textual history of the Bengali *Vidyāsundar* to discuss the understanding of textual transmission and indebtedness in Bengal's literary culture during the nineteenth century. I describe there the history of some Sanskrit poems with the title *Vidyāsundaram* that were discovered during the nineteenth century and which were thought to be the original composition from which the many Bengali *Vidyāsundar* came from. I look at the Sanskrit *Vidyāsundaram* and its supposed relationship with both the Bengali *Vidyāsundar* and the Sanskrit *Caurapañcāśikā* to show how the interface between these three texts, that is, their genealogical relation and the question of authorship of the Sanskrit texts, became part of the nineteenth-century discussion on Bengali literary history and the overall character of medieval literature.

[41]Haraprasad Sastri, "Bhūmikā," in Balarāma Kabiśekhara, *Kālikāmaṅgal* (Kalikātā: Baṅgiya-Sāhitya-Parishad-Mandira, 1331), iii. It is not known when Bālarām composed his *Kālikāmaṅgal*. Salomon places the composition of the poem in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Salomon and Govindadāsa, "Govindadāsa's Kālikāmaṅgal," 100.

The missing link? Sanskrit indebtedness and origin anxiety in the Bengali *Vidyāsundar*

Historians in the nineteenth century seemed to identify two different and somewhat opposing streams in the literary field of the Bengali middle ages. On one hand, literary scholars were suspicious of courtly culture and its literary production, for such textual production was deemed decadent and devoid of the naturality of other Bengali works from the middle ages.[42] As we saw in the previous chapter, during the nineteenth century a good number of scholars and intellectuals, like Kashiprasad Ghosh and Ishwarchandra Gupta, thought of Bharatchandra and his works as innovative in character and style. Even more, as we have seen, Rāmagati Nyāẏaratna, the first scholar to write a complete literary history of the Bengali language, was not only an ardent defender of Bharatchandra's poetical prowess, he even thought of Bharatchandra Roy as the first modern author in Bengali literary history, placing him on the 'modern' side of the medieval/modern divide in Bengali literary history. He placed that temporal divide exactly at the composition of the two *Vidyāsundar* poems: that of Ramprasad Sen, whose poetry belonged firmly to the *madhyakāl*; and the one by Bharatchandra, whose style and use of language put him on the side of *idānīntanakāl*, the "current time."[43]

On the other hand, other scholars thought better of texts with a strong "folksy" character like the many *maṅgalkāvya* poems that dotted the rural landscape of Bengal. For example, a good number of scholars thought of the *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* of Mukundarām Kabikaṅkan as a prime example of this type of production, which evoked bucolic feelings in the minds of Hindu, cultured, middle-class men. For example, the famed literary historian Romesh Chandra Datta extoled Mukundarām's oeuvre mainly for the 'naturality' of its characters: "Its [*Caṇḍīmaṅgal*'s] most remarkable feature is its intense reality. Many of the incidents

[42]See above in the introduction the quote by Dineshchandra Sen on Bharatchandra as a prime example of the "vitiated classical style" of Bengali courtly literature.

[43]See the last section of the previous chapter for this discussion.

are superhuman and miraculous, but the thoughts and feelings and sayings of his men and women are perfectly natural, recorded with a fidelity which has no parallel in the whole range of Bengali literature."[44] Contrast this previous appreciation of Mukundarām with the following description of Bharatchandra by Dutt:

> Critics have formed very different estimates of Bharatchandra's poetical powers. Many of our countrymen of the old school would place him in the highest rank of poets, but we are unable to share this opinion. Bharatchandra with all his gifts is but an imitator of Mukunda Ram, and we confess that Bharatchandra's artificial and polished strains strike us as lifeless, when compared with the simple and faithful pictures from nature, with which Mukunda Ram's works are replete. Mukunda Ram draws from nature, Bharatchandra daubs his pictures with gorgeous colours. Bharatchandra is the more polished and artificial poet, Mukunda Ram is the truer painter and the greater poet.[45]

This line of thinking reached its zenith with the works of the literary historian Dineshchandra Sen and in particular with his magnum opus *Baṅga Bhāṣā o Sāhitya*, published in 1896. Dipesh Chakrabarty has explored this question extensively in an article on Dineshchandra Sen and the construction of what he calls the "romantic archives" of nationalist Bengali literary history. The constitution of these romantic archives, argues Chakrabarty, allowed for an exploration of the question on what constituted "Bengaliness." Opposed to a strictly chronological literary history, Dineshchandra's method for discovering the literary past of Bengal leaned heavily on an understanding of literature as a timeless repository of values for Bengali society and on an understanding of the literary past of Bengal that did not hinge on a temporal rupture but on continuity.[46] "The past," argues Chakrabarty when talking about Dineshchandra Sen's historical methods, "was constituted, ultimately, not merely by historical evidence but also by emotional and experiential recollections of the past."[47] Important to note, as Chakrabarty stresses, is that Dineshchandra Sen's romantic archives were political in many senses, but one of the most important was that his politics were based

[44]Dutt, *The Literature Of Bengal*, 116.
[45]Dutt, 128–9.
[46]Chakrabarty, "Romantic Archives: Literature and the Politics of Identity in Bengal," 677.
[47]Chakrabarty, 671.

on an understanding of "the Bengali people" or folklore not as sociological category of the inhabitants of India from which a shared common store of generalities and interests had to be created, but on a perceived notion of ethnic identity that had been alive since the middle ages and was able to be found in idealized notions of Bengali literature.

Following the idea that the romantic archives of Bengali literature were rooted in part on some form of identity politics, we can then see that the accusation of artificiality against Bharatchandra did not hinge merely on the heavy use of Sanskritic tropes and figures of speech, but also on the perceived language and scope of the texts' intended readership: a cultured, classically-educated (in terms of Sanskrit literature) audience. The praise on the naturality achieved by Mukundarām had little to do with the depiction of the natural world and much with an identification of the social life depicted in the poem with the social life imagined for this romantic past: "the characters of Mukunda Ram, too, are not Princes and Princesses, but men and women in the ordinary ranks of life, a hunter of low caste and his wife, a trader and his two wives. The poet has no ordinary powers of character-painting. All the pictures he has drawn are from life."[48] In that sense, Bharatchandra could not have been the champion of medieval Bengali literature in the nineteenth century, for he wrote for a courtly audience far away from the village. Eventually, the consensus among literary historians was that Bharatchandra belonged to a different time.

On top of the anxiety that the courtly setting and the perceived moral debauchery of Bharatchandra's poem produced among the Bengali intelligentsia, there was another issue at hand. Intimately connected with the question of the temporality of Bharatchandra, there were also questions of authorship and originality surrounding his poem. It was well known that other poets in the medieval period had written different versions of the same story, all bearing the title *Vidyāsundar*. This, of course, raised the question about the originality of Bharatchandra's poem.

In 1922, the scholar Shailendranath Mitra announced in the Second Oriental Conference

[48]Dutt, *The Literature Of Bengal*, 116.

held in Calcutta that the Sanskrit text on which Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar*, and by extension the other dozen or so versions of the story that had been encountered so far, had been found after being lost for a long time.[49] This statement surely came as a surprise for some, for as we saw in the previous section, it was well-known, even in the nineteenth century, that the multiple versions of the Bengali *Vidyāsundar* had a genealogical connection to the traditional text of the Sanskrit *Caurapañcāśika*. Despite knowing this, Mitra thought that Bilhaṇa's *Caurapañcāśika* could not be the archetype of the multiple Bengali *Vidyāsundar* poems, for he thought that the differences between the Sanskrit *Caura* and the Bengali *Vidyāsundar* could only be explained by the existence of a hypothetical missing link between them.

The existence of such a text had been hypothesized first during the nineteenth century by Rāmagati Nyāẏaratna, who thought that the Bengali *Vidyāsundar* had its origin in a Sanskrit *Vidyāsundaram* that located the action in Ujjayini, rather than Bardhaman, the location in Bharatchandra's poem.[50] Many such Sanskrit manuscripts with some version or some part of the *Vidyāsundar* story were found in the libraries and archives of Bengal during the nineteenth century. For example, in 1872, pandit Jībānanada Vidyāsagar had published a text with fifty-four Sanskrit *ślokas*, called simply *Vidyāsundaram*.[51] Vidyāsagar published this text along with his own Sanskrit commentary in the collection of Sanskrit poetry he brought to the public, the *Kāvyasaṁgraha*. However, Vidyāsagar's Sanskrit *Vidyāsundaram* did not contain many passages present in the Bengali poems; in reality this poem only narrates a small part of the whole story, the seduction of Vidyā by Sundar. The story of the florist woman, the capture of Sundar and even the *adyāpi* verses were missing from this Sanskrit text. Nyāẏaratna was probably referring to this text when discussing the problem of the existence of a Sanskrit archetype for the Bengali *Vidyāsundar* tradition, for he mentioned

[49]Sailendranath Mitra, "The Long-lost Sanskrit Vidyāsundara," *Proceedings and Transactions of the Second Oriental Conference Calcutta*, 1923, 216.

[50]Nyāẏaratna, *Bāṅgālā Bhāshā*, 134.

[51]Jīvānanda Vidyāsāgara Bhaṭṭācāryya, *Kāvyasaṃgrahaḥ*, Tṛtiyasaṃskaraṇam. (Kalikātārā- jadhānyām: Sarasvatīyantre Mudritaḥ, 1888), volume 3, 441-463.

a Sanskrit text consisting of only fifty-four *ślokas* which did not include the most well-known passages of the Bengali poems.[52] Though many such manuscripts had been found, Nyāẏaratna was careful to not make any definite assertion on whether any of the Sanskrit *Vidyāsundar* poems were in fact the *Ur-text* of the numerous Bengali *Vidyāsundar* poems since, as he remarked, no definite proof existed that one of the these Sanskrit manuscripts found in Bengal carrying the signature of either Vararuci or simply *Corkabi* was older than any of the Bengali *Vidyāsundar* poems. On the contrary, Nyāẏaratna was sure that none of the Sanskrit poems found so far could be the archetype of the Bengali tradition: the Sanskrit texts were either modern creations, or lacked important parts of the story, and thus it was impossible that these Sanskrit texts had been read or consulted even by Ramprasad Sen or Bharatchandra or any other Bengali author who had written the story of Vidyā and Sundar.[53]

What was, then, Mitra's Sanskrit *Vidyāsundaram*? Was there an actual Sanskrit *Vidyāsundaram* at the heart of an extended Bengali tradition? Had Mitra really found the "long-lost" Sanskrit poem? Undeterred by the conclusions reached by Nyāẏaratna, that even if a Sanskrit *Vidyāsundaram* existed, it had not been found, Mitra tried to prove that this Sanskrit manuscript, called *Vidyāsundaram Upakhyānam*, was indeed the mythical archetype of the Bengali tradition. Apparently, according to Mitra himself, Bengali literary history as a discipline had written off the existence of such a text, for even the hypothesis that behind Bengali *Vidyāsundar* poems there was a Sanskrit text had been discarded as "a vile attempt on the part of the champions of Sanskrit to belittle the glory of Bengali literature, insinuating as it did, without any justification however, that the labours of Bhāratchandra and Rāmprasāda are no better than records of plagiarism from Sanskrit."[54]

Shailendranath Mitra tried to present an answer to all this with the Sanskrit *Vidyāsundaraṁ Upakhyānam*. The Sanskrit text was, being generous to Mitra, too good to be

[52]He only notes that he was able to see a Sanskrit manuscript titled *Vidyāsundaram*. Nyāẏaratna, *Bāṅgālā Bhāshā*, 135.

[53]Nyāẏaratna, 134.

[54]Mitra, "The Long-lost Sanskrit Vidyāsundara," 216.

true. The Sanskrit *Vidyāsundaraṁ-upakhyānam* was written in both Devanagari and Bangla characters, and comprised more than five-hundred verses, for it provided not only the *adyāpi* verses of the *Caura*, there were another fifty verses starting with *adyāpi*, but this time it was the Princess Vidyā who recited the verses, invoking Kali to save Sundar's life.[55] The manuscript has two notable characteristics: first, the Sanskrit text contained almost all the episodes of the different Bengali *Vidyāsundar* poems discovered by then, which for Mitra was a clear indication that this Sanskrit text was the one behind all other vernacular texts. And secondly, this *Vidyāsundara-upakhyānam* seemed to give a direct answer to the question of authorship, maybe a very specific answer. The story begins with the meeting of scholars at the court of a king, Sashanka. There, the king asks to hear some new poets, and specifically the king asks to hear the story of the *Caura-kavi* and the Princess Vidyā. Hearing this, a poet by the name of Vararuci, which implied the mythical Vararuci to whom many works were ascribed, begins to tell the tale of Vidyā and Sundar.[56] But unlike other Sanskrit *Vidyāsundar* poems that also mentioned in passing Vararuci, this one included a colophon stating exactly *which* Vararuci had written this story:

> *iti samastamahīmaṇḍalādhipamahārājavikramādityanideśalabdha-*
> *śrīmanmahāpaṇḍitavararuciviracitaṁ*
> *vidyāsundaraprasaṅgakāvyāṁ samāptam.*[57]
>
> Thus concludes the poem about Vidyā and Sundara, composed by the great pandit Vararuci, by the order of the King of the whole earth Vikramāditya.

These two characteristics are highly suspicious, for they seem to respond directly to two of the strongest arguments against the existence of a Sanskrit *Ur-text* for the *Vidyāsundar* tradition in Eastern India. First, as we saw above, the many Sanskrit and Bengali *Vidyāsundar*

[55]Salomon and Govindadāsa, "Govindadāsa's Kālikāmaṅgal," 115.

[56]At least until 1982, as Carol Salomon remarked, this *Vidyāsundaraṁ Upakhyānam* had not been published. Nyāẏaratna described a Sanskrit text bearing the same name, but he said he was not able to see this text. A text with the characteristics described by Mitra does not appear in the Sanskrit *New Catalogus Catalogorum*. It would be interesting to know the fate of this manuscript, of which the reproduction of a page is given in Mitra's article.

[57]Mitra, "The Long-lost Sanskrit Vidyāsundara," 217.

poems contained a range of narrative units that were different from text to text, although some texts could be grouped into versions. For example, both Ramprasad Sen and Bharatchandra located the story in the neighboring district of Bardhaman, and both named the king of that region Vīrasiṁha. Other versions of the *Vidyāsundar* and even of the *Caura*, especially of the Western recension, had also named the king of Vidyā's kingdom Virasimha, but only the Nadia authors had located the story in Bardhaman. Another example is that not all *Vidyāsundars* contained the *adyāpi* verses, and the ones that did, had a seemingly random number of such verses, and in most cases not all of them, just a small portion. However, the *Vidyāsundara-upakhyānam* seemed to overlap very closely with Bharatchandra's narrative, except for the location of the action: in this Sanskrit text it was Ujjain, just like in the Nepali *Vidyāvilāpa*. Secondly, the authorship ascribed to the mythical Vararuci of the legendary court of Vikramaditya seemed like a direct response to a question that Haraprasad Shastri had raised in the preface to Balarām's *Kālikāmaṅgal*. In the preface, Shastri had said: "people say that the *Vidyāsundar* is a text written by Vararuci. Which Vararuci? There is no indication of that. Is it a text by Vararuci identified as Kātyāyana? Or a text by Vararuci the author of *Vārarucaṁ Kāvya*? Or is it a text by Vararuci one of the nine jewels [*navaratna*] of King Vikramaditya? There is no possible way to know that much."[58] But, in reality, Shastri had only started with the question of Vararuci to stress the impossibility, or rather, the futility of raising that question in the first place: what was known and what was worthy to be researched was that the story of Vidyā and Sundar contained in the *Kālikāmaṅgal* tradition had a clear genealogical relationship with the *Caura* tradition, especially with the Western recension, according to Shastri.

Mitra's article is a strange mixture of optimism and caution around the textual history of the Bengali *Vidyāsundar*. Though Mitra was aware that the *Vidyāsundara-upakhyānam* could be a modern text, he still decided that this Sanskrit text could very well be the *Ur-text* of all Bengali *Vidyāsundar* poems. To support his argument, Mitra resorted to all sorts of

[58]Haraprasad Sastri, "Bhūmikā," in Kabiśekhara, *Kālikāmaṅgal*, iii.

argumentative gymnastics: this Sanskrit text apparently mentioned the twelfth-century poet Jayadeva, which as we saw in the last section of the previous chapter, was nothing surprising in the Bengali poetical tradition. Yet, Mitra took this mention as proof that the text was indeed very old.[59]

It would seem from Mitra's arguments that the discovery of the *Vidyāsundara-upakhyānam*, with its supposed authorship by Vararuci, had complicated the genealogical relationship of the Bengali *Vidyāsundar* tradition with the pan-Indian Sanskrit *Caura*. Actually, the absurd claims of antiquity for the text that Mitra advanced were simply not taken into account in any serious literary history of the *Vidyāsundar* tradition, mainly because, according to the logic of transmission held by Mitra, this Sanskrit text should have come first. For all the cautious–though ultimately unwarranted–optimism of Mitra, the question of the origins of the Bengali *Vidyāsundar* tradition, of its author and of its theorized Sanskrit subtext, all these matters were put to rest, not because they were solved, but because the logic by which scholars tried to solve the issue of authorship demanded increasingly impossible evidence. Mitra had expressed the wish that at some point philology, through paleography and linguistic analysis, would yield a definitive answer on the genealogical relationship of Vararuci's *Vidyāsundaram* with the Bengali tradition.[60] However, the emergence of the two manuscripts of the Chittagong recension further complicated the questions about the transmission and antiquity of the *Vidyāsundar* tradition.

The episode around the authorship and the hypothetical Sanskrit archetype for the Bengali *Vidyāsundar* poems reveals a tension in the idea of the medieval and the *madhyayuga* in middle-class Bengali culture. We can see in Mitra's almost desperate attempts to argue for a purely Sanskritic origin of the *Vidyāsundar* tradition a different play of the tension

[59]The argumentation of Mitra at points becomes somewhat desperate. Of the mention of Jayadeva, he said: "the mention of Jayadeva in verse 21, whether it is an interpolation or not, places the composition of the work about the beginning of the 12th century A.D., if Jayadeva be the same poet that flourished in the court of King Lakṣmaṇa Sena of Bengal." Later, Mitra mentions that one important point in the plot of the Bengali *Vidyāsundar*, the digging of a tunnel so that Sundar can visit the Princess at night, was taken from a Pali story, which Mitra thought attested the antiquity of the Sanskrit *Vidyāsundaram* somehow. Mitra, "The Long-lost Sanskrit Vidyāsundara," 218.

[60]Mitra, 218.

between the medieval past of folklore songs, like the ones with which Dineshchandra Sen had constructed his romantic archives, and another medieval past located in a courtly setting, but one which origins and indebtedness to Sanskrit were also a matter of heavy discussion.

Thus, we can see how several streams came together during the nineteenth century that ultimately focused more on the style and the erotic contents of Bharatchandra's poem, for which Bharatchandra was at the same time celebrated and condemned. First, the impossibility of answering the question of the ultimate authorship of the Bengali *Vidyāsundar* tradition; secondly,the indictment of moral debauchery bestowed upon Bharatchandra's poem during the second half of the nineteenth century, and thirdly the general animosity among nationalist literary historians like Dineshchandra Sen towards premodern Bengali courtly culture, created this particular way of reading Bharatchandra's work at the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, if we believe Tithi Bhattacharya, while other Bengali medieval texts had been printed and circulated in the vernacular press during the nineteenth century because of their literary merits, the *Vidyāsundar* was converted into a standalone book with a heavy focus on the erotic and highly explicit sexual imagery,"created for the express purpose of sensationalism, to ensure steady sales."[61] While this last point might not be completely true, as I will show and argue in the next section, it is true that these ways of approaching Bharatchandra glossed over important ways in which Bharatchandra himself had reworked the *Vidyāsundar* tradition. In the next section, I will turn to that other stage of Bharatchandra's socio-textual history.

Bharatchandra and the reworking of tradition

As we saw before, the story of the *Vidyāsundar* was found in more than a dozen texts scattered throughout Eastern India, the oldest of which dated to at least the early sixteenth century. Of those texts, a sizeable amount belonged to a tradition known as *Kālikāmaṅgal*, a subset of *maṅgalkāvya* poems that placed the goddess Kali at the center of the stories told

[61] Bhattacharya, *The Sentinels of Culture*, 115.

in the poem. These *Kālikāmaṅgal* poems usually included the story of the *Vidyāsundar*, though not all *Kālikāmaṅgals* are *Vidyāsundars* and viceversa. This does not mean that only *Kālikāmaṅgal* poems deal with the figure of Kali, for the goddess was not completely absent in the Chittagong recension, whose texts did not follow the narrative structure of a *maṅgalkāvya* as the *Kālikāmaṅgal* poems did. Rather, these Chittagong texts were *gītināṭya* ("dramatic lyric") texts, probably meant to be performed as standalone pieces. *Nāṭyagīti*, as Thibaut d'Hubert has shown, combined narrative with lyrical forms, meant to "highlight the theatrical dimension of the play."[62] The Nepali texts *Vidyāvinoda* referred to earlier, belonged to this recension despite the geographical distance from Chittagong, which attests to the popularity of the story and the genre. An interesting characteristic of the Chittagong texts is that the poets of this recension wrote Sanskrit *ślokas* as preambles to several scenes of the poem, a feature that is somewhat mirrored in the Nepali texts which contain Sanskrit indications by the *sūtradhāra* (play director). For example, Śrīdhara's text, which as we saw before is a strong candidate for being the oldest *Vidyāsundar* available to us, mentions the goddess Kali in the Sanskrit preamble to the text, when the poet introduces the characters of the poem.[63] Importantly, the Bengali text provides an even clearer demonstration of the intervention of the goddess in the story: in this text, the birth of Prince Sundar was not mere chance, nor was it an unprompted gift from Kali. Actually, King Guṇasāra and his wife Kalāvatī had asked Kali for a son.

bhāryā same guṇasāra āche cirakāla |
saṁsārera vyavahāra nahe baḍa bhāla ||
hṛdae bhāviā duḥkha rājā guṇasāra |

[62] D'Hubert, *In the Shade of the Golden Palace*, 38.

[63] *Asti uttara deśe Ratnāvatī nāma vidyāpurī tatra rājā sarvaguṇa vibhūṣito guṇasāro nānāśāstra sunipuno dharmaparāyaṇastasya Kalāvatī nāmnī bhāryā sarvaguṇaśālinī tasyāḥ garbhe suto jātaḥ kālikāyāḥ prasādāt sākṣātkāmaḥ sarvaśāstraviśāradaḥ.* "There is a divine city called Ratnāvatī in a northern region. There, a virtuos king lives, named Guṇasāra. He was an expert in many sciences, and was fully devoted to Dharma. He had a wife named Kalāvatī, endowed with all virtues. By the favour of Kālikā, in her womb was born a son. Like Kāma he was versed in all sciences." The missing *sandhi* between words seems to be a feature of the manuscript and not an editorial decision, for the text of Sābirid Khān, which also sports Sanskrit *ślokas*, does contain external *sandhi*, although imperfect. Sharīf, "Vidyāsundarer Kavi," 115.

bhāryā same sevanta caraṇe kālikāra ||
nānāvidha upahāra dhūpadīpa dāna |
yugala rudhira diā pūjae vidhāna ||
yajña mahā ārambhilā kālikā uddeśe |
sampūrṇa haila yajña egāra variṣe ||

Guṇasāra stayed with his wife for a long time [as in, they were married for a long time,]
but [their] domestic life was not good enough.
In his heart, King Guṇasāra felt grief,
with his wife, he placed flowers at the feet of Kālīkā,
along with many kinds of gifts, incenses and donations.
The couple, offering blood, performed the pūja
they began the great sacrifice, addressed to Kālīkā,
The sacrifice was completed in its eleventh year.[64]

Thus, we can see that these early *Vidyāsundar* poems already contained the kernel of the *Kālikāmaṅgal* in that the praise and intervention of Kali is present.[65] Whether this means that the Chittagong texts are the archetype of all subsequent Bengali *Vidyāsundars*, is impossible and most probably futile to know. What is important to note here is that at the time of composition of the Chittagong recension, in the early sixteenth century, there was already a way of reading the story that included the goddess Kali, a tradition that would continue for another three centuries.

How and why Kali became the main deity in the *Vidyāsundar* tradition, we cannot know for sure. Ashutosh Bhattacharya, in his history of the *maṅgalkāvya* poems, notes an interesting development associated with the evolution of the *Kālikāmaṅgal* genre. First, Bhattacharya advances the idea that the liminal nature of Kali, who has a strong connection with practitioners of Tantra and with everything related to what Bhattacharya calls 'non-Aryan,' places her in the imaginary of Eastern Indian narratives near other inhabitants of

[64]Sharīf, "Vidyāsundarer Kavi," 115.

[65]It bears mention that not all *Vidyāsundar* poems referenced Kali as the main deity. The version by Kaṅka praised the Hindu-Muslim deity Satya-pīr rather than Kali. Kaṅka's *Vidyāsundar* was considered by Dineshchandra Sen and Muhammad Shahidullah as the *adi kavi* of the *Vidyāsundar* tradition, mainly because in his poem there is a verse that mentions the Vaishnava saint, Chaitanya. But, as Salomon argues following Sukumar Sen, the poems to Satya-Pīr were composed only in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, thus rendering impossible the existence of a text praising Satya-pīr before these centuries. Salomon and Govindadāsa, "Govindadāsa's Kālikāmaṅgal," 101.

the fringes of society: thieves, *caura*.[66] For example, Bhattacharya notes that in the *Caitanya Bhāgavata* (sixteenth century CE), two thieves try to kidnap Chaitanya in his childhood, for which they resort to the goddess Kali. Similarly, in the *Dharmamaṅgal* of Ruprām Cakravarti, another *maṅgalkāvya* written in the sixteenth century, the kid-hero Lāusen is the target of theft by an enemy, who offers a *pūjā* to Kali to carry out the deed successfully. However, the idea of a *caura* in courtly poetry has little to do with a common thief. Instead, the idea of the thief of love relates to a *nāgaraka*, a man-about-town or a connoisseur of the fine arts, that relies on crooked ways to reach his erotic objectives.[67] Thus, the placement of Kali at the center of the *Vidyāsundar* tradition was most probably a more complex textual situation, aided by the institutionalization of the cult of Kali that took force in Eastern India during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rachel McDermott notes that the figure of Kali became increasingly softened during these centuries, opposed to the blood-thirsty and cruel figure of the first Sanskrit texts that mentioned her.[68] This Kali inhabited a middle space, between the cruel and the benevolent. Śrīdhara's verse, cited above, could be seen as a good example of that evolution: Kali is called upon to grant a boon to the childless couple, who have to perform a blood sacrifice to address the goddess: the boon that king Guṇasāra and his wife asked was a request to the benevolent side of the goddess.

These textual transformations of the goddess ran along the evolution of her cult in Bengal and Eastern India, from an almost exclusively textual and personal affair in the secret *sādhanas* of Tantra practitioners prior to the eighteenth century, to the public and non-exclusively textual nature of ritual performances like temple building, image worshipping and sponsored *pūjās* to the goddess, which in most cases abandoned the Tantric context.[69] As McDermott has shown, the cult to Kali and *śākta* poetry in Bengal during the eighteenth century was fueled by the adoption of the deity by *zamindars* in Bengal as a way to showcase power and prestige in the rarefied political climate of Nawabi Bengal, especially with the

[66] Āśutosha Bhaṭṭācārya, *Bāṃlā Maṅgalakābyera Itihāsa* (Kalikātā: E. Mukhārjī, 1975), 692.
[67] Prof. Thibaut d'Hubert suggested this distinction.
[68] McDermott, *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams*, 164.
[69] McDermott, 172.

English making political and military progress rapidly.[70] It has been well documented that, at least since the seventeenth century, the Nadia Raj participated in these public *pūjā* rituals to different goddesses, among which the Kali and Durga *pūjā* were the most celebrated. During the reign of *Rājā* Krishnachandra new festivals for goddesses were set up, which added to the serious plan of temple construction with which the *Rājā* and his ancestors had been endeavoring for decades throughout the region.[71]

Of course, the complex socio-political situation of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Bengal and the transformations (textual, devotional) of the goddess Kali do not explain by themselves (or even taken together) neither the emergence of the *Vidyāsundar* tradition (including the *Kālikāmaṅgal* subgenre) nor its continued presence in the textual ecosystem of Eastern India from the early sixteenth to the late eighteenth century. But this textual and political climate and its transformations do help us understand a particular and enduring way in which the *Vidyāsundar* tradition was read and understood: as a paean to earthly, carnal love, and, at the same time, as a devotional manifestation of affection for the goddess Kali.

As we saw before, this dual goal for the recitation of the *Vidyāsundar* poem hinged upon the identification of the beloved, the Princess Vidyā, with the goddess Kali in this *adyāpi* verse of the *Caura* poem:

> *adyāpi tāṁ kanakacampakadāmagaurīṁ*
> *phullāravindavadanāṁ tanulomarājīṁ |*
> *suptotthitāṁ madanavihvalalālasāṅgīṁ*
> *vidyāṁ pramādagaṇitām iva cintayāmi ||*
>
> Even today I remember her,
> brilliant with garlands of golden champaka flowers,
> her face like a bloomed lotus, a delicate line above her navel,
> woken from her sleep, her body anxious for love,
> She is like wisdom lost by carelessness

[70] McDermott, *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams*, 31.

[71] Kumkum Chatterjee, "Goddess Encounters: Mughals, Monsters and the Goddess in Bengal," *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 5 (2013): 29; Cakrabartī, *Mahārājā Kṛṣṇacandra*, 189–202.

Barbara Stoler Miller identified this verse as N1/WS1, that is, the first verse of the Northern *and* Western-Southern recensions of the *Caura* tradition.[72] The N1/WS1 verse opens the moment in which Prince Sundar is brought to the court in front of the King, at least in Balarām Das, Ramprasad Sen, and Bharatchandra's versions. Probably, the fact that this verse is also the first one of both recensions of the *Caura* and one of the only five verses shared among them points to the importance and influence of it in both the *Caura* and *Vidyāsundar* tradition.

This is not mere coincidence: we can see in this verse that the different textual streams that nurtured the *Vidyāsundar* tradition for over three centuries come together. First, following what Cox, D'Hubert and Ollett have argued about the *Caura* and the *Vidyāsundar* traditions, we find in this verse a playful and allegorical reading of the delights and pleasures of *pāṇḍitya* and witty courtly entertainment, by making an explicit reference to wisdom gained and lost. The second stream that comes together in this verse is that of courtly culture in Eastern India specifically, in which the word *Vidyā* is identified with the name of the Princess in the *Vidyāsundar* tradition. As we saw in the previous chapter, the use of *Braj-bhāṣā* in the *Annadāmaṅgal* by King Virasimha was a conscious way to demarcate the courtly character of the setting by using a Western language, signaling the association of *Braj-bhāṣā* with Mughal and Rajput courts.[73] In Balarām's and Ramprasad Sen's *Vidyāsundar* there is a similar usage of Western dialects in the court scenes with the King. Cintaharan Chakrabarty, the editor of Balarām's poem, argued that this feature was meant to showcase the foreign character of the people in the court.[74] The third stream, as we saw before, adds yet another sense to the term, not only wisdom or the Princess, but also the goddess Kali as Mahavidyā, which was part of or the most important (called *Ādi Mahāvidyā*) of the (usually)

[72]In the rest of the chapter, I follow the nomenclature and the arrangement of the verses advanced by Miller.

[73]The dialogue in Braj takes place between King Virasimha and a herald the king had sent to the court of Kanchipur to invite Sundar to Bardhaman and meet the Princess. The herald recognizes Sundar in the thief, which solves the plot of the story. See Bhāratacandra Rāẏa et al., *In Praise of Annada, Vol. 2*, 358-363 for the original Braj and translation into English.

[74]Kabiśekhara, *Kālikāmaṅgal*, 126.

ten *Mahāvidyās* or manifestations of the goddess according to *śākta* theology.[75]

The *Vidyāsundar* tradition was perfectly aware of the complex and polysemic legacy of this verse in particular, and of the *adyāpi* verses in general. For example, in Balarām's poem, when Sundar is brought in front of the king and the Prince hears his death sentence, Balarām explains in this way Sundar's breaking into reciting the *adyāpi* verses:

> *rājāra niṣṭhura vākya śuniñā sundara |*
> *kālīra kamala padma cintila antara ||*
> *kālikā bhāviya kare kavitā racana |*
> *śuniñā nṛpati kope jvale tatakṣaṇa ||*
> *kumāra karena citte kālikā bhāvanā |*
> *rājā bale mora tare kare biḍamvanā ||*
> *kavitā śuniñā rājā bale hāna hāna |*
> *cora bale eka vākya kara avadhāna ||*
>
> Hearing the cruel words of the King,
> he meditated on the lotus-like feet of Kālī.
> Thinking of Kālikā, he composed a poem.
> Hearing it, the king at once burnt in anger.
> The Prince kept in his heart thoughts of Kālikā
> and the *Rājā* said, "because he mocks me"
> Hearing the poem, the king said, "Kill him, kill him!"
> The thief said, "Please hear these words."[76]

Immediately after these verses, the *adyāpi* verses begin, followed by an interpretation of the Sanskrit verse in Bangla. This is not different in Ramprasad or Bharatchandra's version; each poet provides a variable number of *adyāpi* verses followed by the translation in verse from the Sanskrit to Bangla. Notably, all verses in these three poems came from the Northern recension, which Miller argues, did not usually provide the backstory of Bilhaṇa's seduction of the young girl.[77] Moreover, following Miller, the verses of the Northern recension stress the painful separation of the lovers, and the understanding of the verses are colored by continued references to death and life, which made these verses a perfect fit for the scene of

[75]Jae-Eun Shin, *Change, Continuity and Complexity: The Mahāvidyās in East Indian Śākta Traditions* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 18.

[76]Kabiśekhara, *Kālikāmaṅgal*, 127.

[77]Bilhaṇa and Miller, *Phantasies of a Love-Thief*, 108.

Sundar's soon-to-be execution by orders of the king.[78] In Balarām version, we find fourteen verses;[79] Ramprasad Sen only integrated five verses;[80] Bharatchandra only wrote three verses of the *Caura* into his poem.[81]

The many and varying borrowings between versions of the *Vidyāsundar* poems, like the king's name or the city of birth of Sundar or Vidyā's city, attest to poems that are aware of other versions of the story, but this individual awareness did not give way to a tradition with self-reflexivity. The clearest case of this awareness of the poems without a self-reflexive tradition is the context of composition of Bharatchandra's and Ramprasad Sen's poems. Oral tradition maintained that both poets wrote their *Vidyāsundar* poems at the behest of *Rājā* Krishnachandra, who was a great admirer of Mukundarām's *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* but also was very fond of the story of the *Vidyāsundar*. While the two poems were composed roughly around the same time, and both poems situate the action at neighboring Bardhaman, which no other *Vidyāsundar* did, neither made an acknowledgement of having read the other.

There is in Bharatchandra's poem, however, a self-reflexive gesture which makes it depart greatly from other *Vidyāsundar* poems. In merely a few lines, Bharatchandra makes the *Vidyāsundar* tradition look into itself, and not only that, he does it in a highly ironic way. In the *Vidyāsundar* tradition, when Prince Sundar is brought in front of the king, accused of being Vidyā's illicit lover, a dialogue between the Prince and the king ensues. This is the moment when the grief-stricken poet recites the *adyāpi* verses in front of the king and his court, and when everyone present at the *sabhā* (assembly) realizes how good of a poet this thief actually is.[82] For a real audience listening to the *Vidyāsundar* or some version of the *Caura*, this is the part of the poem when they would enjoy the wittiness of the *double-entendre* associated with the word 'vidyā,' which can be understood as both magic and as

[78]Bilhaṇa and Miller, *Phantasies of a Love-Thief*, 7.

[79]N1/WS1, N2/WS4, N3b-d/WS6b-d, that is padas B to D in these verses, N5, N4, N6, N7, N10, N11/WS5, N12/WS3, N16 with variation in pada B, N23, N45, and N50. Of note here is verse N23, which in Balarām's version is given in half Sanskrit, half Bangla.

[80]N1/WS1, N2/WS4, N34 with variations in padas A and D, N31, and N50.

[81]N1/WS1, N11/WS5, and N50.

[82]Again, Ashutosh Bhattacharya's idea that the thief of *Vidyāsundar* stories is comparable to regular thiefs is wrong, so the assembly is really not thinking of the *cor* as a commoner.

the name of the Princess. For an audience listening to a *Kālikāmaṅgal*, in this part of the story they would also realize that the thief of love is also addressing the goddess Kali by referencing her in the form of *Ādi Mahāvidyā*. As we saw in Balarām's case, the double meaning of Vidyā/Kali is made explicit in the story, when it is described that the thief composes the verses thinking of Kali. But Bharatchandra not only acknowledges the double or triple meaning, he makes it clear that a whole textual tradition (or even, traditions) hinges on these polysemic verses.

Just before Sundar begins reciting the *Caura* Sanskrit verses, Bharatchandra describes, just like in Balarām's version, that the young Prince in describing Vidyā, is also thinking about the goddess:

> *cora vidyāre varṇiẏā cora vidyāre varṇiẏā |*
> *paḍila pañcāśa śloka abhaẏā bhāviẏā ||*
> *śuni camakita loka śuni camakita loka |*
> *kahiche Bhārata tāra goṭākata śloka ||*
>
> Describing Vidyā, the thief
> recited fifty ślokas, while thinking of Abhaẏā [Durgā].
> The audience listened and listened in awe,
> here Bhārata recites some of these ślokas.[83]

Of course, the mention of the fifty *ślokas* is a clear reference to the *Caurapañcāśikā*'s fifty *vasantatilakā* verses, but what is surprising is the displacement of the voice from Prince Sundar to Bharatchandra himself. Here, the assumption is that the audience at Virasimha's court listened to the fifty verses, of which Bharatchandra only provides his own audience with three. That Bharatchandra only provided three *adyāpi* verses and not more probably meant that Bharatchandra was delegating knowledge of the fifty *Caura* verses to his own audience. As we will see in a moment, this is not the only such gesture that Bharatchandra included towards his audience when it came to knowing the tradition of which his own *Vidyāsundar* was part. Importantly, this paucity of verses in Bharatchandra's poem and

[83]Bhāratcandra Rāẏa, *Bhāratacandra-granthābalī*, 332.

the gesture towards the audience did not elicit any surprise among the nineteenth-century readers of Bharatchandra's poem, but mainly because—I hypothesize—both the gesture and the scarcity of verses were hidden by a curious development in the textual and print history of Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar*. In 1851, an editor by the name of Aditya Charan Auddy advertised a version of the *Annadāmaṅgal* that included the fifty *ślokas* of the *Caura* along with their Bangla translation, in a separate section called *Caurapañcaśāt*. However, these *ślokas* were translated not by Bharatchandra, but by a modern commentator. This started a trend among editors of Bharatchandra's work, who included in every new edition new versions of the *Caurapañcaśāt*.[84] These commentaries not only included a Bangla translation of the Sanskrit verses, they were actual commentaries of the *Caura* verses providing the two ways of reading the *ślokas*, as referencing Vidyā and as referencing Kali. This practice lasted till the first critical edition of Bharatchandra's complete work saw the light in the edition of the *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat*, which did away with the practice. Nevertheless, the persistence of the practice throughout the nineteenth century meant that even during the twentieth century scholars and editors would think that it had been Bharatchandra himself who wrote the commentary to his own poem with the fifty *ślokas* and their double meaning. Addressing the huge difference in the number of *Caura* verses between versions of the *Vidyāsundar*, Cintāharaṇ Cakrabartī, the editor of Balarām's *Vidyāsundar*, stated that while Bharatchandra's three *adyāpi* verses seemed too few in comparison to Balarām's fifteen *ślokas*, in reality Bharatchandra had written himself a translation of the fifty *Caura* verses.[85]

But this self-reflexive gesture of Bharatchandra was not the only one, nor the strongest. After listening to three *adyāpi* verses in Sanskrit where Prince Sundara references wisdom, the Princess Vidyā, and the goddess Kali, the courtiers of the poem applaud the poetical prowess of Prince Sundara, who was capable of crafting a good verse on the spot:

[84]Roy, *Print and Publishing in Colonial Bengal*, 155–58.
[85]Kabiśekhara, *Kālikāmaṅgal*, 127fn2.

lajjā peẏe vīrasiṁha adhomukha haẏa |
sabhājana kahe cora mānuṣa ta naẏa ||

Shameful, Virasimha turned his face downwards
The courtiers said "this thief is not human!"[86]

This could be deemed as the first level of understanding of the *adyāpi* verses, which is merely recognizing a well-turned Sanskrit verse. However, things are not so rosy for the king, who is capable of understanding the ironic choice of words of Prince Sundara. The king represents the second, deeper level of understanding of the verses, the double or triple entendre of Vidyā as magic and as the goddess Kali, but also as his own daughter.

bhūpati bujhilā mora vidyāre varṇaẏa |
mahāvidyā sttati kare guṇākara kaẏa ||

The king understood: "he describes my Vidyā
while praising Mahavidyā, this abode of virtues."[87]

For a real audience, understanding the double entendre would have been a cause of joy, but for the king is yet another cause of mortification, and another reason to kill this thief of love: Prince Sundara is openly talking about his illicit relationship and about the princess' body in front of the court and the king. And if exemplifying the different levels of understanding and enjoyment of these *adyāpi* verses was not enough, Bharatchandra once again gestures towards the audience, deferring to them the understanding and enjoyment of these verses. Bharatchandra adds:

dui artha kahi yadi puthi beṙe yāẏo |
bujhibe paṇḍita corapañcāśī ṫīkāẏa ||

If I explain the two meanings, this manuscript will grow larger.
But the learned man will understand, with the commentary on the *Caura*.[88]

[86]Bhāratcandra Rāẏa, *Bhāratacandra-granthābalī*, 334.
[87]Bhāratcandra Rāẏa, 334.
[88]Bhāratcandra Rāẏa, 334.

Of course, that Bharatchandra decided to use the words *paṇḍita* and *ṭīkā* gestures at not only the existence of a whole scholarly system of Sanskrit literary criticism, it also points to an acute awareness of the complex textual situation of this particular textual tradition of Bengal. It was like saying, with some irony: if you want to understand this Bangla poem, please refer to the Sanskrit commentary. Of course, it was not that Bharatchandra lazily deferred the understanding to an ignorant audience. Rather, in issuing this referral, Bharatchandra acknowledges that his audience was highly cultured and educated, just like King Krishnachandra who ordered the composition of the poem in the first place.

Conclusion

What do the gestures and the self-reflexivity in Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar* mean for the temporalization and periodization of Bengali literature? France Bhattacharya, who recently translated the *Annadāmaṅgal* into English for the Murty Library, wrote in an article some time ago that with Bharatchandra "Bengali literature began its emergence into modernity."[89] The cause, Bhattacharya argued, was that Bharatchandra had combined a whole range of textual genres into a poem that had no equal in Bengali literary history. This, added Bhattacharya, was because the audience of the poetical composition had shifted: Bharatchandra was not writing for the village or the deity itself, he was writing for an audience full of connoisseurs, exactly like the *Rājā* Krishnachandra Ray.[90] On the other side of the spectrum we find Rosinka Chaudhuri's characterization of Bharatchandra as "not so very different from the participants of the Santal rebellion of 1855, who counted, among the actors in the theater of the revolt, the presence of supernatural beings," since his poem told the history of the Maratha invasions of Bengal and explained it as divine punishment.[91] The operative concept in Chaudhuri's argument and comparison with the Santals is that

[89]France Bhattacharya, "The Poet and His Patron. Bharat Chandra Ray (1712-60) and Raja Krishna Chandra Ray of Nadia (1728-82)," in *The Varied Facets of History: Essays in Honour of Aniruddha Ray*, ed. Ishrat. Alam and Syed Ejaz. Hussain (Delhi: Primus Books, 2011), 227.

[90]Bhattacharya, 226.

[91]Chaudhuri, "Three Poets in Search of History. Calcutta, 1752-1859," 192.

of the 'primitive,' a developmental, historicist concept that places Bharatchandra again on the other side of the medieval/modern divide. What is then, Bharatchandra's inhabited temporality?

In this chapter, I attempted a socio-textual history of the *Vidyāsundar* tradition *vis à vis* Bharatchandra's own poem and its readership during the nineteenth century. I have made references in this chapter and throughout the dissertation to the story of Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar*'s inception in the court of Krishnachandra, but I would like to return once more to this story. 1752 was the year when the poet Bharatchandra presented for the first time his poem *Vidyāsundar* at the court of the *Rājā* of Nadia, Krishnachandra Ray. According to Ishwarchandra Gupta, Krishnachandra himself had asked him to compose a poem akin to Mukundarām's *Caṇḍīmaṅgal*, from which the first part of the trilogy of the *Annadāmaṅgal*, the *Annapūrṇāmaṅgal*, came into existence. Fascinated by the result, Krishnachandra then asked the poet to include the story of the *Vidyāsundar* into the *Annadāmaṅgal*, to which Bharatchandra acquiesced.[92] However, as we saw briefly in the previous chapter, Bharatchandra's was not the only *Vidyāsundar* that existed and circulated at that period. The *śākta* poet Ramprasad Sen, who lived in Nadia and was in a certain capacity also supported by Krishnachandra, also composed a *Vidyāsundar* poem which, according to Ishwar Gupta, was penned as a token of gratitude towards the *Rājā* of Nadia.[93]

We cannot know if what Ishwar Gupta claimed about the origins of these two *Vidyāsundar* poems was true, and thus we cannot simply accept it as a historical fact. However, we can interrogate this story with the optics of socio-textual history, as part of its own tradition of reception. While Ishwar Gupta presented the story as a mere anecdote, maybe aiming to establish it as a confirmed historical fact, that two *Vidyāsundar* poems with the same patron were composed at basically the same time already indicates several aspects of the socio-textual history of the *Vidyāsundar* tradition and of Bharatchandra's poem in eighteenth-century Bengal. There are two obvious aspects that we can deduce. First, that

[92]Gupta, "Kavivara Bhāratcandra Rāẏ Guṇākarer Jīvana Vṛttānta," vol. I, 69.
[93]Īśvaracandra Gupta, Dāśagupta, and Mukhatī, *Īśvara Gupta racanābalī*, vol. I, 10.

two *Vidyāsundars* were written at virtually the same time attests to the continued popularity of the poem up until the second half of the eighteenth century. This is easily corroborated when we consider the date of composition of other *Vidyāsundars* and *Kālikāmaṅgal* poems, many of which were also written in the eighteenth century. Second, that the king, Krishnachandra, asked expressly for not one but two versions of the *Vidyāsundar* story demonstrates the courtly character of the *Vidyāsundar* tradition in Eastern India, a tradition in which Krishnachandra sought to participate.

There are, however, another set of socio-textual aspects that have not, to the best of my knowledge, been explored. It is noteworthy that the two texts that according to nineteenth-century scholars were on opposite poles of the literary, cultural and even sociological spectrum, Mukundarām's *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* and Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar*, are the same texts that frame the story of Krishnachandra asking for a new *maṅgalkāvya*. Were Krishnachandra and/or Bharatchandra, like the nineteenth-century literary scholars, aware of the fundamental difference between the 'rural' *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* and the courtly *Vidyāsundar*? The answer is both yes and no. Clearly, the difference that the nineteenth-century literary scholars posited between the two texts, the idea of the naturality of the *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* and the artificiality of Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar*, was a periodizing device aimed at portraying the socio-cultural context of the Nadia Raj as a place of decay and decadence. In that sense, the difference between these two texts presented by colonial literary scholars was certainly not accessible to Krishnachandra nor to Bharatchandra. But Bharatchandra did compose a text that was explicitly different from other *maṅgalkāvyas* and other *Vidyāsundars*, so much that Ramprasad Sen's own *Vidyāsundar* is not comparable in style or scope to Bharatchandra's. With the simple but powerful self-reflexive gestures discussed above, along with his ingenious use of Sanskrit tropes and meters in Bangla, Bharatchandra brought a dynamism and self-reflexivity to the *Vidyāsundar* tradition in particular, and to Bengali literature in general, that had not been encountered before. In a way, Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar* could be read as an attempt to synthesize the two divergent traditions of Bengali *Vidyāsundar*, the more

'religious' character of the *Kālikāmaṅgals* and the sensuous and sexually explicit courtly poem. We could even add a third tradition, that of the *maṅgalkāvyas* in general. While it is true that Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar* achieved success as a standalone text since its moment of composition, we cannot ignore the part of its socio-textual history that framed Bharatchandra's poem in dialogue with Mukundarām's poem at the court of the Nadia Raj. Again, the scope and style of Bharatchandra's poem, when compared to Mukundarām's *Caṇḍīmaṅgal*, make it difficult to believe that Bharatchandra did not consciously try to craft something different, something perhaps new.

It is hard, however, to discuss Bharatchandra's self-reflexive literary project using phrases like 'new sensibilities' without falling prey to periodizing understandings of what constituted the 'new' or the 'old' in the literary endeavor of Bharatchandra. It seems to me that the argument of France Bhattacharya and Rosinka Chaudhuri, despite being on the opposite side of the periodizing spectrum, have fallen into this argumentative sinkhole. But this has more to do, I argue, with another aspect of the socio-textual history of Bharatchandra's poem than with a poor understanding of periodization: the problem of how to read a distant text from a (modern) reader's subjectivity. Following Sheldon Pollock's idea of "philology in three dimensions," I turn to a fundamental tension in reading a text that confronts the reader.[94] Pollock argues that there has been, historically, a tension between the plane of meaning of the author, accessible to us through a historicist reading (understood mainly as a reading that puts the text and its author in their own historical context) of the text, and the plane of meaning of the reader, which Pollock characterizes as a 'presentist' reading.[95] Pollock states that the temporal distance that separates the reader from the text is directly proportional to the amount of attention the reader has to pay to such a text: "the more present to our consciousness this discipline of sense making becomes, the more effective it becomes. When we read forms of literature that are maximally distant in time and space—when modern

[94]I have changed the agent of Pollock's argument from the 'philologist' to the 'reader,' mainly because my engagement with Bharatchandra is not philological. Sheldon Pollock, "Philology in Three Dimensions," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 5, no. 4 (2014): 398–413.

[95]Pollock, 401.

Westerners read non-modern non-Western texts, for example—philology becomes maximally present."[96] Pollock acknowledges that the 'distance' is not absolute but varies. Thus, in the case of Bharatchandra, like any other non-modern non-Western text, the tension between planes of meaning is further obscured by the distance that separates us from Bharatchandra. However, this distance should not be measured in absolute temporal units, like years or centuries, but in temporalizing and periodizing terms.

The socio-historical context in which Bharatchandra wrote his texts is heavily teleologically charged: it is viewed simultaneously as a moment in which the 'old' finally dies, like Sanskrit culture, but the new has not yet emerged, like modern Bengali literature. For example, Sheldon Pollock portrays Sanskrit culture during these early colonial years in Bengal as having a 'ghostly existence,' as being in the world without participating in it: "in the south as in the north, at dates that vary according to different regions and cultural formations, Sanskrit writers had ceased to make literature that made history."[97] What does this mean for a poet so embedded in Sanskrit literary culture as Bharatchandra? Sudipta Kaviraj, responding to Pollock on this point, argues that by using Sanskrit meters in Bengali, and by appropriating the semantics of Sanskrit literary culture, especially of the *Caura* tradition for his own *Vidyāsundar*, "Sanskrit was thus an essential part of Bharatcandra's artistic and theoretical universe."[98] However, in the next sentence, Kaviraj succumbs to the periodizing vocabulary with which this period in Bengal's history is usually described. Asking whether Bharatchandra's engagement with Sanskrit literary culture belies Pollock's claim about the character of Sanskrit in early colonial Bengal, Kaviraj says that "Sanskrit exerts a distant, decaying, indirect influence as a high reference point, but so high that it is already becoming inaccessible."[99] However, neither Pollock nor Kaviraj—or France Bhattacharya and Rosinka Chaudhuri for that matter—engaged with the self-reflexive literary endeavor of Bharatchan-

[96]Pollock, "Philology in Three Dimensions," 400.

[97]Sheldon Pollock, "The Death of Sanskrit," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 2 (2001): 413.

[98]Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Sudden Death of Sanskrit Knowledge," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33, no. 1 (2005): 119.

[99]Kaviraj, 119–120.

dra that I have discussed here. Forced to be either 'past-oriented' or 'future-oriented' *a priori*, Bharatchandra and his text cannot escape the temporalization and periodization process.

Conclusion

On June 30th, 1926, a group of pandits from Nabadvip wrote a letter to the Acting Governor of Bengal, Sir Hugh Stephenson, who was at that moment visiting the region of Nadia. The pandits started the letter by singing the praises of Stephenson with a vocabulary and poetic forms resembling a Sanskrit verse and imagery, but the letter was written in English. For example, the pandits said to Stephenson:

> May the full moon of your white fame shed its cool and soothing rays, all around through all directions of the earth and the ever victorious and blessed Fortune of Royalty attend your steps.

They also bestowed a traditional title on Stephenson, *Nītiratnākara* (Ocean or store house of the arts of administration), since he was "well-versed in the rules of administration and commanded the highest honours from all quarters."[1] The pandits were trying to convince the colonial government to establish a publicly-funded Sanskrit college in Nabadvip, appealing to the fame of the place as a seat of Sanskrit learning: "this Nabadvip has been famous from very

[1] "Address Presented by the Pandits of Nabadwip on 30th June 1926," in *Speeches Delivered by H.E. the Earl of Lytton, Governor of Bengal and H.E. Sir Hugh Stephenson, Acting Governor of Bengal, during 1926-27* (Private Secretary Press, 1927), 59.

ancient times for the culture of Sanskrit *sastras* [sic]."[2] A Sanskrit school akin to Calcutta's Sanskrit College had been in the minds of the inhabitants of Nabadvip for at least one hundred years, but the plans were always scrapped.[3] As the letter states, Sanskrit education in Nabadvip had continued during the nineteenth century and the couple of decades of the twentieth elapsed thus far. But Sanskrit education had only been maintained because of private donors, most of whom were dying or were dead when the pandits presented the letter to Stephenson. Thus, the pandits claimed, the future of Sanskrit learning in such an ancient site as Nabadvip was in peril: "our respectful prayer to Your Excellency, therefore, is that you may be graciously pleased to make a grant to this important institution, so that it may rise above its present financial crisis and make a happy progress in its race for the great future it has in view."[4]

Stephenson's reply to the pandits is a masterclass on the deflection of governmental responsibility towards its subjects. Stephenson starts by acknowledging the reach and fame of Nabadvip: "I could not, of course, have spent 30 years in this Presidency without being aware of the place which Nabadwip occupies in the literature, religion and history of Bengal."[5] Stephenson tries to reassure the pandits that the ancient glory and fame of the town is not lost, but that it was a matter of individual, and not governmental, responsibility to uphold the status of the town as a celebrated site for Sanskrit learning:

> You say that this historic town has been shorn of the glory, which it enjoyed as the centre of Sanskrit learning in the past, but the presence of the Pandits here to-day reminds us that the traditions of its scholarship do not live in the memory alone, but have been handed down as a valued legacy from generation to generation and that each generation strives to keep the torch of learning undimmed.[6]

[2]"Address Presented by the Pandits of Nabadwip on 30th June 1926," 59.

[3]See the conclusion of chapter three for the description of how the proposed Sanskrit College of Nabadvip was changed to Krishnanagar College.

[4]"Address Presented by the Pandits of Nabadwip on 30th June 1926," 60.

[5]Hugh Stephenson, "His Excellency Sir Hugh Stephenson's Reply to the Addresses Presented at Nabadwip 30th June 1926," in *Speeches Delivered by H.E. the Earl of Lytton, Governor of Bengal and H.E. Sir Hugh Stephenson, Acting Governor of Bengal, during 1926-27*, vol. 0 (Private Secretary Press, 1927), 61.

[6]Stephenson, 61.

The last clause of the sentence sets the tone for the rest of the reply. Progressively, Stephenson begins turning the tables on the pandits and starts accusing them, in mild terms, of not doing enough for the advancement of their own cause. To each of the demands, Stephenson retorts a variation of the same answer: "are the local people ready to contribute the major portion of the expenditure?" At the end, Stephenson, somewhat ironically, accepts the title of *Nītiratnākara*, stating that he hoped to use the 'arts of administration' to the advantage of Bengal. But Stephenson concludes his response by providing one last piece of advice to the pandits: "in conclusion, gentlemen, let me ask you not to dwell too much on your past glory as a thing of the past—regretfully sighing for its return. Let the tradition and glory of the past spur you on to make this town and its administration worthy of that tradition and of the memories it enshrines."[7]

It is not easy to conclude a work of history that is not bookended by a particular event or series of events. In this dissertation I have argued that the process of temporalization and periodization of the Bengali premodern past into the Bengali 'Middle Ages' took place from the 1750s to the 1870s, and that a good part of those temporalization processes were enacted through the natural and historical (political, cultural) past of Nadia. But as the addresses above shows, the pervasive presence of the 'medieval' was in place for longer than the period studied here. In the exchange between the pandits of Nabadvip and the Acting Governor Stephenson, we can see the discursive entanglements of temporalization. Both the pandits and Stephenson make a reference to the ancient fame of the town as a site of Sanskrit learning. The pandits are worried about the maintenance of Sanskrit learning in the region, but they express their worry looking to the *future* with some anxiety. Stephenson, for his part, believes that the pandits cannot let go of the *past*, and are thus incapable of entering into the future.

If we follow Stephenson and view the attitude of the pandits of Nabadvip as a fundamentally melancholy relation with the past of the town, then we would find the same nostalgic

[7]Stephenson, "His Excellency Sir Hugh Stephenson's Reply to the Addresses Presented at Nabadwip 30th June 1926," 66.

disposition on the historiographic efforts with the past of the region of the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century. During this period, a plethora of historiographical works dealing with the history of the regions of Bengal were published, written mainly in Bangla. In the genre of 'regional history,' *āñcalika itihāsa*, at least eleven works on Nadia were published between 1880 and 1940.[8] The most notable of these were *Nabadvīpa Mahimā* (1884) by Radhi Chaudhuri and *Nadiẏā Kāhinī* (1910) by Kumudnath Mallik.[9] While these works presented themselves as not complete histories of Nadia, in reality that is exactly what they were; both Mallik and Chaudhuri begin their works describing the geological and hydrological history of the region, which points to the almost unbreakable link between the perceived decayed state of the natural landscape of the region and its political and cultural fate during the colonial period.[10] These works were discursively not far away from the pandits' plea to Stephenson, appealing to the ancient glory of the site.

However, this kind of regional history, deeply embedded in the remembrance and memorialization of the past, would fall from the grace of Bengali historians early on in the twentieth century.[11] In 1914, during a meeting at the *Baṅgīẏa Sāhitya Pariṣat* (Bengal Literary Academy) the historian Akshay Kumar Maitreya called for reforming the practice of history writing in Bengal, announcing that the nationalist-driven history writing effort *à la* Bankimchandra was over. Bankim had famously said that no matter what was written on the history of Bengal, if it was written in Bengali then it was like laying a wreath at the feet of the mother. But for Maitreya, the time to write 'whatever' as long as it was written

[8]For a full list of regional histories written in Bangla during this period, see Kanta Chatterjee, *Writing Another Bengal: Regional and Local Histories of Bengal in Times of Modernity and Nationalism, 1860-1950* (Kolkata: Pragatishil Prokashak, 2015), 119.

[9]Rāṛhī and Caudhurī, *Nabadvīpa-mahimā*; Mallik, *Nadiẏā-kāhinī*.

[10]I have explored this link between the natural and cultural/political landscape on the first and second chapters of this dissertation.

[11]This does not mean that regional histories were not produced. In fact, many important regional histories were written in the second half of the twentieth century. For this work I have relied on some of them. While throughout most of my dissertation I deploy a criticism of historicism, the kind of history of these regional histories, with their reliance on positive facts, has been a great help in the documentation effort of this dissertation. Yajñeśvara. Caudhurī, *Bardhamāna, Itihāsa o Saṃskṛti*, 3 vols. (Uttarapāṛā, Jelā-Hugalī : Kalikātā: Ānandamaẏī Caudhurī ; Paribeśaka Pustaka Bipaṇi, 1990); Yajñeśvara. Caudhurī, *Āñcalika itihāsa carcāẏa Nadīẏā* (Nabadvīpa, Nadiẏā: Nabadvīpa Purātattva Parishada, 2007).

in Bangla was over; the time to write history 'correctly' had come.[12] By 1921, as Prathama Banerjee shows, there was a new 'disciplinary mood' among historians, whose parameters did not view in good terms the writing of regional histories: "the journal *Itihāsa o Ālocanā*, published since 1921 in association with Tagore's institute in Shantiniketan [...] made elaborate classifications of 'types of history' and clearly laid out historiographical rules. By these parameters, 'local' histories which all and sundry seemed to be churning out in Bengal were rejected as amateurish, ill-written and unfounded."[13] The new kind of history writing advocated by Maitreya was supposed to be grounded on scientific parameters and had as its main goal the development of the Indian nation. Around the same time, Jadunath Sarkar described this "new" scientific engagement with history in simple terms, during an address of the *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat* in Bardhaman: "The more we discover the real truth about the past, the more the minds of our people will proceed along the right lines. True history teaches people the causes of the rise and fall of nations, their health and illness, their death and regeneration."[14] The rise of this new scientific history not only meant the disavowal of 'romantic' regional history writing, the kind of which the past of Nadia saw quite a few, it also meant the deepening of the perception of Nadia—and rural Bengal in general—as a site of backwardness. The natural, political and cultural 'deterioration' of Nadia, proclaimed in a great number of sources during the nineteenth century (many of which I revised in this dissertation), transformed Nadia into the obverse of the modern, and thus, the other of what the scientific history wanted for the nation. In other words, it was yet again the narrative structure of the Enlightenment which permeated the conceptual stakes of the new scientific history: reason had to prevail over the irrational and superstitious.[15]

Returning to the episode between the pandits of Nabadvip and Stephenson, it is clear in the text of the letters that feelings were riding high in the plea of the pandits, and maybe

[12]Akṣaẏa Kumār Maitreẏa, "Aitihāsik Racanā-kautuka," *Sāhitya* xxv, no. 7 (1914): 535.

[13]Banerjee, *Politics of Time*.

[14]Jadunath Sarkar cited in Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History*, 43. See this book, especially 38-45, for a deeper analysis of the "new" scientific history and the context in which it developed.

[15]Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 237.

there is more than a tinge of irony or even a sardonic gesture in Stephenson's reply. That the pandits and the administrator talked past each other was not only the result of governmental negligence, though much of that was there. It was also the result of Stephenson framing the situation as a miscommunication between the 'future-oriented' colonial administration and the 'past-oriented' pandits, even though the pandits preoccupation was about the future.

The future of historicism: periodize anew?

If by historicism we understand, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has explained, "the usual methodological protocols—the creation of a sense of historical distance, the idea of anachronism, the device of periodization, and so on—by which the discipline of history converts the past into an object of knowledge," then we can see how historicism has been operative in conceptualizing Nadia's history, including the attitudes of the pandits in the early twentieth century, as a place of backwardness.[16] However, the aim of this dissertation has not been to denounce historicism or to mount a passionate defense of the so-called romantic view of the pandits or the early historians of Nadia like Radhi Chaudhuri and Kumudnath Mallick. The goal here has been, instead, to question the assumption of the operative concepts and categories that posited the 'Middle Ages' of Bengal historiography as meaningful entities. As Kathleen Davis argues, the problem with the myth of progress in history is not the teleological narrative of the West, it is "a problem of the formation of concepts in conjunction with periodization, a process that retroactively reifies categories and erases their histories."[17] In that sense, my engagement with Nadia's natural and historical pasts should not be seen as an attempt to rewrite the history of the region. My engagement with Nadia's past here was, then, much like Hartog's concept of regime of historicity to craft "neither a chronosophy nor a discourse on history, and its function is not to denounce or deplore the present times,

[16]Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Historicism and Its Supplements. A Note on a Predicament Shared by Medieval and Postcolonial Studies," in *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of the Middle Ages Outside Europe*, ed. Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 109.

[17]Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, 134.

but at best to shed light on them."[18] Using Nadia as a thinking space, this dissertation was meant as an exploration of the textual materials and discourses that were the basis of the arguments and discussions that rendered the site of Nadia and the age of Bharatchandra and Krishnachandra the last stronghold and the embodiment of the medieval in Bengal.

This dissertation has explored how Nadia—its political and textual past—shows the categories of historicism and periodization at work, which begs the question: should we periodize anew the history of Nadia in particular and Bengal in general, based on the dynamics and debates explored in this dissertation? A decades-old trend in modern scholarship has been to resort to a new temporalizing and periodizing process, which I have sought to avoid throughout this dissertation, that of the early modern. For example, in the case of the literary production of the Nadia Raj, the idea that the new literary sensibilities of Bharatchandra puts him on the new temporal dimension of the early modern can be tantalizing, for it would open a possible comparative approach to the literary work of Bharatchandra and to his sociocultural context, the Nadia Raj in particular. However, it seems to me that a careless and ready adoption of the category of the early modern can further occlude what Bharatchandra's literary project was trying to convey. For example, Partha Chatterjee provided a provisional conceptualization of the early modern, one that tried to do away with the notions of temporal and historical periods. However, his characterization of the early modern ends up being a circular category in which the early modern is defined by itself: "the early modern is not necessarily a 'period' with specific dates marking its beginning and end. It is preferable to use the term to characterize elements of thought or practice that have been identified as belonging to early modern historical formations in other regions of the world, thus providing, at least potentially, a comparative dimension with other modern histories."[19] And here is where I see the problem of an uncritical adoption and usage of the early modern, for the circularity of Partha Chatterjee's definition gets translated to the text itself: does Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar* show a different literary sensibility because of Bharatchandra's self-reflexive

[18]Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 38.
[19]Chatterjee, "Introduction: History in the Vernacular," 21.

engagement with several traditions, or because an early modern sensibility became available to him as an author? If the latter, this begs the question of what is inherently modern or early modern about Bharatchandra's literary endeavors. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, neither continuity or discontinuity are inherently modern.[20] As Daud Ali has pointed out, the use of 'early modern' as a historiographical category "has not so much complicated the narratives of the rise of modernity, as the eighteenth-century debate has suggested, but merely changed its protagonists and shifted its chronological boundaries."[21]

Shall we periodize anew based on Bharatchandra's reinvention of Bengali textual genres? Should the path not taken of the scholars and intellectuals visited in the previous chapter be reassessed? Is the engagement of Krishnachandra with the question on sovereignty a marker of the early modern? This dissertation was meant as an exploration of Nadia's past as a space of transition without teleology, and a transition that was rooted not in the abstract temporal values and sensibilities or the floating *zeitgeist* of the idea of the early modern. Instead, it was rooted, in the case of Bharatchandra, on a strict while innovative adherence to the textual history of its own tradition. In the case of the political past and natural past of Nadia, it is clear that periodization occludes the categories and processes which shore it up. However, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, historicism—its categories and devices like periodization—is exhausted, "but we do not yet know what to replace it with."[22] In that sense, this dissertation has shown that thinking anew the categories and processes of periodization does not only require a careful reading of the textual materials that were the basis of periodization, but it requires also opening up the sites of convergence of those pasts. That is the reason why this dissertation has looked at texts on the political, natural and literary past of Nadia: maybe we cannot escape periodization, but we can definitely problematize it further.

[20]Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Muddle of Modernity," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (June - 2011): 667.

[21]Daud Ali, "The Idea of the Medieval in the Writing of South Asian History: Contexts, Methods and Politics," *Social History* 39, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 407.

[22]Chakrabarty, "An Enchanted Mirror," 115.

Bibliography

Sanskrit and Bangla Works

Ānanda Bhaṭṭa. *Vallala Charita. A History of King Ballālasena of Bengal.* Translated by Mahamahopadhyay Haraprasad Sastri. Calcutta: Hare Press, 1901.

Basu, Rāj Nārāẏaṇ. *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣā O Sāhitya Biṣaẏak Baktṛtā.* Kalikātā: Natūn Bāṅgālā Yantra, 1879.

Bhāratacandra Rāẏa, France Bhattacharya, Bhāratacandra Rāẏa, and Bhāratacandra Rāẏa. *In Praise of Annada, Vol. 2.* Vol. 12. Murty Classical Library of India ; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017.

Bhāratcandra Rāẏa. *Bhāratacandra-granthābalī.* Kalikātā: Baṅgīẏa-Sāhitya-Parishat, 1963.

Bhatta Ramadeva, Ciranjiva, and Raja Kalee-Krishna Bahadur. *Vidvanmodatarangini With English Translation Kali Krishna Bahadur 1834.* Kolkata: Sobha-Bazar Press, 1834.

Bhaṭṭācāryya, Jīvānanda Vidyāsāgara. *Kāvyasaṃgrahaḥ.* Tṛtiyasaṃskaraṇam. Kalikātārājadhānyām: Sarasvatīyantre Mudritaḥ, 1888.

Bhūpatīndramalla. *Vidyāvilāpa; Nepālīya Maithilī nāṭaka.* Prayaga: Akhila Bhāratīya Maithilī Sāhitya Samiti, 1965.

Bidyāsāgara, Īśvaracandra. *Hindu Widow Marriage.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Bilhaṇa and Barbara Stoler Miller. *Phantasies of a Love-Thief: The Caurapañcāśikā Attributed to Bilhaṇa.* UNESCO Collection of Representative Works. New York: Columbia University Press, 1971.

Bilhaṇa and S. N Tadpatrikar. *Caurapañcāśikā: an Indian love lament of Bilhaṇa Kavi.* Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1946.

Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, Baṅkimacandra, and Bhabatosha Datta. *Īśvaracandra Guptera jībanacarita o kabitva.* Kalikātā: Jijñāsā, 1968.

Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra. *Bankim Rachanavali (English)*. 1960.

Gupta, Īśvaracandra. "Kavivara Bhāratcandra Rāẏ Guṇākarer Jīvana Vṛttānta." In *Īśvara Gupta racanābalī*, edited by Śāntikumāra Dāśagupta and Haribandhu. Mukhatī, 54–85. Kalikātā: Dattacaudhurī, 1381.

Īśvaracandra Gupta, Śāntikumāra Dāśagupta, and Haribandhu Mukhatī. *Īśvara Gupta racanābalī*. Kalikātā: Dattacaudhurī, 1381.

Īśvaracandra Gupta, Muhammada Ābadula Hāi, and Ānoẏāra Pāśā. *Iśvara Guptera kabitā saṃgraha*. Dhākā: Māolā Brothers, 1969.

Kabiśekhara, Balarāma. *Kālikāmaṅgal*. Kalikātā: Baṅgiya-Sāhitya-Parishad-Mandira, 1331.

Mukhopādhyāẏ, Rājīvlocan. *Śrī Mahārājā Kṛṣṇacandra Rāyasya Caritra*. Landana: [s.n.], 1811.

Nyāẏaratna, Rāmagati. *Bāṅgālā bhāshā o Bāṅgālā sāhityabishaẏaka prastāba*. Natuna saṃskaraṇa. Kalikātā: Suprīma Buka Ḍisṭribiuṭārsa, 1991.

Parāśara. *Parāśara-Smṛtiḥ*. Bibliotheca Indica ; Asiatic Society, 1890.

Rāṛhī, Kānticandra., and Yajñeśvara. Caudhurī. *Nabadvīpa-mahimā*. Paribardhita saṃskaraṇa. Nabadvīpa: Nabadvīpa Purātattva Parishada, 2004.

Ray, Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra. *Kṣitīśavaṁśāvalīcarita*. Kolkata: Nutan Sanskrit Jantra, 1876.

Rāy, Bhāratcandra. "Vidyāsundara, Ou Kālikāmaṅgala, Par Bhāratacandra Rāya Guṇākara." Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. Indien 719, 1801.

Rāya, Satīśa Candra. *Śrī Śrī padakalpataru: arthāt, padakarttā Baishṇabadāsera saṅkalita*. Vol. saṃ. 5. Sāhitya-parishad-granthābalī ; Kalikātā: Baṅgiya-Sāhitya-Parishad-Mandira, 1322.

Rāẏa, Deoẏān Kārtikeẏacandra. *Ātma-jībana carita*. Kalikātā: Iṇḍiẏāna Ayāsōsiẏētēda Pābalisiṃ Cōṃ. Prāibhēta, 1956.

Sabirid Khan and Āhamada Śarīpha. *Śā'bārida Khānera granthābalī*. Dhākā: Bāṅlā Ekāḍemī, 1966.

Sen, Dineścandra. *Baṅgabhāṣā O Sāhitya*. Calcutta: Hemchandra Sen, 1896.

Sen, Sukumar. *Bāṅgālā sāhityera itihāsa*. [4. saṃskaraṇa]. Kalikātā: Ishṭārṇ Pābaliśārs, 1961.

Shahidullah, Muhammad. *Bāṃlā Sāhityera Kathā*. Ḍhākā: M. Safiyyullah, 1963.

Sharīf, Aḥmad. "Vidyāsundarer Kavi: Dvija Śrīdhar (1520–1532 Khṛṣṭābda) o Sābirid Khān (1517–1585 Khṛṣṭābda)." *Sāhitya Patrikā* 1, no. 1 (1957): 77–135.

Travelogues, Hydrological Reports, Official Publications and English translations of South Asian texts

'Uthmān ibn Sirāj al-Dīn, Abu 'Umar Minhāj al-Din. *Tabaḳāt-i-Nāsiri, a General History of the Muhammadan Dynastics of Asia, Including Hindustān, from A.H. 194 (810 A.D.) to A.H. 658 (1260 A.D.) and the Irruption of the Infidel Mughals into Islām;* translated by Henry George Raverty. Bibliotheca Indica, London: Printed by Gilbert & Rivington, 1881.

"The Mofussil and the Ditch." *Asiatic Journal* 28 (January-April 1839): 36–46.

Baillie, William. "Ruined Gateway in the Baisgazi Wall with the Remains of an Hexagonal Tower, Gaur. In the Distance, Outside the East Wall Is the Firoz Minar." Www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/other/019wdz000003953u00000000.html.

Bandopadhyay, Brajendranath, ed. *Sangbadpatre Sekaler Katha, vol.1 (1818-1830)*. 1932.

Bholanauth Chunder. *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India*. Vol. 1. London: Trübner & Company, 1869.

———. *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India*. Vol. 2. London: Trübner & Company, 1869.

Calcutta Review. "Marriage of Hindu Widows." July-December 1855, 351–368.

Chambers, Robert. "A Discourse Delivered by Sir Robert Chambers, Knight, President." In *Asiatick Researches Vol. Vi*, 1–5. 1799.

Chandler, Richard. *The History of Ilium Or Troy: Including the Adjacent Country, and the Opposite Coast of the Chersonesus of Thrace*. Nichols and son, 1802.

Chattopadhyay, Bankim Chandra. "The Bengali Language: The Language of Writing." *Indian Literature* 58 (3 (281) 2014): 26–35.

Colebrooke, R. H. "On the Course of the Ganges through Bengal." *Asiatick Researches* 7 (1801): 1–31.

Cotton, James Sutherland, Sir Richard Burn, and Sir William Stevenson Meyer. *Imperial Gazetteer of India*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908.

Creighton, Henry. *The Ruins of Gour Described and Represented in Eighteen Views. With a Topographical Map*. London: Black, Parbury, & Allen, 1817.

Daniell, Thomas, William Daniell, and James Wales. *Oriental Scenery: One Hundred and Fifty Views of the Architecture, Antiquities, and Landscape Scenery of Hindoostan*. London: Published by the authors, 1816.

Derozio, Henry Louis Vivian. "Beginnings, Literature in India, Promises." *Indian Gazette* (Calcutta), July 20, 1826.

Dow, Alexander. *The History of Hindostan, : From the Death of Akbar, to the Complete Settlement of the Empire under Aurungzebe. To Which Are Prefixed, I. A Dissertation on the Origin and Nature of Despotism in Hindostan. II. An Enquiry into the State of Bengal*. Eighteenth Century ; London: printed for T. Becket and P. A. de Hondt, 1772.

Dutt, Romesh Chunder. *The Literature Of Bengal*. 1895.

Francis, Philip. "Journal." The British Library, Francis Papers, Mss Eur E23, 1777.

Francklin, William. "Journal of a Route from Rajemehul to Gour." British Library, IOR/X/1292, 1810.

———. *Journal of a Route from Rajemehul to Gour, AD 1810-11 [with a Typed Memorandum by G F Tinney, India Office]*. Shilong, 1910.

Garcin de Tassy, M. (Joseph-Héliodore-Sagesse-Vertu), and Oriental Translation Fund. n 50075112. *Histoire de la littérature hindoui et hindoustani*. In collaboration with Wellcome Library. Paris: Printed under the auspices of the Oriental Translation Committee of Great Britain and Ireland, 1839.

Garrett, J.H. E. *Bengal District Gazetteers - Nadia*. 1910.

Ghosh, J. C. *Bengali Literature*. 1948.

Ghosh, Kasiprasad. "Mill's British India." In *The Days of John Company: Selections from Calcutta Gazette, 1824-1832*, 288–293. Calcutta: Government Printing, 1959.

———. "On Bengallee Works and Writers." *The India Gazette* (Calcutta), January 27, 1830.

Halhed, Nathaniel Brassey. *A Grammar Of The Bengal Language*. Hooghly, Bengal, 1778.

Hastings, Warren. "Revenue Department. November 12 1776." In *Original Minutes of the Governor-General and Council of Fort William on the Settlement and Collection of the Revenues of Bengal: With a Plan of Settlement, Recommended to the Court of Directors in January, 1776*. London : Printed for J. Debrett ..., 1782.

Hedges, William, Henry Yule, and R. Barlow. *The Diary of William Hedges, Esq. (Afterwards Sir William Hedges), during His Agency in Bengal: As Well as on His Voyage out and Return Overland (1681-1697)*. Vol. I. London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1887.

Hirst, F. C. *The Surveys of Bengal by Major James Rennell, F.R.S., 1764-1777: Illustrated by a New Atlas Containing Important Unpublished Maps by Rennell / by F.C. Hirst.* Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depôt, 1917.

"History of Kissen-nagur, the Zemindary of Raja Kisten-Chund." The British Library, Hasting Papers, Add MS 29210, 1771.

Hunter, W. W. "A River of Ruined Capitals." *The Nineteenth century: a monthly review* 23, no. 131 (January 1888): 40–53.

Hunter, William Wilson. *A Statistical Account of Bengal*. Vol. II. London: Trübner, 1875.

Hunter, William Wilson. *The Indian Empire: Its Peoples, History, and Products*. In collaboration with University of California Libraries. London : Trübner & co., 1886.

Lechevalier, Jean-Baptiste. *Description of the Plain of Troy.* Edinburgh: T. Cadell, 1791.

Long, James. "The Banks of the Bhagirathi." *The Calcutta Review* 6, no. 12 (July - December 1846): 397.

Lord Minto. "Lord Minto's Minute on Sanskrit College in Trihut and Nadia." In *Selections From Unpublished Records Of Government (1748 - 1767)*, 731–39. Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1973.

Mill, James. *The History of British India, Vol. I.* London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1817.

Mīrzā Nathan, Moayyidul Islam Borah, and Suryya Kumar. Bhuyan. *Bahāristān-i-Ghaybī: A History of the Mughal Wars in Assam, Cooch Behar, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa during the Reigns of Jahāngīr and Shāhjahān.* Gauhati, Assam: The Government of Assam, Dept. of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Narayani Handiqui Historical Institute, 1936.

O'Malley, Lewis Sydney Stewart. *Bengal District Gazetteers Santal Parganas*. Concept Publishing Company, 1910.

Orme, Robert. *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan, from the Year MDCCXLV. To Which Is Prefixed A Dissertation on the Establishments Made by Mahomedan Conquerors in Indostan.* London: printed for John Nourse, 1763.

Pertsch, Wilhelm. "Preface." In *Kṣitīśavaṃśāvalīcaritaṃn A Chronicle of the Family of Râja Kṛishṇachandra of Navadvîpa, Bengal*, i–xix. Ferd. Dümmler, 1852.

Phillimore, R.H. *Historical Records of Survey of India*. Vol. 1. Dehra Dun: The Surveyor General of India, 1945.

Prinsep, Thomas, R. H Colebrooke, and J. S May. *The River Ganges from Allahabad to Mohungunje: In Six Plates*. India, 1828.

Rennell, James. *A Bengal Atlas*. Lyon: Bibliothèque du Palais des Arts, 1781.

———. *An Account of the Ganges and Burrampooter Rivers*. London: s.n., 1781.

———. *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan; or, The Mogul Empire: With an Introduction, Illustrative of the Geography and Present Division of That Country: And a Map of the Countries Situated between the Head of the Indus, and the Caspian Sea.* London: Printed by M. Brown, for the author, 1788.

Retransfer of Nobodeep from Burdwan to Nuddea. Proceedings, Bengal Revenue 6-10. Calcutta, September 1874.

Risley, H. H. *Tribes And Castes Of Bengal*. Vol. 1. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1891.

Sastri, Haraprasad. *Discovery Of Living Buddhism In Bengal*. 1897.

Sastri, Sibnath, and Roper Lethbridge. *Ramtanu Lahiri, Brahman and Reformer: A History of the Renaissance in Bengal; from the Bengali of Pandit Swanath Sastri*. London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1907.

Śāstrī, Śibanātha. *A History of the Brahmo Samaj*. Calcutta: R. Chatterji, 1911.

Sen, Dinesh Chandra. *History Of Bengali Language And Literature*. 1911.

Sibnath Sastri, Roper Lethbridge. *Ramtanu Lahiri, Brahman and Reformer: A History of the Renaissance in Bengal ...* In collaboration with University of California. Swan Sonnenschein, 1907.

Stewart, Charles. *The History of Bengal: From the First Mohammedan Invasion Until the Virtual Conquest of That Country by the English, A.D. 1757*. Black, Parry, and Company, 1813.

Tavernier, Jean-Baptiste, and V. Ball. *Travels in India*. Lahore: al-Biruni, 1976.

Tennant, William. *Indian Recreations*. London and Edinburgh: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1804–8.

"Sarat Chandra Sing vs Kshitish Chandra Roy." *The Calcutta Law Journal* XII, no. 1 (1910): 216–224.

The Friend of India. "Educational Movements." November 27, 1845, no. 569, [753].

Vansittart, Henry. "Mr. Vansittart's Journey from Mootagill to Calcutta by Kisnagur and Barrasut with Some Description of the Country and of Hybut Oolah the Renter, I [Orme] Believe of Kishnagur. Probably Original." British Library, Mss Eur Orme OV.67, January 1763.

Wilford, Francis. "FIELD BOOK of a SURVEY Undertaken to Find the Difference of Level between the GANGES and BOGRUTTY RIVERS. Observations on the Ganges, Cossimbazar, and Jellinghee Rivers. No Date. Signed F. Wilford, Lieut. Surveyor. On 13 Pages, 4to. Stiff Cover. MS." British Library, IOR/X/428.

———. "On the Chronology of the Hindus." In *Asiatic Researches Or, Transactions of the Society, Instituted in Bengal, for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature, of Asia. Volume Five.* 5:241–295. London: London: printed for J. Sewell; Vernor and Hood; J. Cuthell; J. Walker; R. Lea; Lackington, Allen, and Co.; Otridge and son; R. Faulder; and J. Scatcherd., 1799.

Williams, C. Adams. *History of the Rivers in the Gangetic Delta. 1750-1918.* Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1919.

Secondary sources

Ali, Daud. *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

———. "The Idea of the Medieval in the Writing of South Asian History: Contexts, Methods and Politics." *Social History* 39, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 382–407.

App, Urs. *The Birth of Orientalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

Arnold, David. *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science, 1800-1856*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006.

Asif, Manan Ahmed. *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020.

Aston, T. H., and C. H. E. Philpin. *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*. Past and Present Publications. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Azad, Alauddin. *A Study of Life and Short Poems of Iswarchandra Gupta*. Vol. no. 34. Asiatic Society of Bangladesh Publication ; Dacca: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1979.

Banerjee, Milinda. *A History of Laughter: Ishwar Gupta and Early Modern Bengal*. Kolkata: Das Gupta and Company, 2009.

Banerjee, Prathama. *Politics of Time: "Primitives" and History-Writing in a Colonial Society*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Banerjee-Dube, Ishita. *A History of Modern India*. Daryaganj, Delhi, India: Cambridge University Press, October 27, 2014.

Basu, Ānandamohana. *Bāṃlā padābalīra chanda*. [Bolapura]: [Pāramitā Prakāśana], 1968.

Basu, Śaṅkarīprasāda. *Kabi Bhāratacandra*. Kalikātā: Maṇḍala Buka Hāusa, 1974.

Bayly, C. A. *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. London: Verso, 1998.

Bhatia, Varuni. "Images of Navadwip: Place, Evidence and Inspiration." In *Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia*, 167–185. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011.

———. *Unforgetting Chaitanya: Vaishnavism and Cultures of Devotion in Colonial Bengal*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Bhaṭṭācārya, Āśutosha. *Bāṃlā Maṅgalakābyera Itihāsa*. Kalikātā: E. Mukhārjī, 1975.

Bhattacharya, France. "The Poet and His Patron. Bharat Chandra Ray (1712-60) and Raja Krishna Chandra Ray of Nadia (1728-82)." In *The Varied Facets of History: Essays in Honour of Aniruddha Ray*, edited by Ishrat. Alam and Syed Ejaz. Hussain. Delhi: Primus Books, 2011.

Bhattacharya, Tithi. *The Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal (1848-85)*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Bhattacharyya, Debjani. *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta: The Making of Calcutta*. Cambridge University Press, May 24, 2018.

Bhattacharyya, Dineshchandra. "Prāṇrām Cakrabarttīr Kālikāmaṅgal." *Sahitya Parishat Patrika* l, no. 3 (1943): 62–64.

Bhattasali, Nalini Kanta. "Bengal Chiefs' Struggle for Independence in the Reign of Akbar & Jahangir." *Bengal Past And Present*, 1928.

Bordeaux, Joel. "The Mythic King: Raja Krishnacandra and Early Modern Bengal." PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015.

Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay. "Radhamohan Sen." In *Krishnakamal Bhattcharya, Ramkamal Bhattcharya, Jaygopal Tarkalankar, Madanmohan Tarkalankar, Gourmohan Bidyalankar, Radhamohan Sen, Brajamohan Majumdar, Nilratna Halder*, 0:116–121. Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1948.

Cakrabartī, Alokakumāra. *Mahārājā Kṛṣṇacandra o tatkālīna Baṅgasamāja*. Kalikātā: Pragesibha Buka Phorāma, 1989.

Caudhurī, Ābadula Mamina. *Dynastic History of Bengal, c. 750-1200 A.D.* Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1967.

Caudhurī, Yajñeśvara. *Āñcalika itihāsa carcāẏa Nadīẏā*. Nabadvīpa, Nadiẏā: Nabadvīpa Purātattva Parishada, 2007.

———. *Bardhamāna, Itihāsa o Saṃskṛti*. 3 vols. Uttarapāṛā, Jelā-Hugalī : Kalikātā: Ānandamaẏī Caudhurī ; Paribeśaka Pustaka Bipaṇi, 1990.

Chakrabarti, Pratik. *Inscriptions of Nature: Geology and the Naturalization of Antiquity*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Historicism and Its Supplements. A Note on a Predicament Shared by Medieval and Postcolonial Studies." In *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of the Middle Ages Outside Europe*, edited by Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul, 51–79. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

———. *Provincializing Europe Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

———. "Romantic Archives: Literature and the Politics of Identity in Bengal." *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004): 654–682.

———. *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth*. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

———. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197–222.

———. "The Muddle of Modernity." *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (June - 2011): 663–675.

Chambers, Robert. "A Discourse Delivered by Sir Robert Chambers, Knight, President." In *Asiatick Researches Vol. Vi*, 1–5. 1799.

Chatterjee, Kanta. *Writing Another Bengal: Regional and Local Histories of Bengal in Times of Modernity and Nationalism, 1860-1950*. Kolkata: Pragatishil Prokashak, 2015.

Chatterjee, Kumkum. "Goddess Encounters: Mughals, Monsters and the Goddess in Bengal." *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 5 (2013): 1435–1487.

———. *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India. Persianization and Mughal Culture in Bengal*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011.

———. "The King of Controversy: History and Nation-Making in Late Colonial India." *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 5 (2005): 1454–1475.

Chatterjee, Partha. "Introduction: History in the Vernacular." In *History in the Vernacular*, edited by Raziuddin. Aquil, 14–39. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2008.

Chatterji, Suniti Kumar. *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*. Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1926.

Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra. *Bankim Rachanavali (English)*. 1960.

Chaudhuri, Rosinka. *The Literary Thing: History, Poetry, and the Making of a Modern Cultural Sphere*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. "Three Poets in Search of History. Calcutta, 1752-1859." In *Trans-Colonial Modernities in South Asia*, 189–207. London: Routledge, 2012.

Cox, Whitney. "Love and Theft: "Bilhana" and the Thief's Fifty Verses." Shunga - Erotic Art in a Comparative Context. London, May 25, 2011.

———. "Reading Jalhaṇa Reading Bilhaṇa: Literary Criticism in a Sanskrit Anthology." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 141, no. 4 (2021): 867.

Curley, David L. *Poetry and History: Bengali Maṅgal-kābya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal*. New Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2008.

D'Hubert, Thibaut. "Literary History of Bengal." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, February 26, 2018.

———. *Meaningful Rituals: Persian, Arabic and Bengali in the Nūrnāma Tradition of Eastern Bengal*. Primus Books, forthcoming.

D'Hubert, Thibaut. *In the Shade of the Golden Palace: Alaol and Middle Bengali Poetics in Arakan*. South Asia Research. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Dalmia, Vasudha. *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhāratendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth-Century Banaras*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Datta, Amaresh. *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature: Devraj to Jyoti*. Sahitya Akademi, 1988.

Davis, Kathleen. *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

Davis, Kathleen, and Nadia Altschul. *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of the Middle Ages Outside Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

De, Sushil Kumar. *Bengali Literature In The Nineteenth Century (1757-1857)*. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1940.

———. *Early History Of The Vaisnava Faith And Movement In Bengal*. 1942.

Dodson, Michael S. *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770-1880*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Eaton, Richard Maxwell. *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Edney, Matthew H. *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843*. 2009.

Edward, Thomas. *Henry Derozio, the Eurasian, Poet, Teacher, and Journalist: With Appendices*. Calcutta: W. Newman, 1884.

Eggeling Julius Tr. *The Satapatha-brahmana Part. 3*. 1894.

Ehrlich, Joshua. "New Lights on Raja Krishnachandra and Early Hindu-European Intellectual Exchange." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 31, no. 1 (January 2021): 159–171.

———. "The Meanings of a Port City Boundary: Calcutta's Maratha Ditch, c. 1700 – 1950." *Past & Present*, January 7, 2022, gtab032.

Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Fane-Saunders, Peter. *Pliny the Elder and the Emergence of Renaissance Architecture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Forbes, Geraldine Hancock. *Positivism in Bengal: A Case Study in the Transmission and Assimilation of an Ideology*. Calcutta: Minerva Associates Publications, 1975.

Foucault, Michel. *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences*. London; New York: Routledge, 2006.

Ganeri, Jonardon. *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450-1700*. The Oxford History of Philosophy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Ghosh, Pika. *Temple to Love: Architecture and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Bengal*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.

Ghosha, Binaẏa. *Bidyāsāgara o Bāṅālī Samāja*. Kalikātā: Beṅgala Pābaliśāra Prāibheṭa Limiṭeḍa, 1957.

Guha, Ranajit. *A Rule of Property for Bengal; an Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement.* Paris: Mouton, 1963.

Guha-Thakurta, Tapati. *Monuments, Objects, Histories Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*. Cultures of History. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Harder, Hans. "The Modern Babu and the Metropolis: Reassessing Early Bengali Narrative Prose (1821 - 1862)." In *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Vasudha Dalmia, 358–401. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.

Hartog, François. *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

Hatcher, Brian A. "Introduction." In *Hindu Widow Marriage*, 1–54. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Heaney, G. F. "Rennell and the Surveyors of India." *The Geographical Journal* 134, no. 3 (1968): 318–325.

Hebron, Stephen. *The Romantics and the British Landscape*. London: British Library, 2006.

Hulme, Peter., and Tim Youngs. *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Hussain, Syed Ejaz. *The Bengal Sultanate: Politics, Economy and Coins, A.D. 1205-1576*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2003.

Inden, Ronald B. *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture: A History of Caste and Clan in Middle Period Bengal*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

Ivermee, Robert. *Hooghly: The Global History of a River*. vii, 262 pages, 8 unnumbered pages of plates. London: C. Hurst & Co., 2020.

Jha, Pankaj. *A Political History of Literature: Vidyapati and the Fifteenth Century*. Oxford University Press.

Johnson, Alison M. "The Rennell Collection." *The Geographical Journal* 148, no. 1 (1982): 38.

Kabir, Ananya Jahanara. "An Enchanted Mirror for the Capitalist Self: The Germania in British India." In *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of the Middle Ages Outside Europe*, edited by Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul, 51–79. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

Kāṇe, Pāṇḍuraṅga Vāmana. *History of Dharmaśāstra : (Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law in India)*. Government Oriental Series. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1930.

Karim, Abdul. *History of Bengal: Mughal Period*. Rajshahi, Bangladesh: Institute of Bangladesh Studies, University of Rajshahi, 1992.

———. "Musalman Kabir Bidyasundar." *Bharatbarsa* i, no. 5 (1918): 631–638.

Karim Sāhitya-biśārad, Abdul. "Gauḍreśvarer Ādeśe Racita Bidyāsundar." *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* xliv, no. 1 (1937): 22–24.

Kaviraj, Sudipta. "The Invention of Private Life: Reading of Sibnath Sastri's Autobiography." In *The Invention of Private Life : Literature and Ideas*, 303. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

———. "The Sudden Death of Sanskrit Knowledge." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33, no. 1 (2005): 119–142.

Kelley, Donald R. *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

King, Christopher Rolland. *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India*. Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Kitada, Makoto. "Bengali Drama from Nepal. Vidyāvinoda. A Romanized Text Based on the Manuscript. Report on the Research of Dramatic Manuscripts Written in Nepal of the Malla Dynasty.," April 15, 2019.

———. "The Drama Vidyāvinoda by Poet Śrīdhara Found in Nepal: Probably the Earliest Bengali Version of the Vidyāsundara Story," February 17, 2021, 1–8.

Knutson, Jesse. *Into the Twilight of Sanskrit Court Poetry: The Sena Salon of Bengal and Beyond*. South Asia across the Disciplines. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

Kopf, David. *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance. The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835*. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969.

Kosmin, Paul J. *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018.

Ludden, David. "Orientalist Empiricism: Transformations of Colonial Knowledge." In *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, 250. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.

Majumdar, R. C. *Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century*. Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960.

———. *Maharaja Rajballabh*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1947.

Majumdar, Rochona. *Art Cinema and India's Forgotten Futures: Film and History in the Postcolony*. Columbia University Press, 2021.

———. *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

Markham, Clements Robert. *Major James Rennel and the Rise of Modern English Geography*. Cassell & Co., 1895.

McDermott, Rachel Fell. *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams: Kālī and Umā in the Devotional Poetry of Bengal*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Mitra, Sailendranath. "The Long-lost Sanskrit Vidyāsundara." *Proceedings and Transactions of the Second Oriental Conference Calcutta*, 1923, 215–20.

Morrison, Kathleen D. "On Putting Time in Its Place: Archaeological Practice and the Politics of Time in Southern India." *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 26, no. 04 (2016): 619–641.

Mukerjee, Radhakamal. *The Changing Face Of Bengal*. 1938.

Mukhia, Harbans. *The Feudalism Debate*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1999.

Olivelle, Patrick. "Social and Literary History of Dharmaśāstra: The Foundational Texts." In *Hindu Law: A New History of Dharmaśāstra*, First edition, edited by Patrick Olivelle and Donald R. Davis, 15–29. The Oxford History of Hinduism. Oxford, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Olivelle, Patrick, and Suman Olivelle. *Manu's code of law: a critical edition and translation of Manava-Dharmasastra*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Ollett, Andrew. "Thieves in the Storehouse of Sarasvatī." *Asian Literature and Translation* 2, no. 4 (2014): 1–15.

Pocock, J. G. A. (John Greville Agard). *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Pollock, Sheldon. "Introduction." In *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, edited by Sheldon Pollock, 1–36. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

———. "Philology in Three Dimensions." *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 5, no. 4 (2014): 398–413.

———. "The Death of Sanskrit." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 2 (2001): 392–426.

———. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Quinn, Arthur. "'Meditating Tacitus': Gibbon's Adaptation to an Eighteenth Century Audience." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70, no. 1 (February 1984): 53–68.

Ramaswamy, Sumathi. *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Ray, Aniruddha. *Towns and Cities of Medieval India: A Brief Survey*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2015.

Ray, Avishek. "The Discursivity of the 'Hindu' Gaze: Reading Bholanauth Chunder's Travelogue." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, April 26, 2020, 1–13.

Rene Wellek. *The Rise Of English Literary History*. 1941.

Reynolds, Susan. *The Middle Ages without Feudalism: Essays in Criticism and Comparison on the Medieval West*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Variorum, 2012.

Roy, Tapti. *Print and Publishing in Colonial Bengal: The Journey of Bidyasundar*. Taylor & Francis, November 13, 2018.

Rudra, Kalyan. *Atlas of Changing River Courses in West Bengal,1767-2010*. 1 atlas (xii, 132 pages). Kolkata: Sea Explorers' Institute, 2012.

Salomon, Carol, and Govindadāsa. "Govindadāsa's Kālikāmaṅgal: The Vikramāditya and Vidyāsundara Sections: An Edition and Translation." PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1983.

Sarakāra, Bihārīlāla. *Bidyāsāgara*. Kalikātā: Nabapatra Prakāśana, 1982.

Sarkar, Jadunath. *The History of Bengal. Muslim Period. 1200 A.D.-1757 A.D.* Vol. 2. Dacca: The University of Dacca, 1943.

Sen, Parjanya. "Gaur as 'Monument': The Making of an Archive and Tropes of Memorializing." *Journal of Art Historiography* 8 (December 1, 2013).

Sen, Sudipta. *Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and Making of the Colonial Marketplace*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

———. *Ganges the Many Pasts of an Indian River*. 2019.

Sengupta, Indra. *From Salon to Discipline: State, University and Indology in Germany, 1821-1914*. Heidelberg: Ergon Verlag, 2005.

Shahidullah, Muhammad. *Les chants mystiques de Kānha et de Saraha: les Dohākosa (en apabhraṃśa, avec les versions tibétaines) et les Caryā (en vieux-bengali) avec introduction, vocabulaires et notes*. Textes pour l'étude du bouddhisme tardif. Paris: Adrien-Maison-neuve, 1928.

———. *Buddhist Mystic Songs, Oldest Bengali and Other Eastern Vernaculars*. Dacca: Bengali Academy, 1966.

Sharīf, Aḥmad. "Vidyāsundarer Kavi: Dvija Śrīdhar (1520–1532 Khṛṣṭābda) o Sābirid Khān (1517–1585 Khṛṣṭābda)." *Sāhitya Patrikā* 1, no. 1 (1957): 77–135.

Shin, Jae-Eun. *Change, Continuity and Complexity: The Mahāvidyās in East Indian Śākta Traditions*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Shryock, Andrew, Thomas R Trautmann, and Clive Gamble. "Imagining the Human in Deep Time." In *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present*, 21–54. Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 2011.

Simmel, Georg. "Two Essays." *The Hudson Review* 11, no. 3 (1958): 371–385.

Sinha, Kumar Gangananda. "On Some Maithili Dramas of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." *Journal Of The Asiatic Society Of Bengal* 20 (1924): 73–78.

Sinha, Narendra Krishna. *The Economic History Of Bengal Vol. 2*. Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960.

Sinha, Samita. *Pandits in a Changing Environment: Centres of Sanskrit Learning in Nineteenth Century Bengal*. Calcutta: Sarat Book House, 1993.

Stewart, Susan. *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020.

Stewart, Tony K. *The Final Word: The Caitanya Caritāmṛta and the Grammar of Religious Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Sukthankar, Vishnu S. "Prolegomenon." In *The Ādiparvan. Being the First Book of the Mahābhārata, the Great Epic of India*, 1:LXXVI–CIV. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933.

Tavakoli-Targhi, Mohamad. *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography*. St. Antony's Series. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001.

Thapar, Romila. *Time as a Metaphor of History: Early India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Trautmann, Thomas R. "Indian Time, European Time." In *Time: Histories and Ethnologies*, 167–197. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.

———. *Languages and Nations the Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Travers, Robert. *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India: The British in Bengal*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Truschke, Audrey. "The Power of the Islamic Sword in Narrating the Death of Indian Buddhism." *History of Religions* 57, no. 4 (January 1, 2018): 406–435.

Warton, Thomas. *The History of English Poetry, from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century. To Which Are Prefixed, Two Dissertations. (I) On the Origin of Romantic Fiction in Europe. (II) On the Introduction of Learning into England*. In collaboration with University of California Libraries. Vol. 1. London: J. Dodsley, 1774.

Wright, Samuel. "From Praśasti to Political Culture: The Nadia Raj and Malla Dynasty in Seventeenth-Century Bengal." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73, no. 2 (2014): 397–418.

Zakariah, Abul Kalam Muhammad. "Muhammad Bakhtiyar's Conquest of Nūdīah." *Journal of the Varendra Research Museum* 6 (1982): 57–72.

Zbavitel, Dušan. *Bengali Literature*. Vol. v. 9. A History of Indian Literature ; v. 9 : Modern Indo-Aryan Literatures ; Fasc. 3. Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 1976.