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ABSTRACT

My dissertation investigates how a prescriptive discourse on norms lost currency in the early nineteenth century colonial Kolkata, and how a new generation of Bengali intellectuals turned – via European "moral and mental philosophy"– to theories of the moral sense to argue that a different order of norms was necessary. It tracks how the localization of moral authority in the individual, reasoning Self became a key proposition in Bengali public discourse, and explores how reformers relayed this proposition across a growing network of government-backed schools. This was consequential in inspiring a province-wide movement of "social reform" that sought to amend customs deemed unreasonable and immoral. By way of conclusion, it tracks the ways in which the reformist advocacy for a wholesale reform of society lost traction in the late nineteenth century as a generation of "neo-romantic" critics began to argue that the adoption of new, morally reasonable rules by Indians was merely imitative, and began arguing that the true moral autonomy would only be realized through the progressive development of national character.

INTRODUCTION

<u>*Seeing the advent of a new age*</u>

Reflecting on the "advent of the new age" (*nutan yuger abatāraṇ*) he had witnessed in his childhood, poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) commented that the new epoch was marked by the extension and acclimatization of the "European practice of critique" (*Ẏuropīẏa Bicār Paddhati*) to Bengal.[1] In particular, Tagore argued that the efforts of mid-nineteenth century "social reformers" such as Akshaẏ Kumār Datta (1820-1886) and Iswarcandra Vidyāsāgara (1820-1891) to question once-revered practices had engendered an intimate sense of epochal rupture, making Bengalis feel as if past and future might no longer coincide.

Historians since Tagore have connected the reformists' campaigns against premodern iniquity with the emergence of Bengal's distinctive "Bhadra" society, often described as the subordinate local chapter of a globally ascendant bourgeoisie. They have also pointed out the ascent of the "Bhadralok" – a compound formed from the addition of *good* and *person* – constituted no "bourgeois revolution": the distorting context of colonialism and the enduring legacies of caste frustrated capitalistic transformation and social emancipation alike, ensuring modernity in Bengal fell short of its most fundamental sociological promises. Departing from such accounts of Bengali modernity as social and economic failure, this dissertation tracks instead the extraordinary success that modernity enjoyed in nineteenth century Bengali society as a *claim* regarding the inadequacies of the present, and requiring a new and better ethical ordering of society. By offering a history of how vehement moral disagreement came to define Bengali life in the nineteenth century and helped make a new age visible, I hope to recover the new

[1] Rabindranath Tagore, "Haraprasād Śāśtrīr Smritipustoker jannya" in *Haraprasād Śāśtrī Smārakgrāntha*, ed., Bhaṭṭācārya, D. (Kolkata: Bangīẏa Sahitya Parishāṭ, 1979) 171.

possibilities of ethical becoming that first emerged in the nineteenth century – and their transformation at the onset of a nationalist age.

While claims that one's present may be insufficiently moral have been common at all times, early nineteenth century upper-caste Bengalis in Kolkata faced an ethical challenge of a completely different order of magnitude: living in a completely new, colonial metropolis, and subject to new forms of employment and new risks of pollution, experiences of the past no longer seemed able to straightforwardly guide ethical action in the present. Though intellectuals such as Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālaṅkāra argued a sophisticated case for a renewed attention to the moral order of caste and a reprisal of the authoritative disciplinary tradition (smṛtiśāstras) on which it was founded, public debates about virtuous conduct slid with increasing frequency into anxious metaethical wrangles on where true norms came from. The resulting contest about normativity deepened the sense that what was previously known to be virtuous and what *ought to be* moral might no longer coincide.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the reformer Datta was famously arguing that that in this "time of enlightenment" (gyānujjālita samaẏa) the Vedas were no sure guide for moral judgment and humans ought to rely solely on the work of their *dharmapravṛitti*, their "moral faculty". In a similar vein, his close collaborator Vidyāsāgara called for a reappraisal of the normative resources of Hinduism against the *existing* practices of his society, and demanded a reexamination and reinterpretation of the prescriptive codes underpinning the organization of the Hindu family.[2] Both argued that the present was a time marked by an obligation to build new and better norms, and that a new and genuinely moral society needed to be brought about. "Reform"

[2] Brian Hatcher "*Hindu Widow Marriage* as a Modern Day Commentary" in Īśvaracandra Vidyāsāgar (tr. & ed. Brian Hatcher) *Hindu Widow Marriage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) 30-41 is unsurpassed in this regard.

became a byword for truly moral action, and the struggle against unreasoning prejudice, the truest "dharma".

Recognizing the purchase of their proposition enables a more capacious recovery of the ways in which "enlightenment Europe was appropriated in the subcontinent".[3] By tracking how new understanding of moral personhoods emerged in the midst of an anxious public debate on what good conduct could be, this thesis aims to recover the transformative ways in which the moral critique of the insufficiency and inadequacy of existing social arrangements and practices came to be central to Bengali intellectual life.

The Historiography of Bengali Modernity

Bengal's first generation of professional historians once defended the Bengali "Bhadraloks" as heirs to Enlightenment Europe's project of normative revaluation, and connected the effort of Bhadralok reformism to the constitution of "bourgeois society". In the words of historian Susobhan Sarkar, "the brightest side of the bourgeois culture of the West" found a home in an emergent Bengali middle-class (marked by new avenues of professional employment) even as Europeans "betrayed" these same "liberal values" in the name of colonial authoritarianism and racist jingoism.[4] In Sarkar's understanding, the progressive component of the Bengali bhadralok "class" worked to fulfill the promise of modernity, universalizing liberal and humanistic values against the resistance of native conservatives and European chauvinists alike.

The understanding of Bhadralok society as a modernizing "bourgeois" and of nineteenth century Bengal as a time of "enlightenment" did not, however, last long. Historians found that

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[3] Dipesh Chakrabarty "The Idea of Provincializing Europe" in Dipesh *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 4.
[4] See Susobhan Sarkar, *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1946), 72.

the new organization of credit, the commodification of agrarian production and the emergence of novel kinds of financial institutions generated a very peculiar form of "remittance" capitalism in Bengal. In particular, exports were traded almost exclusively as means to further the speculative transfer of wealth to Britain rather than to institute a genuine process of Indian industrialization, while the wealthy earned rental incomes by sinking productive capital in land.[5] A story of economic underdevelopment came to overlap with a narrative of enlightenment foreclosed. If the work of Bhadralok reformers remained in an "elitist and comprador framework" it followed that the story of Bengali modernity was no "torch race (…) but a story of retreat and decline".[6] For the new historiographical consensus, failures in economic and social organization matched and explained the emancipatory shortcomings of Bhadralok reformism itself. "Modernization in Bengal", Barun De declared, "was doomed to frustration" primarily because the "necessities of middle-class subalternship within a colonial system" condemned Bengalis to a curious "enclaving of modernity".[7] Kolkata lawyers and rentiers pursued in contrived and fabricated ways the legacies of Europe's Enlightenment while reinforcing cultures of caste-based deference and feudal hierarchy in the countryside whence they extracted rent. Ranajit Guha – perhaps the most perceptive and consistent critic of a progressive reading of Bhadralok society – even refused to grant the "bhadralok" the "dignity" of a "class". Making one of the most vitriolic judgments on the Bhadralok "category", he wrote: "Trapped in conditions which did little to

[5] Shyam Bihari Singh, *European Agency Houses in Bengal 1783-1833,* (Kolkata: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1966.)
[6] See Sumit Sarkar, *Essays of a lifetime: reformers, nationalists, subalterns,* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2018), 2.
[7] Barun De, "The Colonial Context of the Bengal Renaissance" in Cyril Henry Philips and Mary Doreen Wainwright (eds.) *Indian Society and the Beginnings of Modernization c.1830-1850* (London: School of the Oriental and African Studies, 1976), 121.

encourage any organic growth and expansion, it hardened quickly into a parasitic and precocious outcrop on the surface of colonial society".[8]

The jettisoning of the equivalence between Bhadralok and bourgeois that Guha and others advocated shared nothing with the critique of the "bourgeois revolution" pioneered for the French revolution and the move to new forms of cultural history. On the contrary, the paradigm of a Bengali bourgeois revolution was challenged by a social history of decidedly Marxist inspiration. It was no flight from social history: it was its reinvigoration. Such critiques have since only intensified, and Bengal's nineteenth century figures as an especially perverse form of colonial *rivoluzione passiva.* Tithi Bhattacharya notes for instance that the "ethical quality" observable in arguments about Bhadraloks were not "abstract", but had "a genuine role to play in material relations". The primacy of ethical concerns in nineteenth century discourse purportedly allowed for the "dissolution of class conflict" between impoverished salaried professional and rentier landlords and enabled the production of a new "conglomeration" that could wield power over the materially dispossessed.[9] While not all accounts have shared Bhattacharya's dismissal of bhadralok ethical discourse as inherently cynical, the reformist effort to bring about moral transformation remains defined by its limits, be it more fundamental misrecognitions, premised on the inescapability of a foundational "antinomy internal to the logic of capitalist forms" or the emancipatory shortcomings that enabled its upper-caste male proponents to secure domination over its "Others": Muslims, women, lower-castes.[10]

[8] Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: history and power in colonial India,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 134.
[9] Tithi Bhattacharya "In the Name of Culture", in *South Asia Research,* Vol. 21 No. 2 (2001): 180.
[10]Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 52. See also Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial History,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) for a very different critical take.

Moral Revaluation in Nineteenth Century Bengal

Tithi Bhattacharya recently noted with frustration that "Contemporary [i.e. nineteenth century] writings on the Bhadralok are based not so much on observation, but on belief rooted in a moral code based on the world of *ought* and not the world of *is*", ultimately mystifying the dismal realities of life in a colonial society.[11] In this dissertation I do not wish to contest the many shortcomings Bengal's critical historians have unearthed: their insights constitute the point of departure for my own investigations into the history of critique in Bengal. Rather, I hope to show that the nineteenth century concern with moral "reform" ensured that the corrosive tools of critique were built into the very regulative ideals of ethical becoming of the same century, and recover how and why the quest for a new ethical horizon first came into being in nineteenth century Bengal.

This means focusing on the ways in which debates about morals may be key to modernity as a whole. In 1981 the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre offered an influential – if critical – definition of modernity as the age of normative revaluation. "The salient characteristic of the moral culture of modernity" was the abandonment of moral evaluations grounded in "virtue" in favor of an allegedly destabilizing turn to moral reason. An outcome of what McIntyre termed the "project of enlightenment", the turn to reason brought about a general transformation of the grounds for moral judgment and made "moral judgments (…) essentially contestable".[12] Charles Taylor has similarly argued that the specific "orientation in moral space" brought about by modernity

[11] Tithi Bhattacharya, *The sentinels of Culture: Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal (1848-85)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-3.
[12] Alasdair McIntyre, *After Virtue: a study in moral theory,* (London: Bloomsbury 2017), x.

precipitated an "immanentization of moral sources", and a turn to the reasoning Self as the "constitutive good" of the moral order *tout court*.[13]

The relationship between modernity and moral revaluation has been further sedimented in Robert Pippin's work. In his words, the impossibility of relying on a norm because it is *given or inherited* makes, for the "great, single modernity problem".[14] Pippin argues the claim of modernity constitutes a special kind of quest:

> whether human beings can regulate and evaluate their beliefs by rational self-reflection, if they can free themselves from interest, passion, tradition, prejudice and autonomously "rule" their own thoughts (…) and determine their actions as a result of self-reflection and rational evaluation, an evaluation the conclusions of which ought to bind any rational agent.[15]

Broadly speaking, as Pippin argues, "modernity" is a claim to an emancipatory or revolutionary autonomy, best described, in terms taken from the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant, as "self-grounding" or "self-legislation".

These works, conducted with exclusive reference to Europe's philosophical history, are nevertheless a significant point of departure for my argument. This is not because they take the self-legislating individual proposed by enlightenment as plausible or realized, but because they take the proposition of such a subject as a significant departure, demonstrating the extent to which contemporary social philosophy takes modernity to be *the* age in which a general and irreversible shift in the source of norms has taken place, and a new obligation to reason about norms has come to be an onus for the reasoning self. Since the inheritance of norms is no longer a criterion for their validity, the reasoning individual is understood as the primary – perhaps the only – source for producing valid norms.

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[13] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the making of the modern identity,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 83-84.
[14] Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, (Cambridge: Blackwells, 1991), 12.
[15] Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, 13-14.

Such an insight is shared with Foucault's celebrated reflection on the Enlightenment. Rejecting the identification of enlightenment modernity with "humanism", Foucault argued that the emergence of a novel kind of critical disposition towards one's own ethical dispositions likely marks the most enduring legacy of the modern.[16] In this sense, the quest for the self-legislating subject remains central to debates on what modernity might be *long* after "autonomy" has become an impossibly spent philosophical proposition. Telling the story of how this philosophical proposition acquired plausibility in Bengal – in the face of a sophisticated and entrenched tradition of śāstric moral reasoning – is key if we are to recover not only the history of Bengali moral thinking, but also of how, philosophically speaking, modernity occurred in the subcontinent.

The accounts of modernity as moral self-legislation surveyed above imply a specifically temporal ordering for moral evaluation. Since inherited norms are understood as inadequate to future moral evaluations *precisely* because they are handed down from the past, it follows that an account of modernity as autonomy relies upon, or produces, the claim of a break with the past. Since mere inheritance no longer constitutes a sufficient guarantee of moral value, the moral worth of existing norms can only be established with reference to their future applicability. It follows that norms are reaffirmed only if they appear futurable, and voided if they fail to hold future currency. Neither pastness nor futurity are categories intrinsic to moral philosophy, but few would deny that they are operational in any and all attempts to conceptualize the self-legislating or autonomous moral subject.

[16] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment" in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader,* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 32-51.

In tracing the connections between the ordering of time and the search for new grounds for norms, my project is animated by historian Reinhart Koselleck's proposition that modernity is a particular organization of the experience of time. He posits that "the modern regime of historicity" may be productively theorized as a fundamental break in the understanding of how futures and pasts relate to one another.[17] Specifically, modernity is characterized by an ever-widening disarticulation between the "realm of experience" (the relevant past) and the "horizon of expectation" (the conceivable future), whereby the resources of the former no longer overlap with the content of the latter.

The caesura Koselleck underscores between what is and what ought to be squares well with philosophical accounts that understand modernity as the rupture when that which was inherited from the past no longer necessarily held value for the future. Drawing upon Koselleck, I argue that the connection between modern periodization and the transformation of moral judgment can be usefully thought of as the *temporalization* of moral revaluation, so that a transformation in the source of norms also appears as a change of time. In Koselleck's words, this would be "the replacement of the old jurisdiction by the new dispensation of justice".[18] Insofar as the experience of the past provides no useful benchmark for the operation of moral judgment, it is "the yet-to-be achieved future" that vouches for the validity of any evaluations pointing out the shortcomings of the inherited present. This became increasingly true for claims in nineteenth century Bengal: In the remarkable words of the historian Sibnāth Śāstri, the reasonable and desirable moral norm (e.g. widow remarriage) was a symptom (lakshaṅ) of the

[17] Reinhardt Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time,* (New York: Columbia University Press 2004), 255.
[18] Reinhardt Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society,* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988) 99.

new age; the visible discarding of the markers of a previous moral order (the Brahminical thread) was the very embodiment of a transformation in time.

Building upon Koselleck's interventions, François Hartog has pointed out how acutely the disarticulation of pasts and futures that characterizes the "modern regime of historicity" exceeds the question of specific modernist commitments. Europeans facing the ruination of the moral resources of their own past, or the opening up of a novel moral horizon, either narrated normative revaluation as progressive self-emancipation or bemoaned it as Europe's suicide. Europe thus always inhabited its own break with the past: for the vanquished Chateaubriand the revolution was the struggle between new and old France.[19] In this sense, the uncompromising temporal break was safeguarded within Europe itself by a logic of spatial integrity.

In colonial Bengal, such continuity was impossible. Instead of old and new France facing each other, colonial intellectuals contended with the challenges of an emancipatory modernity without being able to claim a domestic point-of-origin for their Enlightenment quest. For many in 1830s and 1840s Kolkata, "to become modern was to become European."[20] Indeed, as result of a growing historicist language that made Europe the *telos* of universal history, the search for autonomy was immediately haunted by the specter of derivativeness. The reformists' quest for moral autonomy appeared to form a perverse alliance with the obligation to colonial tutelage the British authorities insisted on. The problem of the temporal ordering of modernity in the colony thus did not yield "autonomy", but immediately instantiated *anew* the problem of heteronomy. It risked transforming the discourse of modernity as emancipation into its opposite, generating the

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[19]François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 93

[20] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artefice of History" in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 39.

problem of whether the future of India-to-be could be understood through the present of a Europe-that-is.

The political consequences are profound. Koselleck notes that reading the present as scandalously inadequate from the moral standpoint of the future allowed German and French Enlightenment thinkers to transform the purportedly non-political act of moral critique into a genuine political challenge to the absolutist order. In a complete reversal of the relation between moral censure and political organization current in Enlightenment Europe, British administrators found ways to disqualify Indians from the fullest pursuit of an emancipatory becoming *precisely* by berating the Indian present as constitutively immoral because derivative and lacking true moral character, a moment most evident in the short-circuiting the project of "imperial liberalism" in the 1880s.

It follows that the diagnosis of modernity under colonial conditions meant much more than the experience of a caesura between past and present. This is not to deny that a gap between the horizon of expectation and the space of experience appeared in Bengal too, but to recognize that as long as the developments of nineteenth century historicism allowed for the figuration of Europe as the home of enlightenment itself, and the moral discourse of character as authentic self-development rose found growing purchase, the break with the past that Indians sought was haunted with the possibility that the future was already achieved elsewhere. Insofar as the quest for emancipated autonomy was constrained by the threat of derivativeness, the *frisson* of transgression against an obsolete order was already farcically condemned to be mere conformism to colonialism's new norm.

This meant, as reformers and their critics noted, that the act of opening up a genuinely novel horizon was a very complex and difficult project, *especially* philosophically. I turn to this

fundamental insight in postcolonial theory to offer a critical rethinking of the intellectual history of colonial Bengal's entanglement with modernity. The singular organization of the temporal order of modernity under colonialism generated original conditions for Bengali thinkers concerned with modernity. To consider the problem in these terms enables us to rethink the relationship between moral revaluation and modern periodization.

Recognizing the specificities of the quest for moral revaluation in the colony pushes us to broaden our account of modernity, and underscores the extent to which a particular history itself came to constrain the possibilities for an escape from the past. Given that the quest to establish Bengali modernity was born in a complicated relationship to colonizing Europe, Bengali intellectuals generated a critique of modernity as yet another form of heteronomy. They highlighted the extent to which the claim of a new age made the relationship to one's past a moral problem (a debate a critical theory of Europe is only belatedly recognizing) and formulated the quest for autonomy not simply as a task, but as a problem.

The Chapters

In my first chapter I turn to this history's inaugural moment, by examining the bitter debate opposing the celebrated Vedantist Rammohun Roy (1772?- 1833) to a variety of neo-prescriptivist adversaries – headed by the journalist Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandyopādhyāẏa (1787-1848) . Their debates centered on whether existing rituals – most notoriously the self-immolation of widows (Sāti) on the funerary pyre of their deceased husbands – ought to retain moral currency as praiseworthy actions or needed to be censured as deplorably immoral. Historians have underscored the ways in which the colonial state found legitimacy by evoking the scandal of widow self-immolation, and have highlighted the ways in which reformer, apologist and

colonial administrator alike came to constitute Indian "tradition" through sustained concern with the widow and her pyre.[21]

Yet Roy and Bandyopādhyāẏa's polemic was moved by a question more fundamental than that of the substantive imports of "Indian tradition" or the colonial state's quest for legitimacy: it was a debate driven by an anxious concern with whether or not this act – and a host of others – was virtuous or not, and premised on the extraordinary realization that an act previously considered morally upright may in truth be profoundly immoral. What Bandyopādhyāẏa defended as a virtuous act was "woman-murder" for Roy. Their debate was a public debate on right and wrong in the most fundamental ways.

Neither Bandyopādhyāẏa nor Roy advanced their arguments as arguments in moral philosophy, nor did they explicitly note that moral transformation marked a break in their sense of the times they were living through. Both also remained committed to the idea that virtuous action was primarily enjoined by India's authoritative traditions, though they argued ferociously about which sources ought to be considered authoritative: Bandyopādhyāẏa and the neo-prescriptivists sought to reinvigorate a vast tradition of prescriptive injunctions – the smr̥tiśāstra; Rammohun instead hoped to inaugurate a new normative foundationalism grounded in appeals to the Vedas, arguing that all other sources of norms were illegitimate and belated encroachments.

As Vedantists and neoprescriptivists failed to agree on whether specific acts were moral or immoral and fought over what was obligatorily enjoined or – conversely – belated and unwarranted, a group of radical graduates from Kolkata's new, government-sponsored

[21] Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

institution, the Hindu College, scandalized all by flagrantly breaking some of the most cherished norms of Hindu society.

Inspired in particular by Thomas Reid's (1710-1796) reprising of Bacon's anti-scholastic "common sense" philosophy, the members of "Young Bengal" – this was the loosely organized group's name – set out to ridicule śāstric knowledge as obtuse and pedantic and to ostentatiously demonstrate that they had freed themselves from the "idols of the mind" then purportedly thwarting the capacity for proper moral reason intrinsic to all Indians. As colonial government traded Toryism for the new ideas of liberal imperialism, the bracing critique of Indian society offered by "Young Bengal" found a sympathetic ear amongst a new generation of Whiggish administrators and Presbyterian ministers. As more and more Britons began to argue that Britain ruled India for the sole purpose of bringing about India's ethical and intellectual transformation, a curriculum of "moral and mental philosophy" was institutionalized in Kolkata's premier educational establishments and then diffused across the province.

Eventually known as the "Young Bengal" generation, this loosely organized group of iconoclasts was inspired by a plurality of readings in British "moral and mental philosophy" to argue that the abstruse reasoning and self-interest sophisms of priests and rulers had obscured the mind's capacity for true moral knowing that all humans were endowed with.The Young Bengal movement has generally been understood – by virtue of its inability to radically transform social practice – as a "failure". I note instead that the declining relevance of its beef-eating effrontery was directly proportional to the declining value of the śāstric order of knowledge it contested, so that the less relevant the injunctions of śāstra became, the less significant their transgressive disavowal would be. By the 1840s many former "Young Bengals" had given up on the ostentatious rejection of Indic knowledge to argue creatively instead that the quest for self-

knowledge enjoined by one of India's hoariest philosophical traditions – Vedānta – anticipated and complemented the enlightenment's preoccupation with the capacity for moral knowledge intrinsic to each and every individual. Gathered in a "truth-seeking society" that would meet off Kolkata's Chitpur road, the deists seeking correspondences between Vedānta and British "moral and mental philosophy" did not seek to reinstate the moral authority of scripture, but merely to argue that India's own philosophical traditions, and their rich insights, would provide a hospitable home for moral sense theory.

Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), the most famous of the Chitpur road deists, found in the exhaltation of the "the pure heart, filled with the light of intuitive knowledge" (*ātmapratyaẏa-siddha- jñanojjbalita biśuddha hṛdaẏa)* supplied by the ancient *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* the proof that an organ of moral knowing had been and would be available to all humans, at all times, universally; and, that the truest dharma would be the one that obeyed to its commands. Akshaẏ Kumār Datta (1820-1886), a close collaborator turned rival, drew instead on the arguments of the Scottish phrenologist George Combe (1788-1858) to argue moral knowing was localized in a specific cerebral organ or faculty, which he termed the *dharmapravṛitti*, or "moral faculty". Despite significant differences in emphasis and argument, both argued that Bengali society would escape its predicaments only if its iniquitous, inherited practices were reformed in the light of the moral knowing supplied by the intuitions of the heart and the workings of the brain. In the consideration of many contemporaries, this moment became the "event of Enlightenment".[22] Intellectuals in Kolkata noted that the work of Datta and Vidyāsāgara marked an "epochal change" (ẏugantar) and the onset of the "new age" (nabaẏug).[23]

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[22] Daniel Brewer, *The Enlightenment Past: Reconstructing Eighteenth Century French Thought,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 24

[23] Śibanātha Śāstrī, *Yugāntara* (Kolkata: Jijñasa, 1967), 184.

The observation that a new time of moral reason was at hand was not limited to Kolkata. In fact, claims of temporal rupture and epochal transformation proliferated to describe their work across Bengal. In the wake of the 1854 educational reforms initiated by Sir Charles Woods (1800-1885) a new network of government grant-in-aid school relayed the regulative ideals of moral personhood and reasonable judgment that Datta and his collaborator, Vidyāsāgara had elaborated across the province. This was no coincidence: Datta and Vidyāsāgara obtained key appointments through the colonial educational department. Datta held the post of Director at Kolkata's first teacher training College (the Normal School) where teachers going to the provinces were trained using a standardized curriculum. Vidyāsāgara, instead, was nominated school-inspector. The textbooks they authored were quickly adopted across Bengal's grant-in-aid schools, and sold millions of copies, transforming the education of Bengalis for generations to come.[24]

As suggested above, assessing the impact of Datta and Vidyāsāgara's moral project ultimately also requires turning to their critics. The philosophical discourse of modernity they pioneered was no straightforward matter in the colony, where the quest for the "moral and material progress of India" already buttressed the colonial regime, and Europe posed as the proleptic figuration of India's future. It did not take long for critics of the reformers, such as Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) to ask if the Bhadralok was genuinely a moral subject or an abjectly imitative creature, a travestied European, and to enquire what true moral possibilities life under colonial conditions offered.

It has been argued that Bankimchandra Chatterjee's critiques of reformism are best read as a story of enlightenment liberalism eclipsed by a nascent nationalism or incipient

[24] See especially Lakshamn Karmakāra *Barṇaparicaẏa: kale o kālottare,* (Ghāṭāla: Sr̥ijan Prakaśanī, 2005).

“culturalism”. Recent accounts have however complicated such simplistic periodization, showcasing enduring conceptual continuity even in the wake of a purportedly paradigmatic shift from liberalism to “nationalism”.[25] Extending Majumdar’s revisionist argument on the neglected continuities between late and early Bankimchandra, I propose that whereas Bankim’s “revivalist” concern with historical belonging was undoubtedly original, his critique of reformism drew from an immanent concern that following good norms could never – by itself – guarantee the moral substance of any given action. That is to say, true moral individuation could not result from merely following a norm, but had to be obtained through an altruistic commitment to repeated, future-directed striving. As the reformist movement came to an end, the moral energy of reformist critique was transferred to the search for a new, progressive future.

Finally, by way of conclusion, I suggest that the reformist quest for a morally equitable futurefound enduring relevance in the words of its critics. . By registering not just the failures, but also the disappointment and mortifications expressed by those who aspired to belong in the new “Bhadra” society and yet quickly discovered that a society that was truly neutral to considerations of material or genealogical distinctions was not yet extant, we may recover just how widely participated the aspiration to a new moral future was. If anything, the disillusionment at the reformist failure to bring about a society may tell us something more about just how broadly such aspirations were shared, and why retrieving such hopes may matter.

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[25] Rochona Majumdar, “A conceptual history of the social: some reflections out of colonial Bengal” in Brian Hatcher and Micheal S. Dodson (eds.) *Trans-colonial modernities in South Asia*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 165-188.

Chapter One: The Normless City: Moral disagreements In Early Nineteenth Century Kolkata, 1815-1830

1.1 Introduction

In 1822, a verse translation of Jagadīśvara Bhaṭṭāchārya's Sanskrit *Hāsyārṇava* (Ocean of Mirth) was printed in Calcutta, introducing to Bengali literature a strange city where all social roles were inverted and all forms of proper conduct stood on their head.[1] In the comical opening lines of the play, a spy rushes to report to the sovereign the first signs of a brazen rebellion by the town's citizens:

> All embrace their own wives
> and none inclines towards adultery.
>
> Though there are Brahmins learned in the Veda at hand,
> they get leather-workers to make the shoes,
>
> and even if they speak face to face with a caṇḍāla [untouchable] or a Muslim
> none greets the caṇḍāla with ritual obeisance.
>
> It's the case that the citizens have become so shameless that
> though lowly men are present they worship the twice-born.[2]

The signs listed above are, of course, meant to be comically disorienting, for the spy effectively furnishes a conventional list of all the predictable signs of a virtuous polity, but presents them *instead* as irrefutable proofs of the citizen's shameless transgressions and dangerous insubordination. In the course of a surreal dialogue that involves the king, officials

[1] For a history of the text and an English translation of the Sanskrit see Jyotirmoy Sharma, *The Ocean of Mirth: Reading the Hāsẏārṇava-Prahasanaṁ of Jagadēśvara Bhaṭṭāchārya: a political satire for all times* (Abindgon/New York: Routledge, 2020). Sharma is unaware of the extensive study of manuscripts undertaken by S.S. Janaki "Two Farces from East India: Hāsẏārṇava and Dhūrtasamāgama" in *The Samskrita Ranga Annual* (Chennai: The Samskrita Ranga, 1979, vol. 7), 10-40. Janaki is especially detailed on the text's indubitable origins in Early Modern Eastern India and its subsequent popularity in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Bengal.

[2] *āpana banitā sabe kare alingaṇa | paradāre mati keha na kare kathana || bedabita brāḥmaṇa thākite barttamāṇa | carmmakāre pādukāra karaẏe nirmmāna || sammukhe thākaẏe yadi caṇḍāla yabana | tāhe nāhi samādara kare kona jana || lajjāhīna haẏyā yata nagarera jana | antyaja thākite dvije karaẏe bandana ||* Jagadīśvara Bhaṭṭāchārya, *Hāsẏārṇava*, Bengali tr. Bhabānīcaraṇa Bandyopādhyāẏa (Kolkata: unknown press, 1822), 16.

and court Brahmins, the audience comes to learn that, according to the supreme law of the fantastical land where *Hāsẏārṇava* takes place, the performance of all that ought to be forbidden is in fact required, and all that ought to be upheld is prohibited. Indeed, the play is set in a world so clearly the reverse of the normative world enjoined by the *dharmaśāstras* that here lower and higher stand literally – not just figuratively – reversed.[3] By royal decree, for instance, women are expected to line the soles of their feet with kajol[4], and daub red lac[5] on their eyes. This topsy-turvy city was aptly called *nirmaryyādā-nagara* – "the Normless City".[6]

To understand what the fear of transgression meant for the residents of early nineteenth-century Kolkata, I suggest that it is necessary to take seriously Ashis Nandy's invitation to attend to the "moral anxiety" and "free floating rage at adaptive problems" of its residents, forced to confront "a time of anomie" in which norms had become "unstable from within."[7] In this chapter, I consider the case Bengali intellectuals made, in the face of extraordinary entropy, for a reinvigorated attention to the authoritative prescriptions of śāstra – or authoritative knowledge – in matters of social order. I argue that their sustained effort to make the case for a prescriptive order of society with reference to authoritative knowledge is the key to the debates that tore Kolkata's intellectual society apart in the 1820s.[8] I conclude this chapter by noting how the impossibility of resolving prescriptively the question of where good norms come from with

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[3] As remarked by David Shulman the *Hāsẏārṇava*'s king Anayasindhu is best read as an "anti-iconic king" – a subversive reversal on the prescriptive and "iconic portrait of kingship" proper to Dharmaśastra. See David Shulman, *The King and Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 89.
[4] A cosmetic powder applied to the eyes.
[5] A reference to alta, a red dye applied to the feet of women, especially on festive occasions.
[6] I follow the translation "Devoid of Norms" for Nirmaryyādānagara offered by S.S. Janaki, "Two Farces", 14. The Sanskrit meaning of violation of a boundary, transgression and normlessness may be at first sight confusing for contemporary readers, insofar as marryādā today primarily means "honor, status".
[7] Ashis Nandi, "Sati: a nineteenth century tale of women, violence and protest" in Vijaya Chandra Joshi (ed.) *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India,* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975), 171-174.
[8] The first organized reading of European "Enlightenment" texts by Bengalis in Kolkata that we may document was connected with the organization of a Scottish-style course in "Moral and Mental Philosophy", organized at the Hindu College in 1829: the subject of the next chapter.

reference to śāstra eventually opened the way for a later generation's case for a genuine "moral revolution".[9] In so far as the relationship between authoritative knowledge and virtuous conduct could no longer be a straightforward matter, it was the case that a reliable authority for moral norms had to be sought elsewhere.

It was satirist and editor Bhabānīcaraṇa Bandyopādhyāẏa (1787-1848) who brought the transgressive realities of the *Hāsyārṇava*'s "Normless City" to Kolkata's attention. In doing so he joined a great many others who worried that the virtuous conduct of Kolkata's residents was endangered by the practices of life then current in the metropolis, and who openly hoped to realign improper conduct and wrongful practices with the prescriptive and authoritative norms of *dharmaśāstra*, the authoritative knowledge on matters moral and social.[10] Poet Baidyanātha Sārbabhaum (fl. 1818) had set the tone for the discussion on moral disorder by issuing a warning on the dangers of defilement present in the city. Bhabānīcaraṇa Bandyopādhyāẏa followed suit. In the writings that followed his translation of *Hāsẏārṇava,* he unsparingly censured those who omitted to perform obligatory acts, even while conceding that not all prescriptions could be followed.

Paṇḍits from the city's new *catuṣpāṭhī* at Bagbazar and from the College of Fort William also reprised and extended arguments on the inadequacy of all acts and propositions made without reference to properly authoritative knowledge – the śāstra – and in so doing provided the necessary case for a prescriptive order of things. Drawing attention to the writings of the two

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[9] See "Rammohun Roy" *Calcutta Review,* Vol. 4 (1845): 385 diagnoses a "Moral Revolution" in Kolkata in the 1840s, and attributes its origin to Rammohun.

[10] Brajendranath Bandhyopadhyaya was aware that Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandyopādhyāẏa had brought out an edition of the *Hāsẏārṇava*, but was unable to consult the 1822 Bengali-Sanskrit version of *Hāsẏārṇava*, only present in the British Library. See Brajendranath Bandhyopadhyaya "Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandyopādhyāẏa" in *Sāhitya-sādhaka-caritamāla* (Kolkata: Baṅgīẏa Sāhitya Parishaṯ, 1943 v. 1), 1-36. The British Library copy is the same *Hāsẏārṇava* mentioned in Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandyopādhyāẏa's 1849 obituary. See the obituary collected by Sar, R., ed. *Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandyopādhyāẏa Racanā-saṃgraha* (Kolkata: Baṇgiẏa Sahitya Parishaṭ, 2013), 455-474 at 461.

most prominent scholars – Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālaṅkāra (1762-1819) and Kāśinātha Tarkapañcānana (1788-1851) – I note that these paṇḍits reaffirmed and extended what Sheldon Pollock has termed "the theory of Śāstra". This meant underscoring the limits of human reason and the fallibility of an unassisted intellect, and consequently the validity of enjoined forms of ritual action and caste-based forms of conduct, even with reference to some of the more complex and compelling philosophical propositions available to them, such as Nyāya and Vedanta.[11] In other words, they reasserted the proposition that only an authoritatively established "discursive thought" could affirm the validity of any given human activity.

The case they made for a thoughtful obeisance to the prescribed order of things was articulate, plausible, and influential – but did not go unchallenged. Rammohun Roy (1774-1833), whose posthumous fame eventually far outstripped that of his then-celebrated adversaries, contested their prescriptive attempt to rigidly define the norms of conduct proper to the city. Rammohun's original and very public case for a new kind of authoritative grounding in the Vedanta subverted his adversaries' normative efforts by brazenly affirming the obsolescence of all those authorities that they had sought to uphold, effectively legitimizing the ritual oversights and caste transgressions the prescriptivists had sought to censure.[12]

Rammohun's Vedantic foundationalism – a strongly normative position in itself – countermanded attempts to reinvigorate śāstric authority in matters of social practice by making the radical case that norms lacking Vedantic authorization were simply not norms. The intense polemic that followed, premised on entirely incommensurable positions, transformed the quest to

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[11] For the development and implications of a theory of śāstra see Sheldon Pollock., "The Practice of Theory and the Theory of Practice in Indian Intellectual History", *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 111 No.3 (Jul. – Sep., 1985): 499-519.
[12] Brian Hatcher, *Hinduism Before Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 24-47 makes a vigorous case for new readings of Rammohun free from proleptic figurations imposed on him.

reduce the gap between norm and practice into a properly philosophical question concerning normativity itself. Consequently, the next generation of Bengali moral philosophers were forced to confront the question of where good norms may truly originate from.

1.2 "Not a city, but by itself the world entirely"

Understanding the writings of Bengali intellectuals in the 1820s requires understanding the changed conditions they were responding to – "an environment that was largely new".[13] The most significant "novelty" was, of course, the city of Kolkata itself: a small and vibrant trading station in the mid-eighteenth century, by the early nineteenth it had become South Asia's foremost urban center. The distinguished poet and Delhi aristocrat Mirzā Asadallāh Khān Gh̲ālib, who stayed in the city throughout 1828, wrote back to friends in Delhi that Kolkata was a city unlike any other he'd ever seen, and perhaps not a city at all, for it contained all "the world" within it. [14]

> I asked: What is Delhi?
> They replied: If the world is a body then Delhi is its soul
> I asked: What is Benares?
> They replied: It's the beloved, picking blossoms
> I asked: What is Patna?
> They replied: It's more colorful than a flowered garden
> (…)
> I asked: and so, what is Kolkata?
> They replied: It's not a city. It is by itself the world entirely, with its seven parts.[15]

Even allowing for the hyperboles of poetic convention, Gh̲ālib's verses capture something of the astonishing feeling that the entire world could be now encountered in a single place: Kolkata. "Calcutta is composed of persons from every quarter of the world" and only here

[13] Marshall, P.J., *Bengal: the British Bridgehead, Eastern India 1740-1828* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 180
[14] Russel, R., *The Oxford India Ghalib: Life, Letters and Ghazals* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 55-59.
[15] I rely on the translation by Arun Shome, "Ghalib and the city of Calcutta", reprinted in P. Thankappan Nair., *A History of Calcutta's Streets* (Kolkata: Firma KLM, 1987), 586. A slightly different translation of the line on Kolkata is offered by Ralph Russel, *Ghalib,* 56.

"Armenians, Persians, Chinese, Hindoos and Mohammedans are all seen mixing in the streets".[16] Britons and Bengalis agreed with G͟h͟ālib that Kolkata, the "chief emporium of the East" was not properly speaking just a city: in the idiom of early nineteenth century colonial administrators Kolkata was regularly described as the "Metropolis of British India". Bengalis instead consistently used the term "Mahānagara", which means much the same: "great city". Incredibly diverse, Kolkata was also, by all accounts, exceedingly populous: throughout the 1820s the city's growing population seemed invariably impossible to compute, despite the best efforts of an administration increasingly obsessed with quantification and statistical knowledge.[17]

Historians have long ascribed Kolkata's rise to twin processes of political and military consolidation and economic transformation. Two decades of relentless military expansionism and "proconsular despotism" (in Chris Bayly's inimitable expression) had taken the Governor-General's armies far beyond the old British "bridgehead" of Bengal to North, West and Central India, to Insular South-East Asia, and finally to Burma.[18] "Such vast accession to territorial sovereignty" had brought about not only significant additions to the Calcutta government's revenue, but also enormous new military and administrative charges, and a prodigious expansion of the "machinery" of government itself.[19]

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[16] See s.v. "Calcutta" in *Supplement to the fourth, fifth and sixth edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (Edinburgh: Archibald Constanble & Co. 1824 vol. 2) 568. The singling out of Armenians, Chinese and "Persians" (i.e. 'Iranī) as large and visible communities by the 1820s is accurate. Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History* (Kolkata: Firma KLM, 1978) 39-44 (for the settlement of Armenians from New Julfa in 'Isfahan and of 'Īrānīs, and of two important communities of Ottoman subjects, Baghdadi Jews from Aleppo and Thracian Greeks from Philippopolis and Adrianople), pp.52-53 (for the Hakka Chinese settlement at Tiretta bazaar).
[17] See William Hamilton, *The East India Gazetteer1* (Parbury, Allen & Co., 1823), 320. The estimates range vastly.
[18] Chris Bayly, *Imperial Meridian* (London: Longman, 1989). Lord Bathurst was Secretary of State for war and the colonies – a new office – between 1812 and 1827.
[19] Jon Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers: Modern Governance in Eastern India 1780-1835* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 133-160.

This had consequences: the cost of government could only be met by establishing a new complex system of public finance that tied Calcutta and London together even further.[20] At the heart of a global Empire, Calcutta was then necessarily more than just an enormous agglomeration of military arsenals, out-of-sight suburban garrisons and dreary administrative bureaus.[21] It was also the linchpin for an emergent global circuit of commodity-trade.[22] John Phipps, who worked as a clerical officer in Kolkata's port, noted that since the East India Company's trade monopolies had been dissolved by Parliament in 1813, imports into the port at Calcutta had tripled in the space of a decade, and that importers now faced the never-before seen problem of gluts. Exports had continued to grow prodigiously too, despite consistent depreciations in the London market.[23]

Legions of British soldiers and administrators sought credible avenues of remittance for the wealth and plunder they had accrued in the pursuit of empire, and which they hoped to draw as pensions once back in the metropole. Fortunes accrued in silver rupees could not be transformed into pounds sterling deposited in London banks through the magic of paper-credit alone. Instead, investments in indigo, cotton and opium exports became the philosopher's stone necessary to transform – through an intermediate commodity form – baser Indian coin into

[20] Most carefully detailed in Amales Tripathi., *Trade and Finance in the Bengal Presidency 1793-1833* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) and Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *The Evolution of the State Bank of India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
[21] For the "invisible" yet very present military in Kolkata, a "key tactic" of the "modern regime of power" see Partha Chatterjee, *Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 88-91.
[22] The circuits of commodity-trade, finance and labor are described in Tirthankar Roy, *India in the World Economy: from antiquity to present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 123-180.
[23] James Phipps, *A Guide to the Commerce of Bengal: authentic sources* (Kolkata: publisher unknown, 1823).

British gold.[24] A new network of managing firms – "agency houses" – provided the necessary wizardry, transmuting savings into indigo stalks, and blue dye into pounds sterling.[25]

Above all, the possibilities of gainful employment in commerce or of a subsistence wage as a laborer, and the concomitant penury of life in a rural Bengal devasted by the extractions of landlords and tax-collectors brought a great many Bengalis of all backgrounds and castes to the city. As S.N. Mukherjee's study of the house-tax collected from eastern and south-central Kolkata in 1806, 1821 and 1836 – with special focus on Cossitollah Street and Chitpore Road – shows, new immigrants to the city lived crowded in densely heterogeneous neighborhoods that had no real precolonial equivalent for scale, density and sheer diversity of communities present, with Muslims and Hindus of all castes living alongside one another.[26]

Towering above the huts and hovels of recent immigrants were the palaces of those Bengalis who were busy making a fortune out of the tryst with empire, first as commercial go-betweens for a generation of plundering proconsuls, then as brokers for the new commodity trade. By the early decades of the nineteenth century this moneyed elite, backed by the purchase of those very many landed estates the Company had seized from Bengal's *ancien régime* aristocracy, had finally conquered positions of unassailable preeminence in the city. A "list of all respectable and opulent natives" of Kolkata compiled by one such worthy (abhijāt), Radhakanta

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[24] The fact that Indigo prices could not be related to the logic of supply and demand, but ought to be understood vis-à-vis a logic of capital remittance was first made by Horace Hayman Wilson, *A review of the external commerce of Bengal 1813-14 to 1827-28,* Kolkata: Baptist Mission Press, 1830.

[25] See especially Anthony Webster, *The Richest East India Merchant: the life and business of John Palmer of Calcutta* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007). The managing concern of Palmer & Co. dominated the Calcutta financial scene in the 1820s.

[26] Saumyendra Nath Mukherjee, "Calcutta in 1806: An essay on Urban History and the Computer" and "Owners and Premises 1806-1852," in Saumyendra Nath Mukherjee, *Calcutta: Essays in Urban History,* (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1993), 1-25 and 26-48. In the two streets examined in detail: Cossitollah and Chitpore, Brahmins owned a growing number of residential straw and tile huts among Muslims, Kayasthas, Baniks and Weavers and even European owners of residential and business properties. Sex workers were a very substantial group of property owners in 1806.

Deb, reveals the extent to which obscure families of brokers and clerks of no great ritual or social standing had managed to become the pinnacles of native society in South Asia's wealthiest city.[27]

The newly moneyed had certainly not achieved wealth and prestige by virtue of the scrupulous adherence to forms of enjoined virtuous conduct or ritual obligation (*kartabyatā*). Baptist Missionaries recorded their omissions with zeal, holding that their manifold transgressions invariably brought the grandees closer to conversion. In 1820, the *Friend of India* optimistically reported that "the wealthy banker, the extensive-fund holder, and large proprietor" had by and large foregone all forms of ritual obligation, and "the injunctions of the Shastra are no longer regarded when they interfere with the slightest opportunity for display", and that the "little rivulet" of transgressive omissions was "now extended into a broad and mighty stream, and threatens in time to submerge all the institutions of the Vedas".[28] When, in 1821, a Bengali summary of the daily obligations of caste Hindus was published, missionaries delighted that "the publisher found the people were afraid to purchase it, as the instances of their religious omissions were so numerously recorded in them, that they were afraid of being reduced to beggary by the imposition of fines from the Brahmans on account of the neglect of religious rites."[29]

1.3 Prescribing Virtue in the Disorderly City

During the 1810s, driven by observations similar to those of the missionaries, Baidyanātha Debśarmā Sārbabhaum, a Brahmin scholar (*paṇḍit*) and a consummate poet residing

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[27] The list is supplied in Saumyendra Nath Mukherjee, "Class, caste and Politics in Calcutta 1815-1838," in Saumyendra Nath Mukherjee, *Calcutta: Essays*, 127a-b. It counts 29 Sudra families (12 Kayasthas, 4 Baniks, 2 Setts and/or Basaks, 2 Rāḍhi Kulīṇ Brahmins and 1 fallen (bhagna kulin Brahmin). Though Deb was considered a Maulik Kayastha, his father in a 1766 document is listed as "Nabkissen Cawndoo" (Kuṇḍu) – and so of baṇik parantage. Also Mukherjee, "Calcutta in 1806", 21.

[28] "On the Present Celebration of Hindoo Poojas," *Friend of India* 3, No.23 (May 1820): 127

[29] James Long, *A descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Works* (Kolkata: Sanders, Coner & Co., 1855), 78, referring an 1821 incident occurring following the publishing of the Karmmalocana (likely the Nityakarmānuṣtāna-paddhati or some other Bengali summary of Āhnikatattvam).

in the wealthy Kolkata suburb of Boral (Baḍāl) just south of the growing city, composed a pāñcāli – a narrative poem meant for sung recitation – addressing the subject of the norms best suited to regulate Bengali Hindu society.[30] Unlike an earlier generation of Bengali poets who were preoccupied with the tumultuous and violent transition to English rule, Sārbabhaum had decided to examine the transgressions of the moral order undertaken by Bengalis themselves. Unsurprisingly and quite explicitly he had Kolkata's wealthy "Sudras" in mind.[31]

In a lengthy autobiographical introduction (*ātmaparicāẏ*) Sārbhabhaum described the drying up of patronage opportunities in his native parganā of Dhulyāpur (in East Bengal's Jessore district), and his subsequent search for a worthy patron in the colonial metropolis, then populated by thousands of new immigrants fleeing like himself. Sārbabhaum's brief description of Kolkata as a place of moral danger anticipated the nineteenth-century Bengali "*idée fixe* … of Calcutta, a city made of forgery, swindling and falsehood" and commonly expressed in popular wisecracks and ditties.[32] Sārbabhaum's description was, however, distinct from the simple street witticisms so common in later decades. As a scholar of considerable learning, his account pointed out very specific transgressions of the moral order, and offered a specific kind of prescriptive solution.

Kalikātā dhanamātā loke khyātā śuni
Kolkata, the mother of all riches, is famous in the world
Giẏā tathā dekhi yathā tathā buthā gunī
But once there I saw just how pointless it is to be virtuous
Bhāgyabanta nāhi anta nāhi santa puṇya

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[30] Rājānārāẏaṇa Basu, *Grāmya Upākhyāna* (Kolkata: Kuntalīn Press, 1914), 99-101. It contains a short account of Sārbabhaum's life as part of a description of bygone life in Boral. The title page of the copy of *Aśaucapāñcāli* available in the British Library is missing, but Blumhardt was able to assign it a date of 1818 on the basis of the copy available in Kolkata to James Long. See James Fuller Blumhardt, *A Catalogue of Bengali Printed Books in the Library of the British Museum* (London: The British Museum, 1886), 110. Also James Long, *A Descriptive Catalogue,* 96.
[31] For the violation of established moral codes by the English see Gautam Bhadra, "Prāk-Rāmmohun Yuge Kompānir śāsaner prati kaẏekjana Baṅali Buddhījībi Manobhaba" *Akādemī Patrikā* 4 (1991): 61-82.
[32] Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta* (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 1989), 88.

Folks possessed of fortune beyond number, but no virtue and no saints
Dānapātra bāi mātra kibā citra anya
Only courtesans receive patronage, what an amazing thing
Yato dhīra kompānīra cākurīra āsā
Unshakable is the hope to secure a clerkship with the Company
Tāhā dekhi urddha ākhi nāhi mukhi bhāshā
Watching this makes my eyes turn, I am at loss for words
Kona śūdra āche bhadra nahe kkhudra adhi
Some Sudras are indeed virtuous and of no mean standing
śūdra dhana nite dāna biḍambana bidhi
Cheating on the norms of giving, Sudras grab the wealth.[33]

It is evident to the reader that even this initial list of Sārbabhaum's charges against Kolkata is simply not analogous to the transgressive anomie for which any large city may be disparaged (or desired). In his eyes, the people of Kolkata violated norms that were *specific* to the prescriptive moral order of a society marked by *varṇāśramadharma*, and even more particularly one understood here with reference to the proper relationships of gift exchange (*dāna*) between Sudra and Brahmin, the *only* two castes extant in Bengali Hindu society according to normative accounts of the time.[34] Sārbabhaum argued that there was a viable prescriptive solution to the present crisis in the relations between Brahmins and Sudra: a turn to the authoritative prescriptions of the Dharmaśāstra.

Anupāẏa dekhi tāẏa keha kaẏa bāṅī
Seeing no other means at hand someone spoke
Kona smriti Pāñcāliti karo puti śuni
"Make some Smr̥ti into a narrative poem" so listen to the poem.[35]

In other words, Sārbabhaum responded to challenges of a new kind of urban living by invoking the authoritative knowledge of the smr̥tiśāstra – the corpus of prescriptive texts

[33] Baidyanātha Sārbabhauma, *Āśaucapāñcāli*, (Kolkata: 1818), 4.
[34] A great deal of canonical references for the existence of *only* Sudras and Brahmins in Bengali Smr̥ṭi are collected in Lālmohan Vidyānidhi, *Sambandhanirṇaẏa: Baṅgadeśiẏa jātisamuhera sāmājik bṛittanta.* Mukherjee, S.N. "Class, Caste and Politics," 135 also reaffirms this.
[35] Sarbabhaum, *Āśaucapāñcāli*, 4. "Smriti" (i.e. "recalled") is the name given to the foundational texts on which the discipline of dharmaśāstra was based.

invariably written in Sanskrit and concerned with the moral organization of society. In particular, his appeal for a reinvigorated focus on norms was concentrated on an aspect of the smṛti tradition of special import – pollution (*aśaucatā*). His poem, the *Aśaucapāñcāli* (Poem on Pollution) focused on the ways in which the ingestion of purportedly polluting substances, interactions with individuals from castes other than one's own, and, above all, the occurrence of specific events connected with family life – especially the death of relatives – could all be vehicles of dangerous taint or pollution. Consequently, all required careful management and behavior that was congruous with authoritative prescriptions.[36] Sārbabhaum worried that these obligations had not been properly observed in the city.

Without the performance of corrective rites, the state of impurity (*aśaucatā*) caused by polluting occasions rendered one incapable of successfully conducting rituals (*anuṣṭhāna*).[37] In so far as *aśaucata* vitiated the validity of all ritual actions, it was held to impede the ability to effectively accrue virtue (*puṇya*). Furthermore, since various kinds of pollution made the self potentially defiling for others, the failure to successfully overcome a state of defilement could also lower one's rank in the system of distinctions *internal* to each caste.[38]

At first sight, Sārbhabhaum's choice to single out pollution and its corrections as a matter of concern was anything but original at the time, and his solution to Kolkata's moral ailments fits well within the renowned Bengali tradition of thinkers on Dharmaśāstra, the Smārtas.[39] Yet

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[36] On the "grammar of defilement" set by the concept of aśaucatā, and allied concepts, see Micheal Aktor, "Impurity and Purification" in Patrick Olivelle and Donald R. Davis (eds.) *The Oxford History of Hinduism: Hindu Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 200-235.
[37] This definition is supplied by the sixteenth century Bengali author Govindānanda, *Sūddhikaumudi*. Aktor. "Impurity", 201.
[38] On upward and downward mobility within the ranks in which Bengal's uppermost castes were organized see. "fallen kulins" in Ronald Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture: a history of caste and class in Middle Period Bengal* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 118-121.
[39] On the contributions of Bengali smārtas (i.e. scholars of smritiśāstra or dharmaśāstra) see the foundational Monmohan Chakravati "Contributions to the History of Smṛti in Bengal and Mithila," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 11 (1915): 311-406.

Sārbabhaum's treatise constituted, in its own small way, a moment of radical discursive departure. Instead of writing yet another Sanskrit prose-treatise on the subject of impurity, Sārbabhaum's *Aśaucapāñcāli* took the form of a Bengali narrative poem meant for sung recitation. By securing a printing-press to publish his work, the *Aśaucapāñcāli* became one of the earliest printed works in Bengali not to issue from a government or missionary press. It is a text on smṛṭi meant for an audience far wider than the usual, scholarly circles of the smārtas, and it might have reached many who could not have read about normative prescription before.

Sārbabhaum himself recognized the outrageousness of writing dharmaśāstra in the form of a pāñcāli: he compared the intrusion of his vernacular poem on impurity into the more aesthetic domain of poetry to a crow croaking in an assembly of sweet-singing cuckoos.[40] Anticipating a community of learned readers, he pleaded forgiveness: there are more crows in the world than cuckoos, he wrote, and the normative entailments of a rightful moral order are obligatory for all – even for crows.[41]

Historians have noted that the work of the scholars of *dharmaśāstra* tended to be esoteric, and that its purchase was likely limited. Composed in Sanskrit, exclusive to only certain, highly specialized Brahmins, and always undertaken with reference to the normative authority of very ancient texts rather than through an evocation of the order then current in society. *Dharmaśāstra* was a domain of knowledge that at times dissimulated its contemporaneity. It follows that its relevance was more opaque than obvious.[42] Sārbabhaum's insistence that prescriptive norms

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[40] Sarbabhaum, *Āśaucapāñcāli*, 4

[41] The question of the dharma of crows evokes the well-known argument about the universal enjoinment of dharma being congruous with the particular obligations of each class of beings. Wendy Doniger, "The Dharma of Demons" in Wendy Doniger and John Duncan Martin Derrett (eds.), *The Concept of Duty in South Asia* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1977), 96-106.

[42] As Ludo Rocher influentially put it, the work of thinking through the normative order of society envisioned by smārtas was animated by an "internal logic" of exegesis rather than by the ambition to provide a positive "law of the land" or any simple, straightforward guide to society's actually existant moral ordering. Ludo Rocher, "Hindu

ought to acquire general currency in the face of new forms of disorder was thus, in many ways, original.

Original as it was, Sārbabhaum's demand for a turn to the authority of *śāstra* was certainly not isolated in the 1810s. For some ritual perfomances disciplined by Smṛiti – Sati in particular – a complex and twisted entanglement with the positive force of British law began.[43] But the case for a reinvigorated order of prescriptions exceeded any single performance or act. The most important intellectual to advance a general case for a reinvigorated attention to prescription was the shipping agent turned publicist Bhabānīcaraṇa Bandhopādhyāya. Bandhopādhyāya was not – unlike Sārbabhaum – an outsider from the provinces. Born in 1787 in Nārāẏaṇpur in pargana Ukhḍa, only 30 miles north of Kolkata, his ties to the colonial metropolis predated his birth.[44] His father "had gone to Kolkata with the desire of acquiring wealth (*dhanopārjjanābhilashe*)" and had succeeded in securing clerical employment in the Kolkata mint, even buying a home in the bustling commercial neighborhood of Kaluṭolā (Kolutola). The young Bhabānīcaraṇa followed him to this neighborhood, then the heart of Kolkata's Armenian community, and learned what was necessary for clerical employment: Persian and accounting, as well as the new language of commerce, English.[45] Bhabānīcaraṇa (with his father before him) was thus precisely one of the metropolitan moderns mocked in 1818

Conceptions of Law," in Donald R. Davis Jr. (ed.) *Studies in Hindu Law and Dharmaśāstra* (London: Anthem Press, 2014), 31-58.

[43] Tanika Sarkar, "Something like rights? Faith, law and the widow immolation debates in colonial Bengal" in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 49 No. 3 (2012): 295-320.

[44] Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandhopādhyāya is known to us primarily through the biographical obituary authored by his son in 1849. See "obituary" in Ramenakumār Sarkar (ed.) *Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandhopādhyāya Racanā-samgraha* (Kolkata: Baṅgīẏa Sāhitya Parishaṯ, 2013), 455-474.

[45] For a detailed account of Kolkata's early tutors, mostly Firiṅgīs see Chaudhuri, R. *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal: Emergent Nationalism and the Orientalist Project* (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2002), 21. An amusing anecdote on Kaluṭolā's first English teacher, the Armenian Āraṭun Piṭrās (Aratoon Petrus), conveys the transformative power of English in the 1810s. "One-eyed Niṭāi Sen and lame Advaita Sen could speak and write a very broken and ungrammatical English, therefore in Kolkata's society at that time their fame knew no bounds" Śibanātha Śāstri, *Rāmtanu Lāhiṛī o Tatkālīna Baṅgasamāja* (Kolkata: Punaśca), 156.

by Baidyanātha for their "unshakable desire to secure a clerkship." Bhabānīcaraṇa's book-keeping pursuits were successful: he rose from humble beginnings as a clerk (*sarkār*) for a British shipper all the way to the post of chief accountant (*deoẏān*) of the Kolkata Tax Office in the 1840s, making considerable wealth in the process.

Yet, despite obvious differences, Bhabānīcaraṇa shared many of Baidyanātha's concerns, and correctly worried that the conduct of Kolkata's residents could appear scandalous to outsiders. These anxieties led him to break with the collaborators with whom he had set up Kolkata's first Bengali-owned and edited newspaper, the *Saṃbād Kaumudī* ("the moonlight which illuminates the news"). In March 1823, he founded a much more successful rival, the *Samācār Candrikā* (also "the moonlight which illuminates the news"!). To correct the disorder prevalent in the city Bhabānīcaraṇa then produced a line-by-line translation of the venerable ethics manual, *Hitopādeśa*, helped found an association for the protection of Dharma, and printed editions of the most important normative texts he thought Bengalis should turn to.[46]

Bhabānīcaraṇa also made more original efforts to bring deficient practices in line with authoritative norms. In 1823, he wrote his first full-length book in the form of an entirely original guide to life in Kolkata, the *Kalikātā Kamālalaẏa* (Kolkata, Abode of the Goddess of Wealth). The first line of the preface states Bhabānīcaraṇa's concern: the horror provincials experienced on encountering the practices of Kolkata's inhabitants and the "bad forms of conduct" (*durācār*) then prevalent in the city.

> I have written a description of the place that is the metropolis (*mahānagara*) of Kolkata called *Kalikātā Kamālalaẏa* (…) [in order to answer the questions of] the villagers and the residents of other cities who invariably after reaching Kolkata are at once struck with

[46] The catalogue of his efforts is impressive: The Śrimadbhāgavata (Bhagavata Purana) in 1830, the Manusaṃhita in 1833, a collection of 19 further Saṃhitas in 1833, the Bhagavad Gita in 1835, and finally the most authoritative treatise on Dharmaśastra, Raghunandana Bhaṭṭacārya's *Aṣṭabiṃśatitattva nabyasmṛiti* (The "Digest"): a comprehensive guide to every single action that is congruous – or incongruous – with Dharma.

dread after encountering the forms of conduct (*ācār-bicār*) practices (*byabahāra*) usages (*ritī*) and twofaced speech (*bākkauśal*) of this place.[47]

Kolkata, Bhabānīcaraṇa agreed with provincials, was a city like no other. In its vastness and strangeness it resembled the ever-moving ocean, with unsettling waves and fearful creatures lurking on the sea-bed. Andrew Sartori has suggested that in early nineteenth century Bengal the commercialization of Bengali society, and the brisk trade in commodities conducted by the new colonial agency houses, ensured the "plausibility of liberal conceptions of individuality and society." By virtue of the fact that "liberalism" was and is "predicated on the role of commodity exchange as the primary medium of social interdependence," he has argued that Bengalis came to inhabit liberalism "not by the logic of any discursive formation, but by the transformation of the sociohistorical context" itself.[48]

Yet the normative concerns of Bhabānīcaraṇa, shipping agent and commercial book-keeper, suggest that the argument that Bengali liberalism was the necessary conceptual extension of Kolkata's new entanglement in an emergent global capitalism conjures too transparent a relationship between liberal concepts and commercial society, and assumes too much in the way of Dharmaśāstra's demise. If anything, the burgeoning practices of commodity exchange appeared to Bhabānīcaraṇa – to borrow Micheal Taussig's description of those confronting the incipient reification of everything in the nineteenth century – "as a magic matrix of things," and not as the natural order of things.[49] Bhabānīcaraṇa, the sole Bengali commodity trader to have

[47] Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandhopādhyāya, *Kalikātā Kamālalaẏa*, 1823 [2013], 32.
[48] Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 4.
[49] Micheal Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 23-38.

reflected on the town's role in world-trade, found the forms of exchange proper to Kolkata to be stupendous, and completely outside of the expected order of things.

> There is a resemblance between Kolkata and the sea, and for that reason the name Kamalālaẏa has been fixed[50](…) the name is appropriate because what is found in the sea can also be found to Kolkata (…) Kolkata too is filled with a water that is both bottomless and undrinkable, though that water is actually a flood of money (*mudrājala*), which during working hours flows out in the direction of all sorts of different countries, while all sorts of currents of this flood-of-money go to and fro (…) Kolkata has no peers and is famous in all other countries for the fact that many people here are addicted to criticizing others [*paranindāparāẏaṇa*] and these are in truth like sharks in the sea, or people utterly devoid of understanding, and they are in truth frightful crocodiles (…) and just as Vishnu finds a vehicle in the waves of the ocean, there are waves of people crazed by the riches of the place, and waves of extreme confusion.[51]

It is thus important to note that Bhabānīcaraṇa's evaluation of Kolkata's moral life was not predicated on a conservative assessment of the perils of liberty turned license, or, conversely, the liberal denunciation of an essentially reasonable humanity fettered by inherited obligations. It was predicated instead on the same conceptual architecture Baidyanātha relied on when denouncing the scandalous forgetting of obligatory forms of action, and the erosion of the entire system of those purportedly genuine forms of merit-accrual, such as dāna, enjoined by *varnāśramadharma*. It was then born out of the perils of a city that could end up looking much like "the Normless City" of the *Hāsẏārṇava*, a text which he had edited and translated only the year before setting out to judge contemporary Kolkata.

Quite unlike Baidyanātha Sārbhabhaum, however, Bhabānīcaraṇa was himself a participant in the new world of commerce where kulin twice-borns and ritually impure foreigners met in the auction rooms of indigo appraisers and the waiting rooms of long-distance shippers.

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[50] The goddess of wealth, Lakkshmi, was born from the churning of the ocean. Edward Moor, *The Hindu Pantheon,* (London: J Johnson, 1810), 132. "In the 36th section of the *Ramayana,* describing the *Kurmavatara* [the avatara of Vishnu as a turtle] the production of Lakshmi is this painted – the gods, the *Asuras* [titans] and the *Gandharvas* [celestial beings] again agitating the sea, after a long time appeared the great goddess, inhabiting the lotus [kamal] appeared".

[51] Bhabānīcaraṇa Bandhopādhyāya, *Kalikātā Kamālalaẏa*, 1823 [2013] 3.

To be plausible, his critique of metropolitan entropy therefore needed to go beyond Baidyanātha's denunciation. It needed to affirm the possibility that even under new forms of gainful employment and rapidly transforming social conditions, virtuous forms of conduct that were congruous with the injunctions of dharmaśāstra would be not only possible, but advisable. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, Bhabānīcaraṇa solved this apparent impasse by furnishing a novel description of the virtuous subject about in the city ("Bhadralok" – a term pioneered by Bhabānīcaraṇa). While he admitted that a great many in the new urban class were characterized by their failure to perform necessary ritual obligations, he argued that others – including the virtuous citizen who stood for himself – scrupulously maintained a "critical symbolic boundary" between the confusion of worldly practices current in Kolkata and the rites and practices that actually mattered, i.e. those forms of obligatory ritual action most connected with the maintenance of dharma, and the proper worship of gods and ancestors.[52]

In other words, Bhabānīcaraṇa argued the case of the continued relevance of the prescriptive order not because he was unaware of changing conditions, but because he felt he could make a meaningful argument that they need not pose an insurmountable obstacle to the pursuit of virtue as he knew it. In the fictional dialogue between inquiring villager and responsive metropolitan (standing in for Bhabānīcaraṇa himself) that he staged in *Kalikātā Kamālalaẏa*, Bhabānīcaraṅa addressed this question head on, denying that the temporal regimes of office work necessarily entailed the failure to perform obligatory rituals (*karmakāṇḍa*).

> Village Visitor: I have heard that in Kolkata many people have given up ritual obligations (*ācārabhraṣṭa*) they get up early in the morning and after eating reach their place of

[52] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Family, Fraternity and Salaried Labor" in Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2009), 219-223.

> work, they stay there all day, and they only return a full two or four *praharas* after sunset*,* some even a full *daṇḍa* after dark, and after eating they will simply go to sleep.[53]
> Kolkata Resident: What you have heard is right but this kind of action is not one that Hindus undertake, only those who are travestied or pretend Hindu (*hindubeśadhārī*) act like this and I don't know much about them. But let me tell you about what I know, about the properly good people [Bhadralok].[54]

Too little credit has been given to the fact that Bhabānīcaraṇa Bandhopādhyāya and Baidyanātha Sarbabhaum's efforts to recall and reinvigorate discursively the normative practices of *varnāśramadharma* were remarkably successful – and that many of the newly wealthy strove to be ""good" [*bhadra*] people [*lok*]" precisely in the way that Bhabānīcaraṇa recommended. Baidyanātha Sārbabhaum's "Poem on Impurity" secured him the patronage of Rāmdulāl De (1725?-1825), the Kayastha trader who made a fortune shipping cloth-pieces and China tea to Boston, and was famous for the portrait of George Washington he had received from a Philadelphia merchant.[55] De clearly took its message to heart, and came to be known for the lavish purification rites he organized for those Hindus who had "fallen" from their caste through the adoption of Muslim practice.[56] De's sons, heirs to a man who had patronized a treatise enjoining the scrupulous observance of the proper funerary and mortuary rites of śrāddha as the only way to guarantee oneself a proper transfiguration into an ancestral spirit (*pitṛ*) – spent the family's fortune on appropriately generous *dāna* . The *Saṃbād Kaumudī* reported:

> In the metropolis of Kolkata the first ceremony of the departed Babu Rāmdulāl Sarkar was performed and it was cause for admiration for all those who saw the arrangement and

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[53] These are measures of time that are not isometric with clock-time. Each night between sunset and sunrise is divided into 4 purportedly equal praharas – their length depends on the length of the night – and each prahara in seven or, more commonly, eight dandas.

[54] Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandhopādhyāya, *Kalikātā Kamālalaẏa*, 1823 [2013], 34-35.

[55] The very entertaining account of how he secured Rāmdulāl De's patronage, against the charge advanced by rival paṇḍits that his writing was ungrammatical is recounted in Rājānārāẏaṇa Basu, *Grāmya Upākhyāna*, 99-100.

[56] Known by way of a posthumously published notice of the 1853 *Patitoddhāra biṣayaka Bhumika o byabasthāpatrikā,* (Kolkata: unknown publisher, 1853) later reprinted in Brajendranath Bandhyopadhyaya, *Sangbad Sekaler Katha*, 427. The text cites Rāmdulal Sarkar as Kolkata's foremost pioneer in the organizing of purificatory and expiatory rites for Hindus "fallen" out of caste and come to be considered Muslim. "*kiñciṯ Musalmān dharmme bigata patita Hindu byaktike bṛhaṯ samāroha-purbbaka samanvaya-dhārā hindujāti maddhye punarbbāra calana karen*".

> expenditure and just how many shining gold and silver objects and how many horses and elephants and river-boats were prepared as dāna (…) from Kaśi and Kaśmīr and Saurāsṭra and Maharaṣṭra and Kañcī and Kanyakubya and other lands scholars were invited and from this very land seven or eight thousand revered paṇḍits were invited (…) and there was no match for the lakhs that were spent.[57]

Bhabānīcaraṇa Bandhopādhyāya's arguments were also effective at convincing others who prospered in the new economy that ritual and caste observances ought not to be given up. In 1835, a Baṇik merchant, Matilāl Śīl (1792-1854) sent him a set of questions on the correct comportment of Sudras towards Brahmins,[58] to which Bhabānīcaraṇa drafted a response with the aid of a group of unidentified paṇḍits. Matilāl Śīl agreed to subsidize 500 copies of the exchange with the descriptive title of *Biprabhakti Candrikā* (*The Moonlight that illuminates Devotion to Brahmins*), so that the city's wealthy, pious Sudras may learn how best to conduct themselves towards Brahmins.

The *Biprabhakti Candrikā* is the only extant printed work in which we may hear the voice of one of Kolkata's "Sudra" merchant princes. S.N. Mukherjee has argued that the occurrence of a debate between a Sudra and a Brahmin on a question of caste indexes a growing solidarity based on "class consciousness", and demonstrates a "breaking down [of] the caste barrier". I suggest instead that it underscores the opposite: in the wake of Bhabānīcaraṇa's argument, it was important for Matilāl and Bhabānīcaraṇa to work out their correct relationship vis-à-vis each other in terms of *dharmaśāstra*. Matilāl Śīl, more generally celebrated as a pioneer for building a sugar-mill and running shipments of biscuits to Australia, was not trying to be a bourgeois liberal, but a virtuous subject. Bhabānīcaraṇa and the paṇḍits obliged:

These are Motilāl's questions:

[57] *Saṃbād Kaumudī,* 14 May 1825 / 2 Jaiṣṭha 1232

[58] At the time Baṇiks were considered Sudras of not particularly elevated status. On the low Sudra status of Baṇiks see Lālmohan Vidyānidhi, *Sambandhanirṇaẏa: Baṅgadeśīẏa jātisamuhera sāmājik bṛttānta*

Must a Brahmin render obeisance to a Sudra who is a true Vaisnava.
If a Sudra who is a true Vaisnava salutes a Brahmin ought the Brahmin greet him in return (…) reaching a verdict that is in accordance with śāstra please do inform us.

The response of the Paṇḍits, sent by Bhabānīcaraṇa Bandhopādhyāya:

Firstly: According to the śāstra agreed upon by Vaisnavites of all the Sattvika Puranas the most important Purana is the Padmapurana, and in its Kriyayogasara[59] it is stated that for the purpose of divine worship all Vaisnavites ought to undertake proper actions (Kriẏayoga) and achieve proper knowledge (Dhyanayoga)
The marks of proper actions are the worship of the Ganga and the performance of the ́Srivishnupuja, the worship of Brahmins and the fast of Ekādaśī. The most important mark of a Vaisnavite is therefore the devotion (*Bhakti*) to Brahmins (…) the devotion to Brahmins is clearly understood as obligatory (Viprabhaktikartavyata).
Secondly: Just as a cow that feeds on illicit things is best even when compared to a pig that refrains from eating illicit things, so it is the case that a Brahmin with bad habits is better than a renunciant – which is to say a Vaisnava who happens to be a Sudra (…) a Sudra is unworthy of salutation (anamasya) (….)[60]

The *Biprabhakti Candrikā* remains an eloquent testimony of the reach and purchase of *Kalikātā Kamālalaẏa*'s argument. It showcased both Matilāl Śīl's virtuous conduct as a Sudra, deferentially seeking the guidance of scholarly Brahmins in matters of caste relations, and Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandhopādhyāya's new-found role as a publicist of paṇḍit verdicts. Yet, in the exchange at the end of the *Kalikātā Kamālalaẏa*, Bhabānīcaraṅa suggests that authoritative knowledge was not easy to obtain in Kolkata. In a comically terse exchange between the scandalized visiting provincial and a humorously apologetic local, Bhabānīcaraṅa suggested that the proper relationships between the wealthy and the knowledgeable could be still be threatened by the smugness of ignorant upstarts, the selfishness of those Brahmins tasked with upholding authoritative knowledge, and the disparities of wealth between rich Sudras and poor Brahmins.

Visiting provincial: On the matter of Brahmin scholars you said this most extraordinary thing – that the paṇḍits here listen to the expositions of the meaning of the śāstra provided by the wealthy, and [I think] this is a most unbelievable story, for the paṇḍits have gained

[59] Kriyayogasara is a supplement of the last part of the Uttara Khaṇḍa of the Padma Purana, containing 25 chapters and 40,000 stanzas.
[60] Matilāl Śīl, *Biprabhakti Candrikā* (Kolkata: Samācar Candrikā press, 1835), 40-64.

knowledge (…) to explain the meaning of the śāstra, so why would (…) [they] stay and listen to these other men who are blind to the śāstra and cannot read a word of Sanskrit?

Townsman: You ought to consider this: that some extremely poor Brahmin scholars who have acquired knowledge with considerable hardship have, moved by the desire to gain wealth, come to Kolkata in order to maintain their families, and know no other livelihood than that of constantly making their way to some wealthy person in order to give twice a day their holy blessings, and find that it still does not command the attention of the wealthy man, what are they to do?
Some of them, who are very shrewd, have noticed that some wealthy individuals give themselves knowing airs and are very content on being praised as knowledgeable, and so have started to pair themselves up in groups of two and go to any such wealthy man to request that he be an arbiter (madhyastha) between contending propositions (koṭī) in Nyaya philosophy or in any other śāstra, or to ask said wealthy man to explain a point of apparent contradiction in the injunctive statements of any smritiśāstra, and the wealthy man without considering their cunning will say something in accordance with his own reasoning (āpana buddhyanusāre) […] if they earn a living like this, what's wrong?[61]

1.4 The Limits of Reason and the Merits of Authoritative Knowledge

It was up to two paṇḍits to explain exactly why judging "in accordance with one's own reasoning" alone was "wrong", and to make the case for an intellect truly grounded in śāstra – an "intellect sharpened by śāstra" (*śāstrābhyāsajanita tīkṣṇa buddhi*). The first and foremost of the two, Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra (ca. 1762-1819) was also an immigrant to the city.[62] Born into a Kulin family of Raṛh Brahmins in Midnapur on Bengal's south-western fringes, he had studied in the wealthy provincial court of Nāṭor in East Bengal.[63] By the close of the eighteenth century, however, Bidyālankāra too had left the patronage of declining mofussil grandees to find fortune

[61] Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandhopādhyāya, *Kalikātā Kamālalaẏa*, in Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandyopādhyāya Racanā-saṃgraha, ed., Ramenkumar Sar (Kolkata: Baṇgiẏa Sahitya Parishaṭ, 2013).
[62] The fullest biographical reconstruction is still Brajendranātha Bandyopadhyāẏa, "Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra" in *Sāhitya-sādhaka-caritamāla* (Kolkata: Baṅgīẏa Sāhitya Parishaṯ, 1943 v. 1b), 1-40.
[63] See Bandyopadhyāẏa, "Mrituñjaẏa"*,* 12. If this is correct, he would have been a student in a catuṣpātī patronized by the celebrated widow, Rani Bhabānī (d.1793 or 1795). Unfortunately, his name does not appear in the extensive list of paṇḍits reconstructed by Mohammad Rahmān. For Sanskrit learning at the court see Mohammad Maksudur Rahmān, *Nāṭorer Mahārāṇī Bhabāṇī: aitihāsik paryālacanā,* (Rajshahi: Sāhityalok, 1988), 161-163.

in the metropolis. In Kolkata he finally achieved renown as the director of a *catuṣpāṭhī* – an establishment where he taught the disciplines of Smriti and Nyāya ("logic") in Sanskrit.[64]

When in 1801 the patrician Governor-General Richard Wellesley set up a College at Fort William to make statesmen out of the young East India Company clerks and accountants crowding Kolkata's offices, Bidyālankāra – a "colossus of literature" and "soundness of critical judgment"– was appointed first paṇḍit in Bengali and Sanskrit. [65] Bidyālankāra remained at Fort William until 1816, when he became paṇḍit to chief justice Sir Francis MacNaghten. A decade after his death, Bhabānīcaraṇa Bandhopādhyāya celebrated him as the one paṇḍit in Kolkata whose life ought to be held as normatively exemplary, "for none of his actions could be contrary to what is established in authoritative knowledge (śāstra)".[66]

While at Fort William – so sometime before 1816 – Mrityuñjaẏa wrote an entirely original work, the *Prabodha Candrikā* (Moonlight of Understanding, printed only in 1833), in which he addressed, in the generic and introductory manner proper to a manual of advice for kings and princes (i.e. as in a text of *nitiśāstra* or *nripaśāstra*) a number of moral questions akin to those that had troubled Sārbabhauma. He issued advice on what forms of conduct were proper, what kind of relations between people were licit and what comportments execrable and – above all – how one ought to discern good from bad, and where to turn to for such knowledge.

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[64] In Kolkata "the nyayu and smritee shastrus are principally taught" [by] "Mritunjuyu Vidyulunkaru of Bagbazar". William Ward, *A view of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindus,* (Srirampur: Baptist Mission Press, 1818 v. 1), 592- 93.

[65] David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 45ff. The estimation is from John Clark Marshman, *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward embracing the History of the Serampore Mission* (London: Longman et al. 1859 vol. 1), 180.

[66] Samācār Candrika, 25 December 1830, reprinted in Brajendranath Bandhyopadhyay, *Saṃbādapatre Sekāler Katha* (Kolkata: Bangiẏa Sāhitya Parishat, 1949 vol.1), 104. The other three scholars: Jagannath Tarkapañcanan of Tribeni (Hooghly) Vaneśvar Vidyālankar in Guptapālli (Barddhaman) and Raghumaṇī Bidyabhushaṇa in Dharmadabahirgāchi (Nadiẏā, where he had been royal preceptor). The first two were of paramount importance in the complex making of "Anglo-Hindu" law. See Nandini Bhattacarya-Panda, *Appropriation and Invention of Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford, 2007), 89-136, 201-242.

Mirrors for Princes such as the *Prabodha Candrikā* constituted a popular and distinguished literary genre in early modern Bengal. In this respect, Mrituñjaẏa's *Prabodha Candrikā* represents something of a swan song of the genre.[67] Quite unlike all previous *niti* texts, however, the *Prabodha Candrikā* was not written for a king, but rather "to instruct the newly arrived young men of the Saheb class" at the College of Fort William. Mrityuñjaẏa belonged to the singular generation of paṇḍits who switched from the service of royal courts to new forms of metropolitan employment.[68] Few people in Kolkata were as qualified to write a new work in *nītiśāstra* as Mrituñjaẏa, who had translated from Sanskrit, and thus effectively re-written, both the celebrated *Batriśa Siṃhāsana* (Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne*,* 1802) and the allegorical precepts contained in the *Hitopadeśa* (Tales of Beneficial Advice*,* 1808).[69] The *Prabodha Candrikā*, however, was more openly didactic than its predecessors. It offered an idiosyncratic survey of śastra: from Daṇḍin on the distinctions of genres in literature to comments attributed to Cāṇakya on the political implications and practical perils of adultery. More importantly, it contained an extended meditation on authoritative knowledge itself, arguing that upholding truly authoritative knowledge (śāstra) was indispensable to living a properly human life.

In a mode similar to classic works of *nīti,* the *Prabodha Candrikā* also instructs through stories. Readers make their way through a sequence of didactic tales recounted to a young prince by Mrituñjaẏa's fictional alter egos: the king Bhaijapāla and the court's wise Brahmin preceptor

[67] Certainly the last one to be authored truly thinking that it would be of instruction to rulers. The last major work in *nitī* was Vidyāsāgara's quite different *Betālapañcabiṃśati (The Vampire's Twenty-Five Tales)*, first published in 1846, already intended for collegiate-level students: rulers - whether fictive kings, or colonial sahebs, were no longer in mind.
[68] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *Prabodha Candrikā* [1833] in Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *Racanābalī* (Kolkata: Pustaka Bidani, 2004), 242. The *Prabodha Candrikā* was only printed after the "Anglicists" had seized control of the administration, and so, by a cruel twist of fate, its intended British audience never read it as a textbook. It did however become one of Kolkata's most important college-level manuals in the 1830s. See Anon. "Purātan Prasaṅga", *Āryābartā* 3, Issue 1, 1319 (1901): 157 for Vidyāsāgara's objections to the text.
[69] Bidyālankāra, *Racanābalī*, i-v.

Prabhākar Śarmā. In these tales, King and preceptor guide the prince to a kind of thoughtful veneration of the established order of things. The principle the *Prabodha Candrikā* imparts is that there is no true knowing without authoritative knowledge. In the opening sequence King Bhaijapāla, prior to summoning the preceptor for a more thorough instruction, makes the fundamental case that any correct operation of the intellect (*buddhi*) must be grounded in authoritative knowledge (śāstra). Mrityuñjaẏa was unequivocal in this regard: only those who possessed the "sharp intellect that is generated through authoritative knowledge" (śāstrābhyāsajanita tīkṣṇa buddhi) could be truly intelligent.[70] The king clarifies that intelligence is secondary to established forms of authoritative knowledge because the faculty of understanding cannot guarantee itself: it requires the backing of an *already* authoritative and established knowledge. Thinking properly, Bhaijapāla explains, meant thinking with the śastra, while thinking without authoritative knowledge was almost akin to not thinking at all. In the King's words:

> Son, it is order to excise the fault of obtuseness from a good intellect you must sharpen it by grounding it with constant exercise on the whetstone whose nature is authoritative knowledge [śāstra]. A sharp intellect is like a sharp arrow, and upon touching the smallest part of a given object it can pierce it. A dull intellect is like a stone, and cannot enter inside what it touches. The intellect that is sharp is the only true intellect, and the one who is possessed of such an intellect is intelligent [*buddhimān*], just as one is strong only if one's kingdom is strong. We call a fool anyone who is devoid of that intelligence that is given through authoritative knowledge [śastrīẏa buddhirahitake nirbuddhi bole], even though they may otherwise understand the day-to-day things of the world. And one who is both a fool and a prince, once deprived of the inheritance of the kingdom, is nothing but a wretch.[71]

[70] Bidyālankāra, *Prabodha Candrikā* in Bidyālankāra, *Racanābalī*, 242.
[71] Bidyālankāra, *Prabodha Chandrikā*, in Bidyālankāra, *Racanābalī,* 244.

Foregoing the śāstra was perilous even for someone who possessed ample understanding of worldly affairs.[72] This is particularly evident in the slight modification of the *Hitopadeśa*'s definition of one who falls short of proper manhood. While the *Hitopadeśa* explains that the mark of a vile or failed man (*kāpurusha-lakshaṇam)* is to allow himself to be overwhelmed by unexpected difficulty, in the *Prabodha Chandrikā* preceptor Prabhākar Śarmā argues that the most important test of virtue is the capacity to persevere in the path set by sāstra. It is "forsaking the path set in authoritative knowledge" in the face of difficulty that thwarts the achievement of one's fullest humanity. In his words of advice to the prince:

> Remember that even though authoritative knowledge can be very difficult to comprehend, it is the case that one who forsakes the path set in authoritative knowledge because of the arduousness of undertaking the proper pursuit of the goals of human existence that is one who is not properly a man [kāpurusha].[73]

To drive home the point that there was no intellect without authoritative knowledge, Mrityuñjaẏa also listed for his readers eight defining qualities of the intellect. The attribution of a set of eight qualities to the intellect was common, but the qualities themselves were not fixed. [74] Mrituñjaẏa's list underscored once more the centrality of authoritative knowledge to the functioning of the intellect.

> The eight qualities of the intellect are: the desire to hear authoritative knowledge, the hearing of authoritative knowledge, the grasping of authoritative knowledge which is to say its retention, the formulation of a hypothesis which is to say a correct postulation of meaning, the advancing of a disputation which is to say a rejection of an incorrect

[72] Of course, some śāstras (the one dealings with artha and kāma) themselves could be dangerously "worldy". Wendy Doniger, *Against Dharma: Dissent in the Ancient Indian Sciences of Sex and Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 125. In *Prabodha Chandrikā* their subordination is made abundantly clear.

[73] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *Prabodha Chandrikā*, in *Racanābalī,* 244.

[74] See especially Kāśinātha Tarkapañcānana, *Padartha Kaumudi* (Kolkata: Baptist Mission Press, 1821), 19. "parattva (priority), aparattva (posteriority) saṃkhya (number), parimāňa (volume), prithaktva (singleness), samyoga (conjoindness), bibhaga (division) o beg (action) ei ashṭa gun moner (these are the eight qualities of mind)". I discuss this text in some detail later, especially with regards to the inadmissibility of purportedly illogical questions.

> ascription of meaning, and the ascertainment of meaning itself, of knowledge itself and of reality itself.[75]

Mrityuñjaẏa noted that while everyone could be "virtuous" thanks to the thoughts entertained in one's mind (mana), it did not follow that everyone was qualified to engage with śāstra: some simply did not possess the necessary intellect (buddhi), others were of too mean an extraction.[76] In order to distinguish those capable of grasping the śastra from those who could not, the characters of *Prabodha Chandrikā* offered, at different points of the text, a ready classification of the kinds of intelligence available in the world. These classifications do not stand on their own: in a completely circular argument, the reader is informed that the only intellect worthy of receiving the śāstra is the one capable of receiving the śāstra. Yet the classification became popular, and was even reproduced in later texts – for instance, in the 1855 *Jñāna Sudhākara* (*Moon of Knowledge*). They were also functional to the *Prabodha Chandrikā*'s central argument, and further reinvigorated the equivalence between the Intellect (*Buddhi*) and the capacity to grasp and retain authoritative knowledge.[77] In the opening section King Bhaijapāla states:

> According to some scholars there are three kinds of intellect. That which is the best is akin to oil. In the same way that if a single drop of oil touches only a single part of water it comes to pervade the whole, so it is in this way that this kind of intellect comes to comprehend the entire intended meaning of authoritative knowledge, and so it is the foremost and best [kind of intellect]. The second and middle kind is the Intellect that is like leather, which if pierced by a needle is pierced in that place only [and it is called so] because its parts are penetrated only to the extent that they are pierced by the intended meaning of the śāstra, but fail to grasp any further meaning. The intellect that is akin to coarse wool is instead the third and lowest, and just as in a coarse wool cloth those parts

[75] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *Prabodha Chandrikā*, in *Racanābalī,* 244.
[76] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *Prabodha Chandrikā*, 1833 in *Racanābalī,* 277-278 (a leather-worker demonstrates "maner bhadratā" by putting the welfare of cows before his livelihood, and the example of the son of a thief who specializes in stealing shrouds from corpses as being an individual of too mean a parentage to learn śāstra)
[77] Madhusudana Tarkālankāra, *Jñana Sudhākara* (Kolkata: Mileṭari arphan yantrālaẏa [Military Orphan's Press] 1855 [Saka: 1777]), 59. The *Jñana Sudhākara* slightly deviates: the foremost intellect is like oil, the middling one like a needle (sucikā), the lowest like a stone (śilā). It is obvious that even the new terms are lifted from the analogies of *Prabodha Chandrikā.*

> that are perforated by a needle are the same as those that are not, and so it is for this intellect that what has been studied is the same as what has not been studied.[78]

In a subsequent section, preceptor Prabhākar Śarmā proposed a similar classification of adequate and inadequate intellects by way of an anecdote. One day a hideous demoness (rākṣasī) appears suddenly in the midst of the splendid court of king Vikramaditya and challenges the court paṇḍits to establish whether the man she has just beheaded was a paṇḍit or a "fool". Unflustered, the playwright Kālidāsa asks for a thin, long metal rod, and inserts it into the severed head's ear right until he is able to see its tip emerge through the opposite ear. Kālidāsa then turns to the demoness, and neatly explains that the man had to be a fool, for his head could not retain what entered into it. In Kālidāsa's fictional words:

> There are four kinds of people: Begacīrā, Ciracirā, Cirabegā and Begābegā. Those who immediately grasp the intended meaning of the śāstra and never forget it are Begacīrā. Those who after a lot of trouble understand the mening but never forget it are Ciracirā. These two are entitled to learning [ei dui byaktir bidyāte adhikāri]. The one who after much effort acquires meaning and immediately forgets it is cirabegā. The one in whom what he grasps from one ear immediately leaves from the other without touching the mind is called begābegā. These two kinds of people have no claim on authoritative knowledge.[79]

Mrityuñjaẏa reinforced his proposition that the only true intellect was the one grounded in authoritative knowledge by presenting a catalogue of examples of both faulty and correct judgments. First, he reminded readers of the so-called rule of the blind man and the cow's tail (andhagolaṅgūla-nyāẏa) to explain that those approaching a subject without an authoritative

[78] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *Prabodha Chandrikā*, in *Racanābalī*, 244.
[79] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *Prabodha Chandrikā*, in *Racanābalī*, 267. In a telling (if perhaps apocryphal) account of the import of this fourfold classification, it is recounted that a generation later paṇḍit Isvarcāndra Vidyāsāgara's once expressed profound dissatisfaction with Bidyālankāra's classification of Intellects – which he had to study while a student at Sanskrit College – and claimed to have written his version of *Betālapañcabiṃśati (The Vampire's Twenty-Five Tales)* partly as a rejoinder. See Anon. "Purātan Prasaṅga", *Āryābartā* 3, Issue 1, 1319 (1901): 157.

guide would be all the worse for it.[80] Then he anecdotally explained that nothing can be classified as being half in one category and half in another without undermining the categorizing effort itself (ardhajaratiẏa-nyāẏa) – a proposition necessary to demonstrate that two contrary propositions on the same subject cannot be entertained at once, and one cannot cherry-pick both a principle and its opposite. He chose to underscore the centrality of this logical rule to contemporary ethical concerns by offering a variant rule. In the new variant, which Mrityuñjaẏa curiously termed the principle of the half-hen (ardhakukkuṭīẏa- nyāẏa), he suggested that it was a logical absurdity to follow a set of Muslim norms while claiming to be a paṇḍit – possibly a dig at the well-known Vedantic scholar Rammohun Roy, who had settled in Kolkata in 1815 and was no friend of Mrituñjaẏa's.[81]

Subsequent anecdotes in the same chapter reinforce the importance of authoritative knowledge in general, affirm the combination of the six philosophical schools as the only valid means to knowledge, and exalt particular schools, especially the Vedanta – to which Mrityuñjaẏa was philosophically committed.[82] The argument on the unimpeachable validity of authoritative knowledge had consequences for the more practical argument on the moral order of society that Mrityuñjaẏa concluded the *Prabodha Candrikā* with. The *Prabodha Candrikā*'s reflection on the moral order of society commences – unsurprisingly enough – with an extended meditation on the transgressive rejection of the prescribed social order. It does this by discussing the mythical king

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[80] This was done by supplying the exemplary anecdote of a blind man, who, after relying on the advice of a washer-man, reached his destination by clinging to the tail of a cow through the prickliest thorn, and much worse for wear than when he started.

[81] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *Prabodha Chandrikā*, in *Racanābalī*, 258.

[82] This are the law of what has proceeded (gatanugatika- nyāẏa) [on authority], the law of the blind and the elephant (andhahastidarśana- nyāẏa) [on the combined authority of schools] the law of the ten men (daśama- nyāẏa) [Vedanta] the law of the blind and the lame (andhupangu- nyāẏa) [Samkhya], the law of the broken carriage (nastasvadagdharatha-nyāẏa) [Vedanta] and the law of the spellbound man and the puffed rice (lājābandhana-nyāẏa) [Vedanta]. It is often overlooked that the smārta and nyayayika was also a Vedantist. Rammohun Roy, undoubtedly a rival, commended Bidyālankāra's library as the finest private collection of Vedic texts in Kolkata.

Veṇa, who, in the inaugural moments of his reign, sought to confound the caste system and turn the kingdom's social order upside down by prescribing norms antithetical to *dharma*.[83]

Mrityuñjaẏa chose king Veṇa as an exemplary transgressive subject because of his ability to confound his subjects as to "what is licit and what is forbidden, the actions that are enjoined with those that are not enjoined, those places that are fit for access from those that are not fit for access, what is edible from what is not edible, what is permissible to drink from what is impermissible to drink" – a problem recognizable to all the moralists discussed above as salient to life in 1820s Kolkata.[84] In other words, in order to analyze the perils of transgression in his own time, Mrityuñjaẏa engaged with one of the most compelling accounts of social anomie offered by the Puranic tradition. The story is as follows:

> This king Veṇa, who was opposed to the proper order of things [adharmmik] and malicious [parapīḍaka] announced immediately upon ascending the throne by beating kettle-drums and issuing edicts in all cities prohibited to Brahmins all the Vedic obligations, which is to say the yajna [ritual sacrifice], the dāna [the practice of ritual gifting] and the homa [the maintenance of ritual fire] and to all people the performance of the appropriate actions [ucita karma] relating to their caste [barṇa] their stages in life [āśram] and their lineage [kul] (…) [and] gave order that for "the benefit of all and in order remove the sin of torturing themselves [atma-piḍana] all should renounce fear, shame and have intercourse as they please with their own wives or the wives of others, their husbands or the husbands of others, whether they be of high caste or of low caste".[85]

Unlike canonical accounts of Veṇa that foregrounded the perils of all-powerful kingship, Mrityuñjaẏa was most interested in the causes and consequences of Veṇa's subversion of norms.[86] As a result, Mrityuñjaẏa recognized and wrote into Veṇa's speech and actions

[83] An account of the myth of Veṇa is offered in Wendy Doniger, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology,* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 321-331.
[84] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *Prabodha Chandrikā*, in *Racanābalī*, 347.
[85] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *Prabodha Chandrikā*, in *Racanābalī*, 347-348.
[86] Doniger, *The Origins of Evil*, 321-331. Doniger notes in the versions she examines that "the proliferation of opposition suggests deeper meaning", including the perils of kingship (it challenges the gods) the relation of father to son – and of mother to child. Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra's version is of course instrumental to his case for proper authoritative knowledge.

something akin to what Wendy Doniger has termed elsewhere “a transcript of adharma”: a visibly subversive critique of the normative prescriptions proper to dharmaśāstra that was not devoid of philosophical import. This is evident in the king’s purportedly universally beneficent proclamation that to invert the order of things is good, and that abolishing norms may free the self from the burdensome task of being its own persecutor.

Veṇa’s philosophical position is even more clearly stated later: immediately after discussing his abolition of any distinction between permissible and impermissible edibles, Mrityuñjaẏa notes that Veṇa confused “that which is excessively mundane [lokātirikta] with that which is transcendent [paraloka] and the end of the mortal bodies with the transmigration of the souls [dehāntaraprāpti],” Effectively, Veṇa is revealed to be a philosopher-king in the Carvaka or “materialist” mold –a long-lost school of philosophy censured in Puranic accounts.[87] Following his subtle identification of Veṇa as a Carvaka, Mrityuñjaẏa cites a Sanskrit verse from the Katha Upaniśad that likens scholars who deceive others to the “blind leading the blind.”[88]

Mrituñjaẏa’s rewriting of the myth of Veṇa as the story of a “materialist” antagonist of the moral order effectively transformed the content of the myth itself. From a story invested in the predictable berating of those monarchs who rule wrongly it became, in colonial Kolkata, an ingenious critique of those scholars who make arguments that forego the authority of the śāstra in matters of dharma, and who choose to contest the prescribed order of things by denying its true other-worldly presuppositions. The story thus takes a new direction: immediately after the king’s proclamation is issued, the sages note that the king’s position issues from outside the

[87] Of the five Puranic versions of the story of king Veṇa, there is one Puranic version in which Veṇa is *explicitly* identified as a lokayāta (i.e. cārvāka). This is in Viṣṇu-Dharmottara Purana 1 .108. as noted in Ramkrishna Bhattacharya’s recent work. Ramkrishna Bhattacharya, *More Studies in the Cārvāka/Lokayāta* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), 203-204.

[88] The source of the quote is not identified *explicitly* in the text, but “Andhenaiva Niyamāna Yathāndhā” is the concluding part of Katha Upaniśad 1.2.5. and would have been recognized by any paṇḍit versed in Vedanta.

accepted range of Vedic positions (he is thus termed a "nāstika – an opponent of Vedic ritual). He may sound like a scholar, but in truth he is someone whose knowledge stands on false grounds (one who purports to be a paṇḍit – "paṇḍitābhimanī").

> The sages of the kingdom had become very scared because of the fear of the end of the proper order of things [dharmalopabhaẏe] and because of the pre-eminence of this norm-transgressing [atikrāntamaryyādā] denier of Vedic truth [nāstika] and so went to king Veṇa to give him good advice.
> " Oh King, there is no friend like dharma (…) in the kingdom without dharma those who have wealth are not its owners those who have a wife are not her husbands and those with fields are not its landlords and those with homes are not its homeowners and this state is the exact opposite of property and mastery [svatva svāmitva] and in it all four castes will join in the sexual intercourse beyond marriage which is proper to Brahmins, and women of the four castes will enjoy the sexual intercourse beyond marriage which is instead proper to Kṣatriẏas.[89] From the mixing of castes the destruction of the proper order of caste and station [varṇāśramadharmabilopī haiẏā] will occur and this will bring about hell [naraker nimitta haẏa] Then when the world is overrun with unrighteousness and ruin the creator lord in great anger will consume the arrogant false paṇḍit [paṇḍitābhimanī] who had fallen from the pearl that is dharma and spread disorder against the proper order of things and make him into a pile of ash more minute then piercing-hole of an earring.[90]

Veṇa similarly addressed the sages in the vitriolic terms of classical religious controversy, rather than with the imperious words of a sovereign chastising insubordinate subjects.

> Oh re re! You are deceivers of your own-self (svabañcaka) and swindlers of others (parapratārak) and the bad forms of conduct are yours not mine (…) seeing and hearing the extent to which you are enveloped in the darkness of ignorance (jñāna andhakāracchanna) you cannot know me (…) of course I have heard that the mixing of caste will bring about hell, but if I increase the confusion of castes how exactly is it that from this very mixing of castes hell will ensue?[91]

The king turns out to be predictably mistaken in this and a succession of disastrous calamities ensues, forcing the sages to commit an apparently legitimate regicide. Mrityuñjaẏa

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[89] Here the sages judiciously argue that sex outside marriage (*parakīẏa*) is licit, but in a bounded manner: i.e. the elopers must either be Brahmins or Kshatriyas. There was of course considerable estimation of sex outside marriage by virtue of estimation of held both for the adulterous love of Krṣna and Radha, and for the literary topos of erotic love. See Edward C. Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaisnava-Sahajiya cult of Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 209-213.
[90] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *Prabodha Chandrikā*, in *Racanābalī*, 347-348.
[91] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *Prabodha Chandrikā*, in *Racanābalī*, 348.

spends almost no time on the subsequent events of the Puranic story, partly because the restoration of the social order by Veṇa's son Pṛthu would undermine his most important proposition, which forms the conclusion of the *Prabodha Chandrikā* proper: that the forms of social organization of his own era, so different from the ones prescribed in the most authoritative texts on the organization of society, were the result of the confusions brought about by Veṇa. Yet the confusion of the present was precisely what enjoined renewed attention to norms. Mrityuñjaẏa thus concluded *Prabodha Chandrikā* with a catalogue listing all the "mixed" castes of Bengal drawn from a seventeenth century text, the Jātimālā, and offering all sorts of etymological attempts to connect each new caste or group present in Bengal – even the Marwari traders of Rajasthan(!) who had just settled in Kolkata – to the many kinds of illicit sexual unions that occurred between members of the four castes extant during Veṇa's reign.[92]

A younger colleague at the College of Fort William, paṇḍit Kāśinātha Tarkapañcānana, extended and radicalized Mrituñjaẏa's "empowerment of śāstra". Rather than an original reflection, he offered a translation of some of the most important texts from the most revered and complex śāstras practiced in early nineteenth century Bengal: "Nyāya".[93] Nyāẏa – a term translated as "logic" in the nineteenth century, but which was more exactly defined by its practitioners as "the examination of an object with the help of the instruments of valid knowledge" (*pramāna*) was a disciplinary practice generally counted as one of the six authoritative "schools" of Hindu philosophy (*darśana*) and was an especially authoritative discipline in Early Modern Bengal.[94] Tarkapañcānana, having studied in one of Bengal's premier

[92] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra *Prabodha Chandrikā*, in *Racanābalī*, 352-358.

[93] An 1828 translation of the Sāṃkhyapravacanasūtra (the foundational texts of Sāṃkhya) by Mrituñjaẏa's son Rāmjaẏa Tarkālankāra was likely commenced by Mrityuñjaẏa himself, so he would have shared with Kāśinātha a radical project of sutra translations. See Anon. "Mritunjaẏa Bidyalankārer Jibanī o Granthapañjī", *Śanibārera Ciṭhi* 9 No. 4 (1936): 555.

[94]Samuel Wright, "The Expansion of a Discipline: Intellectual Change in Nyāya-śāstra in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century India", unpublished PhD dissertation submitted to the Department of South Asian Languages

centers of Nyāya philosophy, Bhatpara (Bhāṭṭāpalli) in the Hooghly district, was well qualified to offer a summary of the discipline. When he joined the College of Fort William in 1813, he found a collegue in Mrituñjaẏa, who was a practitioner of Nyāya philosophy (Naiyayika) too.[95]

He then persuaded the College administration to fund a book that would explain "To the Sahebs in the College some of the principles of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika philosophy".[96] The resultant book, titled *Padarthā Kaumudī* (Moonlight on the Objects of Knowledge) was an encyclopedic *vademecum* articulated in three parts: an original introductory poem on Nyāya philosophy and its soteriological role; a short, free translation of the first book of the Nyāyaśāstra's founding text – the revered *Nyāyasūtra* of Akṣapāda "Gautama", and, finally, a "paraphrase" of the most authoritative "modern" disciplinary textbook of Nyāya, the *Bhāṣapariccheda*/ *Siddhanta-muktāvalī* once attributed to Viśvavanātha Nyāyapañcanana Bhaṭṭācarya. In terms of content, *Padarthā Kaumudī* offered a discussion of all the sixteen categories of Nyāya (concerned with epistemology and ontology) and the seven ontological categories of the allied Vaiśeṣika system in a new, Sanskrit-infused Bengali vernacular prose of considerable technical difficulty.[97]

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and Civilizations, University of Chicago (2014); Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya and Mrinalkanti Gangopadhyaya (eds. & tr.) *Nyaya Philosophy: Literal Translation of Gautama's Nyaya-Sutra and Vatsyayana's Bhasya*, (Kolkata: Indian Studies, 1968), 5.

[95] For biographical details see Hemchandra Bhattacharya, *Baṅgīẏa Saṃskṛta-Adhyapāka-jībanī*, (Kolkata: Nabīna Prakāśaka, 1976), 45 and Brajendranath Bandhyopadhyaya, "Kāśinātha Tarkapañcānana" in *Sāhitya-sādhaka-caritamāla* (Kolkata: Baṅgīẏa Sāhitya Parishaṯ, 1942) 39-42. At an unspecified date in the late eighteenth century Bireśwar Nyayalankara of Bhatpara had defeated in philosophical debate the revered nyayayikas of Navadwip, establishing Bhatpara's purported supremacy in Nyāya. Also Samita Sinha, *Pandits in a Changing Environment,* (Kolkata: Sarat Book House, 1993), 45. This estimation of Bhatpara's pre-eminence may not have been shared in Nabadwip.

[96] "Kālejer Pāthārthi Sahebdiger Alpāyāse Nyāya o Vaiśeṣika darśana bidya" see Bandyopādhyāẏa., "Kāśinātha Tarkapañcānana", 32

[97] Johann Hans Heinrich Eduard Röer, who had studied philosophy at Königsberg and Berlin before joining the fledgling Department of Public Instruction in Bengal noted in his own translation of *Siddhanta-muktāvalī* that he had relied on Kāśinātha's *Padarthā Kaumudī* (He volunteered that at times "The Bengalee translation expresses the meaning much more clearly". See the introduction to Eduard Rōer (ed. & tr.), *Discussion of the Categories of the Nyaya Philosophy* (Kolkata: Baptist Mission Press, 1850). The *Bhāṣapariccheda* is generally no longer attributed to Viśvavanātha, but to one Kṛṣnadāsa Sarbabhaum, in the wake of a 1941 study by Dineshchandra Bhattacharya.

Kāśinātha's radical choice to translate Nyāya's foundational texts into a single Bengali volume requires explanation. "Nyāya" was already a discipline of exceptional import in early nineteenth century Bengal.[98] This was because Naiyayikas had come to claim for their śāstra the role of a "master" discipline, advancing the twofold case that Nyāya in general could be relied upon both to reliably establish the epistemic value of any śāstra against the charges of skeptics and doubters, and as a method to work out problems of knowledge internal to each and every discipline. It was, in other words, the śāstra that held the keys to all other śāstras. The Baptist missionary William Ward had noted their extraordinary preeminence in the provinces in 1818:

> The Nyayu Durshunu is chiefly studied (…) Almost every town in Bengal contains some Nyayayiku schools (…) Indeed, the Nyayu has obtained so decided a pre-eminence over all other durshunus now studied in these parts that it is read by nine students out of ten (…) the truth is that it is the only system which in Bengal has remained popular (…) at the festivals, he who can best dispute on the first principles of philosophical research as taught in the Nyayu receives the highest homage, the most honorable seat and the richest present (…) he who is merely acquainted with the law books is placed on a lower seat.[99]

And yet, as Samuel Wright has recently shown, only very few of these specialized paṇḍits had chosen to settle in the new metropolis of Kolkata, and established networks had changed very little.[100] This was especially problematic if the inhabitants of Kolkata were to be made to reason properly, rather than allowed to think whimsically. Kāśinātha – we know from an

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[98] Wright, "The Expansion of a Discipline."

[99] William Ward, *A View of the History, Literature and Religion of the Hindoos*, (Śrirampur: The Mission Press, 1818, vol. 1), 396.

[100] A contemporary list of Nyāya specialists [Naiyayikas] compiled by one such scholar in Nabadwip could, for instance, identify only two Naiyayikas (out of 131 listed) as residing in Kolkata proper in the late 1810s or mid 1820s. The list is certainly partial (and likely partisan too): it omits Kāśinātha Tarkapañcānana, his two collaborators, and Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra. The date for the list is indicated by the document's editor – Pañcānana Maṇḍala – as being 1828 [1235 B.S.], Wright instead argues convincingly the case of a date between 1808 and 1817. See Samuel Wright "Scholar Networks and the Manuscript Economy in Nyāya-śāstra in Early Colonial Bengal", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* Vol. 49, no. 2 (2020): 323-59.

1823 source – acted to obviate this deficiency, and tutored in Nyāya the young scion of a prominent abhijāt family, Nandalāla Ṭhākura of Pāthuriẏaghāṭā.[101]

Jonardon Ganeri has recently made the case that nyayayikas – following the decisive rupture represented by the sixteenth century paṇḍit Raghunātha Śiromani – made of nyāẏa "a term more or less synonymous with the appeal to reason and critical based inquiry". He argues thus that the work of early modern Naiyayikas ought to be translated as "New Reason".[102] However, to state that the "appeal to reason" was key to Nyāẏa in the early Modern period is somewhat misleading: the nyayayika study of the "sixteen objects of knowledge" probed and interrogated the cognitive process itself – and so offered if anything a far-reaching account of reason's capacity to question and even trick itself, not the optimistic affirmation of its capacity to question everything. This is especially apparent if we consider the final chapters of *Padarthā Kaumudī*, which offer a lengthy and complex defense of the knowability of the metaphysical yet ontological category of the "unseen" – adṛṣta – wherein fruits of properly virtuous action came to be concretized and stored in complex ways. Against all skeptics *Padarthā Kaumudī* reissued and restated the complex naiyayika defense of the efficacy of all ritual action, and made the case that questioning the logic of sacrifice was, formally speaking, unreasonable and illogical.[103]

Kāśinātha's later work also picks up similar themes, and similarly underscores the perils of injudicious and improper reasoning, the possibility of self-delusion and the attendant dangers of moral transgression. This is evident in his Bengali translation of Krṣṇa Miśra's allegorical

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[101] Bandhyopadhyaya, "Kāśinātha Tarkapañcānana."

[102] Jonardon Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 4. Śiromani had reorganized the inner sub-components of one the seven ontological categories that the Nyaya had borrowed from the Vaiśeṣika school, collapsing God (Íswara), time (kāla) space and ether (ākāśa) all into a single category.

[103] Tarkapañcānana, *Padarthā Kaumudī,* 137, section titled "Hadriṣtaṃ hyāddharmah svargādi sādhanaṃ" discusses ritual action and Ganges bathing (and how the river Karmanāśā cancels merits), 141 "Adharmmo Narakadīna Hetu Nindita Karmmajah" discusses how hell is brought about by the failure to uphold dharma.

play *Prabodha Candrādaẏa* (*Rise of the Wisdom Moon*), which he retitled *Ātmatattva Kaumudī* (*The Moonlight that grants true Knowledge of the Self*).[104] Though the allegorical play is known to be an especially complex staging of Vedantic philosophy, Kāśinātha advanced the case that it could serve as a guide against wrongful forms of thinking and conduct:

> Just as in the advice of authoritative texts on nīti it is said that the fable of the crow and the tortoise exists to teach restless children, so it is it is advised that the play known as *Prabodha Candrādaẏa* brings the dawning of true knowledge to the man who has embarked on a path of never-ending wrongfulness.[105]

Kāśinātha's belief that the *Prabodha Candrādaẏa* could be read as a higher kind of *nitī* text is perhaps not entirely surprising. Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandyopādhyāẏa thought much the same, decrying the reluctance of Kolkata's citizens to purchase a newly printed translation of the *Prabodha Candrādaẏa* (obviously referencing Kāśinātha's translation!).[106] The particular reading of *Prabodha Candrādaẏa* they advanced seems to be due to the fact that the second and third acts of the play offer a scathing survey of those dangerous intellectual positions that ensnare men in a degrading this-worldliness, and push them to undertake actions incongruous with virtue. The catalogue of "the deceptions of heretics" (*Pāṣaṇḍabiḍambana*) consists of a great many conventional adversaries: the nastikā, the lokāẏata and so on. But it also offered a portrait of a more proximate one: a Brahmin highly learned in Vedanta who argues that rites and

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[104] Tarkapañcānana, *Ātmatattva Kaumudī* (Kolkata: Lālmohan Press, 1822). The play recounts the tale of the dethronement of the rightful king, Vivek (the personification of Discernment) and his queen, Moti (Intelligence) by the forces of Māhāmohā (the one who is greatly deceived), and of Vivek's subsequent quest to liberate the kingdom. Liberation – the prophecy predicts – will only be possible through marriage of Vivek with the elusive lady Upaniṣat (the principle set of authoritative texts for Vedantists), which will ensure the birth of a son, Prabodhacandra (The Wisdom Moon) and a daughter, Vidya (Scientia) and the ultimate deliverance of the kingdom from illusion. For more see Krṣṇa Miśra [Krishna Mishra] (ed. & tr. Matthew Kapstein) *The Rise of Wisdom Moon* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), i-lvii

[105] Tarkapañcānana, K. *Ātmatattva Kaumudī,* 2.

[106] Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandhopādhyāya, *Kalikātā Kamālalaẏa*, 1832 [2013], 51.

rituals may be entirely done away with if one is to truly seek the liberation of the soul described in Vedanta [107]

1.5 The Modern "Paṣaṇḍa" and the Crisis in Normativity

In a remarkable case of life imitating art Kāśinātha would find himself debating one such dangerous Vedantist: the celebrated Rammohun Roy (1774-1833). Like all the other characters in this story, Rammohun Roy, too, was a Kulin Brahmin from the provinces. He was a late-comer too, and settled in Kolkata only in 1814. But quite unlike the others, his family belonged within the highest ranks of Bengal's fallen Nawabi *ancién regime.* His ancestors had distinguished themselves in administrative service at the court of Murshidabad and accrued land-rights and considerable social prestige in the process. His great-grandfather, Kṛṣna Chandra Bandopādhyāẏa had even earned the family the honorific title of "Raẏa" – which, following the conventions of Bengali pronunciation, came to be "Roy". Rammohun's father, Rāmkanta, worked as an official in the Murshidabad court during the tumultuous years when the East India Company to power in Bengal.[108] Rammohun too – following a Persian education in Patna – eventually settled at Murshidabad, where he famously authored a tract in Persian and Arabic, the *Tuhfat ul-Muwahhidin* (Gift to Monotheists) attacking the validity of revelation in matters of religion, and arguing that a single true God is known through human understanding alone.[109]

[107] Tarkapañcānana, *Ātmatattva Kaumudī,* 34-35. The episode in English is in Kṛṣṇa Miśra, *Wisdom Moon,* 49*ff*. See also Amelié Pedraglio, *Le Prabodhacandrodaya de Kṛṣṇamiśra*, (Paris: Boccard, 1974), 318.

[108] See the sources collected by Brajendranath Bandyopādhyāẏa in "Rāmmohana Raẏa", *Sāhitya-Sādhaka-caritamāla,* (Kolkata: Baṅgiẏa Sāhitya Parishaṯ, vol. 1., 1943), 11. A detailed biography based largely on Bandyopādhyāẏa has been provided by Amiya P. Sen *Rammohun Roy: A Critical Biography* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2012).

[109] See Rammohun Roy (tr. & ed. Obaidullah el Obeidi) *Rammohun Roy and Tuhfatul Muwwahhiddin* (Kolkata: K.P. Bagchi, 1975). There Rammohun argued against "those who prefer the so-called invented revelation of mankind to the natural inspiration from God". He did so by proposing that miracles in themselves are not to be believed; the belief in them originates in the ignorance of the true cause of things, for "in this world things are related to one another by subsequent relations of cause and effect" (p.15). Instead, one ought to see that "There are many things; for instance, the many wondrous inventions of Europe and the dexterity of jugglers, the causes of which are not obviously known and seem beyond the comprehension of the human faculties, but after the exercise of keen insight or the instruction of others their causes can be known satisfactorily" (p.27).

The *Tuhfat ul-Muwahhidin* has long bewitched historians, much to the detriment of Rammohun's later polemical radicalism and philosophical originality. Sumit Sarkar was the first of many to be disappointed by Rammohun's arguments in Kolkata, and influentially contended that Rammohun effected a "retreat from the fairly consistent and militant rationalism of the *Tuhfat*" to turn to the conservative project of editing and translating the most authoritative of Vedantic texts, the Upanisad.[110] Lata Mani has influentially extended Sarkar's point, arguing that Rammohun was participating in a "reconstitution of tradition" under the pressures of colonialism's drive to construct "reliable" knowledge of Indian social practice, and the need to counter relentless missionary criticism by providing authoritative texts. In her argument Rammohun recedes from critical thinking to ultimately become the first and foremost proponent of a new kind of nineteenth century "scriptural Hinduism."[111]

I argue that even in Kolkata Rammohun remained a recklessly original and challenging thinker. In his first collection of anecdotes from the Upanisad, the 1815 *Vedanta Grantha*, which he translated in 1816 into English as *Abridgment of a Translation of the Vedant*, Rammohun noted, like a proper scholar of philosophy, that the "the reasoning faculty, which leads men to certainty in things within its reach, produces no effect on questions without its comprehension."[112] The recognition of a more circumscribed role for the intellect did not however limit Rammohun's philosophical daring. It was in Kolkata that Rammohan first took on the new theorists of moral prescription, and he did so by refusing to entertain the authoritativeness of the texts on which their arguments depended. To contest the authority of

[110] Sumit Sarkar, "Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past" in *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975), 53.
[111] Lata Mani, *Contentious traditions: the debate on Sati in colonial India* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 123.
[112] Rammohun Roy, *Abridgment of a Translation of the Vedant* (Kolkata: publisher unknown, 1816), ii.

puranas, the kavyas and the smṛṭis Rammohun conducted an argument on the grounds of *sabda-pramaṇa*, the "proof" developed by the philosophical schools of Mimamsa – often taken to be a rival of the Nyaya – that posits "natural ontological relationship" between names and things by alleging that only Vedic expressions guarantee reality.[113]

Rammohun turned to Vedic *sabda-pramaṇa* not to maintain the case for a stable transmission of meaning, but to make the case that received knowledge was inadequate, and, indeed, that many of the norms advocated by Kolkata's moralists were illicit. His turn to the foundational authority of Vedic meanings was thus meant to bring about the disqualification of all other sources of authority. The 1815 *Vedanta Grantha* presented, in its opening, an argument against the existence of the other gods of the Hindu tradition – Krishna, Rama, Shiva (Pashupati) and the mother goddess Kali-Durga on the basis of their absence from the semantic content of the word *Brahma* in the Upanishad.

> Because by means of the original signification of the Sanskrit words "Brahma the absolute, omniscient, omnipresent etc" the Absolute Being was being denoted *and* no god nor human was being proved by those Sanskrit words, it must follow then that for all for all those beings that are described in all śāstra and poems there is in no way any firmness in their signification because the word Krishna or the word Ram and the word

[113] In the domain of Indian language philosophy debates, the most uncompromising position was that of the Mimamsakas, who demanded that Vedic language be understood as predicated upon a "natural ontological relationship" between words and things. Their position avoided the problem of attributing to Vedic words either purely notional meanings or an unstable, purely referential function (these were positions entertained by schools that rivalled the Mimamsakas). The idea of a natural, ontological relationship between words and things meant that the Mimamsakas argued that the Vedas required no creator. Indeed, in their view the Vedic texts could have none, else the signification of the word would be dependent on a prior author. The Veda had to be *apauraseya* (uncreated) *nitya* (eternal) and *svatah-pramanya* (intrinsically valid). Insofar as the Veda is eternal, and the words relate only to stable, eternal things, then its words only denote universals (*aḳrti*) and never particulars – not even particular gods (*vyakti*). The mimamsakas ultimately produced one of the most radical, and simultaneously most orthodox positions in classical Indian philosophy: they came to deny the significance of a conception of god in order to uphold the absolute validity (and conceptual priority) of the Vedas. To paraphrase one of Madaleine Biardeu's incisive summaries of the Mimamsa position: one can only conceive of an ontological, pre-given relationship between words and things if the text in question is authorless and has escaped from the particularity of the intervention of a thought. See Madeleine Biardeau, *Théorie de la connaissance et philosophie de la parole dans le Brahmanisme Classique* (Paris: Mouton, 1964).

> Pashupati and the word Kali-durga-*di* ascertain a different substance [from the creator] and therefore they can contain no normative kind of meaning.[114]

The allegation that Rammohun's turn to the Veda is a simple kind of "scripturalism" appears philosophically inadequate in the light of just how sustained the case for *sabda-pramana* is in the Bengali text of the *Vedanta Grantha* (for obvious reasons it is absent in English). In an entirely original move, Roy calls for the death of the gods on the basis of a grammatical rule – the derivation of meaning from true Sanskrit *dhatus*.

> There is no firmness in the signification… because according to the rule of Sanskrit words that are accomplished through the process of suffixal addition [one can] indicate many things. Every word through its root can indicate many things, and if we pay a little attention we will find out that in the name of Brahma we do not find any trace of the gods, for if a god particular in form or quality or a human was the subject of the Vedantasastra then we would have found some reference in these more than 500 verses.[115]

The normative consequences of Rammohun's Upanishadic foundationalism were entirely antagonistic to the efforts of those seeking to restore and reinvigorate a prescriptive order of morals by turning to the smṛṭi tradition. Both Kāśinātha Tarkapañcānana and Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra had been committed to Vedanta and to a conventional understanding of the smṛṭi tradition. Rammohun made their dual commitment more difficult, and was brazen about it. Wherever theorists of dharmaśāstra had indicated an obligation (kartavyata), Rammohun openly declared its irrelevance for those truly devoted to the pursuit of Vedantic liberation:

> It is optional with those who have faith in God alone to observe and attend the rules and rites (…) applicable to the different classes of Hindoos and the different religious orders (…) it is optional with those who have faith in the only God to attend the prescribed

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[114] Rammohun Roy, *The Bengali translation of the Vedant, or Resolution of all the Veds; the most celebrated and revered work of Brahmanical Theology, establishing the unity of the supreme being and that he is the only object of worship,* (Calcutta: Ferris & Co. 1816), reprinted in Ray, P. *Rammohan Rocanabali*, (Kolkata: Rammohan Mission, 2006), 7.
[115] Roy, *The Bengali translation*, 7.

> ceremonies or neglect them entirely (…) He who has true faith in the omnipresent may eat all that exists.[116]

The outrage of moral theorists at the sustained argument dissolving the relationship between Vedic foundations and the authoritative traditions on the moral order was immediate. In 1817 the aging Mrityuñjaẏa issued the *Vedānta Chandrikā* (*The Moonlight that Illuminates the Vedanta*), a text later translated as *An apology for the Present System of Hindu Worship.* In it Mrityuñjaẏa effectively quoted himself, warning against the "crafty cormorant (…) who will allure his pray to destruction by assuming the shape of a lotus" and reminding readers that Rammohun committed the "mistake of the blind man who seized the tale of the cow" bypassing all authoritative knowledge in order to arrogantly arrive at the debasement of the self, rather than its true liberation.[117] Mrituñjaẏa also noted the relationship between Rammohun's *sabda-pramaṇa* argument and his incitement to desert norms: Mimamsakas had insisted on the authority of Vedic meaning – which was uncreated – for very different reasons:

> The ancient Mimangsuk writers, in treating of vice and virtue, had for their object the deterring from the former, not the directing to the latter. They did not, as seems to be the object of the atheistic mistaken moderns, inculcate that prescribed rites should be abandoned or forbidden acts performed.[118]

In the following years the controversy only grew in intensity. Rammohun did not retract, and in 1820 issued an even stronger statement on the irrelevance of ritual acts in Sanskrit Hindi, Bengali and even English.[119] In a challenge printed by the Baptist newspaper, the *Samacar Darpana* (whom Rammohun had offended by removing references to Jesus' miracles in his 1820 exploration of Christianity, *The Precepts of Jesus*) Kāśinātha Tarkapañcānana pseudonymously

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[116] Roy, R. *Abridgment of a Translation*, 12-13

[117] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *An apology for the Present System of Hindu Worship* (1817) in Bidyālankāra, *Racanābalī*, 395-396

[118] Mrityuñjaẏa Bidyālankāra, *An apology* in Bidyālankāra, *Racanābalī*, 420.

[119] See Rammohun Roy, *Apology for the Pursuit of Final Beatitude independent of Brahmanical Observances* (Kolkata: Baptist Mission Press, 1820).

challenged Rammohun to account for multiple violations of the prescribed moral order by setting out "four questions", providing a wealth of authoritative references, and – like a good nyaẏika ought to – calling out Rammohun's "misleading line of reasoning" (*brahmātmaka buddhite*).

> On the basis of what highly unknown textual authority (śāstra) does the purveyor of false knowledge who is falsely called a scholar and those who accordingly follow him as if sheep going to market among whom are many wealthy rest in their judgment of whether it is moral or not (kartavya athaba akartavya) that those who are distinguished as good people and the children of those who are pure, generous in the arrangement of dāna, and distinguished should leave the actions and dharma proper to their caste and take that proper to another caste. [120]

Rammohun answered at length, citing important authorities in favor of his own arguments, and arguing that he did not challenge the moral order of society as such, but only the relevance of the prescriptive enjoinments that were doubly not authoritative: firstly, because these norms were *ipso facto* irrelevant for the followers of the Vedanta, who were freed from lowly norms both by their higher pursuit of liberation, and secondly, because they were intrinsically not authoritative, in so far as they were based on non-foundational text.

Rammohun also argued that the moral order his adversaries advocated was dead because they themselves failed to live up to it, despite their best efforts. First up for Rammohun's inimitable censure was Kāśinātha, who had failed even to maintain the basic rules concerning śāstra's exclusivity by translating Nyāya, and yet had the gall to charge Rammohun with inadequate behaviour.

> If a person serves the mlecchas and teaches śāstra to the mlecchas and by virtue of having transposed the meaning of the Nyaẏa philosophy in vernacular can sell this to the mlecchas and brags about it but then says to another person you mix with the mlecchas and have described the meaning of the philosophy [of Vedanta] in vernacular and given it to mlecchas and so failed your dharma – what is the appropriate way of referring to this person?[121]

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[120] Anon. [Kāśinātha Tarkapañcānana] "Chari Prasna", *Samacar Darpan* 8 April 1822 in Brajendranath Bandopadhyaẏa (ed.) *Rammohun Granthavali* (Kolkata: Bangiẏa Sāhitya Parishat, 1952).
[121] Roy, R. "Chari Prasner Uttar" (1822) in Bandopadhyaẏa (ed.) *Rammohun Granthavali*.

> If an individual scrubs their teeth every day with that misi powder that the Yavanas manufacture, or at every meal time or on other moments rubs on their body the essential oils and distilled water that are also made by the Yavanas and yet tells another you have touched a Yavana so you are fallen from your dharma and are an outcaste, what will I say to this person.

Rammohun also did not mince his words regarding Bhabānīcaraṅa:

> To the individual who has studied himself those branches of knowledge that are proper to the Yavanas and prints the work of Manu and the Mahabharata on the Samācāracandrikā and Samācaradarpana despite knowing that these are read by many Mlecchas and yet says to another you have studied the śāstra of the Yavanas and printed the meaning of the śāstras: what can I call them.[122]

Kāśinātha's answered the charges in *Pāṣaṇḍapīḍana* (which he subtitled in English "Torment to the Irreligious") and made the explicit case that Rammohun was a new raja Veṇa, but the debate did not abate, and in fact it intensified: Rammohun responded in kind with a new tract, and further supporters of Kāśinātha joined in authoring a tract denouncing Rammohun's scandalous transgressions and unreasonable arguments. An English periodical compared the interminable quarrel between Rammohan's neo-Vedantists and the proponents of a reinvigorated smritiśāstra to the endless struggle of "liberals" and "tories", drawing a suggestive set of equivalences more by way of analogy than by way of description[123]

When Rammohun left for England in 1830, Bhabānīcaraṅa wrote a jeering poem on the "Brahmin King" who had forsaken all proper norms, and betrayed all dharma for greed and lust, and was destined to die without appropriate funerary rites.[124] But in many ways the project of normative reinvigoration Bhabānīcaraṅa and his allies had advocated stood in tatters: as long as Rammohun and his rivals cited authoritative texts against each other, they invariably

[122] Roy, "Chari Prasner Uttar".
[123] "Rammohun Roy the Hindoo Philosopher" in *Alexander's East India Magazie and Colonial and Commercial Journal,* Vol.1 (Dec. 1830-June 1831): 48.
[124] "Dvijarājer Khedoktiḥ" (*Lament of the Brahmin King*) in *Samācāra Candrikā* 4 November 1830.

complicated the question as to whether any given ritual action was either obligatory and virtuous, or deserving of blame or avoidance. Young Bengalis were forced to confront the fact that no dispute on norms could be settled authoritatively any more, and to ask for once where good norms may come from. A new course in “Moral and Mental Philosophy”, offered for the first time in 1829 at an expensive, English-language school for the sons of grandees – the Hindu College – would provide for some a radical solution to the normative impasse at hand.

CHAPTER TWO: PHILOSOPHICAL BEEF AND SCOTCH BACON: TRANSGRESSION AND MORAL SENSE IN COLONIAL KOLKATA 1829-1848

2.1 Introduction

Pyārīcā̃da Mitra's (1814-1883) 1858 novel *Ālāler gharer dulāl* ("The rich man's spoilt son") describes a lavish *śrāddha* – the obligatory ceremony held in honor of a deceased relative – arranged by the son of a deceased Kolkata magnate for his father. To mark the occasion, a host of impressively titled logicians assembled for public disputation, and we learn from Mitra's description that "there was no end of Tarkabāgīśas[1], Vidyāratnas[2], Nyāẏālaṅkaras[3], Bācaspatis[4] and Vidyāsagāras[5]" ready to engage in learned debate and bring luster to the late gentleman's memory.

> One of the Pandits introduced an element of the Nyaya shastras for discussion – "smoke is the effect of fire, and this is a different substance from a water-jar". A pandit from Orissa (utkālanibāsī) remarked "The water-jar is itself distinct from a mountain". "What is that, what are you saying?" quipped one from Kāśījoḍā. Another "you surely have not paid proper attention to the sentence: he who regards a water-jar, clothes and a mountain as the same as smoke from a fire murders the famous Śiromaṇi.6 A Pandit from East Bengal said – "smoke is an entirely different substance from a water-jar, smoke is the effect of fire, how can there be smoke when there is no fire?" and so the dispute went on, until from simply glaring at each other they got into a hand to hand scrummage.[7]

The scholarly dispute soon degenerated even further. On discovering a Muslim amongst the ceremony's attendees, the *naiyāyika*s set aside their differences to attack him, enraged that his presence "polluted" the gifts they hoped to receive in exchange for their display of erudition,

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[1] Master in Disputation, a common title for a Nyayayika.
[2] Gem of knowledge
[3] Ornament of Logic
[4] Master of speech
[5] Ocean of Learning
[6] Raghunātha Śiromaṇi (c. 1470-c.1550)
[7] Pyārīcā̃da Mitra *Ālāler gharer dulāl* in Pyārīcā̃da Mitra *Pyāricā̃da racanābalī* ed. Mohammad Manirujjamāna, (Kathakali: Dhaka, 1968), 144. [in chapter 20.]

and which they now could no longer touch. After beating the unfortunate Muslim attendee, the offended pandits quit the venue in disgust. Needless to say, the ceremony ended in ignominy.

Ālāler Gharer Dulāl is a work of fiction. Yet, its rendering of Nyaya disputation as a grotesque and inconsequential assemblage of windbags and bigots was real enough. Scarcely a generation earlier, Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyaya had upbraided the youthful rich for their ritual omissions. Now, one of the young and newly moneyed *nababa bus* – the Kayastha Pyārīcañda Mitra – could finally take literary revenge, alleging the meaninglessness of hitherto revered forms of knowledge and lampooning the hypocritical delusions of the *tartuffes* upholding them. Just two decades earlier Bengali satire had mocked those who infringed the moral order of caste – now instead it turned to chastise those committed to the obsolescent norms of *dharmaśāstra* and the purportedly abstruse reasoning of the *naiyāyika*s.

This chapter asks how Mitra's confrontation with the upholders of the normative order of caste first originated, and details the ways in which the complex edifice of philosophical knowledge that had sustained the śāstra came to be derisively dismissed by a young band of "English educated" College graduates in the 1830s and 40s. In those heady years, Pyārīcā̃da Mitra and his associates – all graduates of Kolkata's new and prestigious Hindu College – scandalized Kolkata's respectable society through a series of decidedly public transgressions, including the ostentatious display of beef-eating right in the college's square. Concerned relatives and scrupulous pandits weren't the only ones to find the antics of Mitra and his companions – a loosely organized coterie eventually known as the "Young Bengal"– objectionable. The contemporary English press in Kolkata infamously jeered at their "cutting their way through beef and guzzling their way to liberalism through tumblers of beer" and historians have by and large concurred with this unsympathetic dismissal, denouncing Young

Bengal as "a parasitic and precocious outcrop on the surface of colonial society", made all the more insufferable by its derivative character and its failure to challenge the political and economic arrangements of colonial rule.[8]

In this chapter, I revise such strictures and propose that an examination of the intellectual reasons guiding Young Bengal's wholesale rejection of the learned traditions of moral knowledge then current in Kolkata is key to recovering the meaning of the transgressive pursuits they were so flagrantly committed to.[9] Rosinka Chaudhuri has underscored how Young Bengal's beef-eating and the violation of Brahminical taboos were significant acts: I extend this arguments by underscoring just how, for those wishing to break *tout court* with the normative order upheld by their families, undertaking the gravest of transgressions constituted a clear and unmistakable break. Tracking the resources upon which Young Bengal drew to engage in specific transgressions, this chapter reassesses the role that the celebrated Hindu College teacher and Kolkata poet Henry Louis Vivien Derozio (1809-1831) played in inspiring Young Bengal's defiant transgressions. In ways not unlike those of the "satanic school" poets of Regency England, members of the Young Bengal generation subscribed to the Byronic contention that a purely formal understanding of moral norms was in itself immoral, and proposed instead that true moral action was only possible in opposition to the norms and conventions of a hypocritical and insincere society. To openly sin was thus a truly moral act. But it could only be so because the moral order of caste itself appeared to them profoundly inadequate, ridiculously abstruse and painfully self-referential.

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[8] "Henry Louis Vivien Derozio" in *The Oriental Magazine consisting of original papers in prose and verse*, No.1 (October 1843), 378 and Ranajit Guha. *Dominance without hegemony,* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 134.
[9] In this I expand on the arguments first made by Rosinka Chaudhuri, *Freedom and Beef-steaks,* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan 2012).

To their learned paṇḍit adversaries the rebellious students' rejection of centuries of systematic thinking in smriti and nyaya seemed, with good reason, "totally and utterly ignorant" (*digbidik jñānabarjita*).[10] Unlettered as they may have been in the learned traditions of Indic moral thinking, I note that the graduates of Hindu College were in no way philosophical philistines. Rather, they drew on an incommensurable philosophical tradition, finding in the anti-scholastic polemics of Scottish "mental and moral philosophy" key arguments to dismiss the intellectual work of paṇḍits –what they saw as the "wiles and tricks of Bramincraft" – as moral and cognitive failures. In the early 19th century, "mental and moral philosophy" was a specific term that indicated an emergent philosophical discipline grounded in the works of Glasgow University's Thomas Reid (1710-1796) and Edinburgh University's Dugald Stewart (1753-1828).[11] Reid and Stewart had effectively reprised and extended the anti-scholastic epistemological polemics of the English Renaissance polymath Francis Bacon (1561-1626) ridiculing the practice of formal logic as a form of "scholastic barbarism and superstition".[12] Against the vagaries of what Thomas Reid had scoffed at as mere "ideal theory" – a catch-all term he used for rivals as diverse as Hume and the Scholastics – the "Scotch school" of Reid and Stewart had made the case for a particularly sanguine kind of realist epistemology, proposing after Bacon a new "inductive philosophy" built on the "realist" premise that all true knowing was "inductive" and that invariably presupposed the reality of its objects.

Reid and Stewart did not limit their arguments to epistemology. In different and sometimes contradictory ways the "philosophers of Mind" all proposed that their "inductive" or

[10] See the anecdote collected by Subodh Ray, *Itibritta Āryahada Dakkhiṇeṣvara ebaṃ anyanya* (Kolkata: Offbeat Publications, 2014 [1971]).
[11] See especially Jerome Borges Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[12] Dugald Stewart on Bacon in Dugald Stewart, *Elements of a Philosophy of the Human mind*, (Edinburgh: Constable & Co. 1814).

"modern" philosophy offered the only philosophically plausible account of moral knowing. Each of them also made an anti-Humean case for "the existence of self-evident moral perceptions" either intuited or cognized through a moral sense or "faculty".[13] In later decades, Utilitarians and British idealists alike found the Scotch school and its inductive theory of morals both epistemologically flawed and internally inadequate, and argued that the "Scottish school" could not account for the ways in which better norms may eventually substitute obsolescent mores.[14]

In Kolkata however the "Young Bengal" group turned to the Scottish understanding of moral cognition *precisely* to break with past norms and to ridicule the formalism of Naiyā yikas and Smārtas. Pyārīcañda's brother Kiśoricañda Mitra (1822-1873) saw the works of "Reid, Stewart and Brown" as key texts for a "moral revolution" that could[15] "arraign Hinduism at the bar of reason". Like Rammohun, the rebellious graduates of Hindu College offered a relentless critique of almost all ethical prescriptions then current in Kolkata. Unlike Rammohun, however – in fact in ways opposite to him – they did so with no reference to any recognizable normative grounding other than their own capacity for moral knowing, making no mention whatsoever of the Vedas as a source of normative authorization.

Young Bengal was not simply derivative in demanding a new moral order by virtue of the distinctly Scottish appeal to an immediate and self-evident capacity for moral cognition that all humans possessed. They also effectively transformed the Reidian proposition that "the principals of morals are self-evident and easily available to mature people" into a formidable

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[13] Alasdair MacIntyre. *A Short History of Ethics: a history of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the twentieth century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 177 (referring to Stewart).
[14] See Alfred Jules Ayer's "Introduction" to John Stuart Mill's *The Logic of the Moral Sciences,* (London: Duckworth, 1987 [1843]) for a discussion on Mill's attack on both an inductive theory of morals and Scottish moral intuitionism.
[15] Anon. [Kissory Chand Mitra] "Rammohun Roy" in *Calcutta Review* Vol. 4 (December 1845) 356.

critique of caste society, and made the quest for “moral sense” the philosophical justification for their flagrant transgressions.[16]

I conclude this chapter by positing that the focus on the derivativeness of their propositions and the lack of political import to their actions has obscured the philosophical problem that Young Bengal sought to tackle, masking the far-reaching consequences of their localization of normative authority in the cognitive capacities of man. Quite unlike their European contemporaries, Pyārīcañda Mitra and his associates could not make a case for the autonomy of a self-legislating “moral faculty” without resorting to imitation. For those seeking normative autonomy in colonial Bengal the problem was that, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has pointed out, “in the 1830s and 1840s, to be a ‘modern individual’ was to become a European”.[17] Young Bengal’s case for autonomy drew from conceptual languages pioneered in Europe, and was soon and easily confused with the invitation to live a merely different kind of heteronomous life, in the shadow of an increasingly assumed equation between the unfolding of reason and the history of Europe.

Perhaps inevitably Young Bengal’s quest for a new moral order grounded in the workings of the “moral faculty” came to an impasse. Drawing on a long-standing alliance between Presbyterian theology and “moral and mental philosophy” the missionary Alexander Duff – a student of the influential Scottish moral philosopher Thomas Chalmers – influentially argued in Kolkata that the recognition of a “moral faculty” would coincide not with the mere rejection of the norms of dharmaśāstra and the transgressive antics of Byronian rebellion, but with a fuller embracing of moral philosophy’s Christian premises. Duff argued Christianity completed and extended the workings of a natural “moral sense” and encouraged young Bengalis

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[16] Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy,* 399.
[17] Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artefice of History” in Chakarabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 33.

to break positively, rather than negatively, with the moral order their families had upheld. Heeding his call many of Kolkata's philosophical radicals gradually turned to Christianity, attaching their quest for "moral reason" to the lure of Europe and its cultural forms and embracing Christianity as the logical fulfilment of the promises of "inductive philosophy". In this somber context, the writer Akshay Kumar Datta attempted to give a new plausible account of the "moral faculty" and sought to extricate the quest for moral sense from the imitation of Europe and the inextricably colonial paradox of a heteronomous autonomy. Datta and a group of associates gathered around a new journal – *Tattwabodhini Patrika* –to untether "moral sense" from its European point of origin.

In working to extricate Scottish moral intuitionism from its agonistic embroilment with śāstra, Datta and the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* hoped to decouple the search for autonomy from the obsessive pursuit of imitative transgression. While his efforts won him early acclaim, it was soon evident to the more perceptive Vedantists cheering him on that his refusal to entertain any other authorizing principle other than the "moral faculty" challenged their Vedantic foundationalism too. His reprisal of the vocabulary of Sanskrit philosophical investigation granted the "moral faculty" a new purchase and plausibility and a truly vernacular life, but did not re-establish the Veda as a source of normative authorization, opening a new chapter in Bengali moral philosophy.

2.2 Philosophical Beef

In a March 1830 article in his *Samachar Chandrika*, Bhabānīcaraṇa Bandyopādhyāẏa severely berated the students of the recently established Hindu College for "having visited a Muslim baker (*ruṭioẏālār dokān*) and for having purchased and even eaten biscuit (*biskuṭ*) on the

premises of the bakery".[18] A controversy on the purportedly polluting consequences of the students' "grievous transgression" (*gurutar aparādh*) immediately followed. The biscuit controversy repeated many points from the earlier debate that had pitted the heterodox Vedantist Rammohun Roy against Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandyopādhyāẏa and his prescriptivist allies, now gathered in a new and notoriously conservative association – the Dharma Sabha. Bandyopādhyāẏa's condemnation of biscuit eating drew on the widespread anxieties surrounding pollution that he had helped foster for a decade, and directed at the youthful troop of college-going, English-educated youths from Kolkata's *abhijāt* families, the harsh strictures he had previously reserved for the "heretic" Rammohun. Predictably, Bandyopādhyāẏa's intervention won the students the open friendship of Rammohun Roy, and against the *Samāchār Cāndrika*'s reproach Roy's periodical – *Saṃbad Kaumudī* – ("Moonlight of News") offered a defense of biscuit eating, arguing that their consumption did not violate dietary norms and could not be held to be a sin. But Rammohun's support did not earn the wayward students reprieve from their outraged families. A decade later one former student recalled that "after the Bengali press inappropriately revealed that the students had eaten biscuits (…) many were locked up by their parents and guardians, and some even thought of taking poison (…) the cry was that "the root of Hinduism was struck".[19]

The polemic on the liceity of eating Muslim-baked biscuits would be the beginning of a much wider generational revolt in the colonial metropolis. As Rammohun sailed to Europe – amidst the *Chandrika*'s delighted taunts – to plead the cause of the king of Delhi's ever-

[18] The *Samachar Chandrika* editorial was summarized in *Samachar Darpan,* 13 March 1830, and is reprinted in Brajendranath Bandyopādhyāẏa, *Saṃbād Patre Sekāler Kathā,* (Kolkata: Baṇgīẏa Sāhitya Parishaṭ), 120-121. The March 1830 incident is noted as a turning point in the history of the Bengali press by James Long, *Hand Book of Bengal Missions in Connection with the Church of England and Educational Efforts in North India,* (London: Farquhar Shaw, 1847), 347.
[19] Bengal Spectator, 1 September 1842 reprinted in *Saṃbād Patre Sekāler Kathā* vol. 2, 30-31.

diminishing allowance, some of the students of Hindu College decided to undertake even more egregious dietary transgressions, and rather than nibble on biscuits, they commenced chewing on beefsteaks instead.

If the students' visits to a Muslim rotiwallah was meant to be surreptitious, the turn to beef constituted a blatantly open transgression. Remembering his days at the Hindu College, Pyārīcañda Mitra stated that one of his closest friends, the Brahmin Radhanath Śikdar, decided to make eating beef a "hobby" and would openly declaim the virtues of the forbidden meat.[20] Well-known anecdotes of the period collected decades later by the historian Sibnath Śastri clearly present the outrageous gastronomic pursuits of the young students as an ostentatious, aggressive break with all extant conventions and norms. On an unspecified date, students supposedly chased a paṇḍit shouting they would eat beef.[21] More infamously, on the 23rd of August 1831 – as the rift between students and guardians became increasingly unsustainable in the wake of the dismissal of Young Bengal's favorite teacher, Henry Louis Vivien Derozio – a group of partying youths allegedly threw the discarded bones from their beef-eating dinner into the courtyard of pious Brahmnin neighbors. The sacrilegious act resulted in the expulsion of one celebrated student – the iconoclastic, beef-eating Brahmin Krişṇamohana Bandyopādhyāẏa – from his family home and in a general, led to a rift between rebellious students and outraged families.[22]

Less than a year later, an unnamed editor of the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* – a periodical where Derozio himself had once worked as an editor – drew a connection between transgressive beef-eating that was scandalizing Kolkata and the quest for new and better norms. He illustrated this by reprinting a fictional tale on the ancient Roman "discovery" of beef-steaks, first printed in

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[20] Pyārīcā̃da Mitra [Peary Chand Mitter] *A Biographical sketch of David Hare,* (Kolkata: Newman & Co. 1877), 36.
[21] Śibnāth Śāstri, *Rāmtanu Lāhiḍī o Taṭkālīn Bangasamāj,* (Kolkata: S.K. Lahiri, 1909), 108.
[22]Śāstri, *Rāmtanu Lāhiḍī*, 112.

the eclectic London-based literary review, *The Monthly Magazine*.[23] In this apocryphal tale, a Roman priest was said to have tasted a forbidden slice of veal, roasted on the sacrificial fire and reserved as an offering for the gods. By virtue of his unwitting mistake, the priest had "made the grand discovery that the taste of a slice so carbonated was infinitely beyond all the old, sodden cookery of Rome", and was soon driven by the delicious taste of the forbidden food to offend again and again, his secret feasts only coming to an end when the outraged populace discovered his sacrilegious pursuits.[24] And yet, in a remarkable change of fortune, the magnanimous emperor Trajan decided to try the forbidden cut of meat, and, won over by its flavor, assured to the shocked populace that while eating beef might have been "against the laws of the empire", to forbid men from tasting so delicious a meal would certainly be "against the laws of nature".[25]

Given the ongoing upheaval at the Hindu College, the *Calcutta Literary Gazette*'s 1832 suggestions that the taboo on beef-eating was "against the laws of nature" was not without significance. If the taboo on beef-eating was a serious crime in Trajan's fictional ancient Rome, it was an even more injurious offense in Bhabānīcaraṅa Bandyopādhyāẏa's Kolkata. As Rosinka Chaudhuri and Kalyan Das have noted, the student's public acts of beef-eating were acts of "a striking seriousness" and constituted a "hitherto unthinkable attack" on the extant moral order.[26] The biscuit imbroglio between the students and the *Chandrika* had foreshadowed both how important dietary norms were to those concerned with upholding the injunctions of dharmaśāstra

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[23] *Calcutta Literary Gazette,* April 29 1832 [author unknown] article titled "Beefsteaks". The anecdote first appeared in *The Monthly Magazine,* Vol. 12 No. 70 (October 1831), 405- 406 with no title. It is the third anecdote in the rubric titled "Paragraphs from a Portfolio". At the time the liberal Laman Blanchard was editor of *The Monthly Review*, and may be the author of the fantastical story.
[24] *Calcutta Literary Gazette*, April 29 1832.
[25] Invoking a felicitous congruence between "the laws of nature" the progress of society and the practice of beef-eating marked other key British discussions on the environment in late eighteenth century Britain. See Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, *Enlightenment's Frontier: the Scottish Highlands and the origins of Environmentalism,* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 133-134.
[26] Chaudhuri, *Freedom and Beef-steaks*, 55. Kalyan Das "To eat or not to eat beef: spectres of food on Bengal's politics of identity," *Economic and Political Weekly* 50, No. 44 (October 31 2015): 105-114.

and how threatening the possibilities of metropolitan life could be to the maintenance of such norms. Now the students' pursuit of steak would prove just how willing a new generation was to actually disavow the norms their parents strenuously sought to live by.

As Patrick Olivelle has noted, in classical dharmaśāstra the proper ordering of castes and the maintenance of ritual "purity" hinged just as much on the regulation of foods that were intrinsically prohibited (*abhakṣya*), and the parallel disciplining of food exchanges between individuals, genders and castes (through the regulation of *abhojya* food transactions), as it did on the regulation of social intercourse and physical touch.[27] Years later, Pyārīcañda Mitra, a protagonist of this season of youthful revolt, satirized the concerns of fastidious smārtas and the complex dietary norms of upper-caste Hindus. In *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl*, he staged a learned controversy (*śāstrīẏa tarka*) between two paṇḍits on whether it was obligatory to eat bottle-gourds today or abstain from eggplant tomorrow.[28] The imagined vehement disagreement between the scholars centred on whether the grievous sin of consuming milk and salt together could be equivalent to the irredeemable crime of eating beef.

In the 1820s and 30s, however, norms on permitted and proscribed foods were no laughing matter. Historians of śāstric injunctions have noted that in early modern Bengal, "cooked food was the daily source of a person's or a lineage's bodily substance, and of the rank embodied therein" and eating food – enjoined or forbidden – "was an action by which the rank of a being … stood transformed" for good or evil.[29] The purpose of the students' beef eating antics – which has attracted little attention from modern historians – would have been inescapable to

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[27] Patrick Olivelle, "Abhakṣya and Abhojya: Dietary Rules and Social Organization in Ancient India" in *Languages, Texts and Society – explorations in ancient Indian culture and religion,* (London: Anthem Press), 2011.
[28] Mitra, *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl,* 73. [In Chapter 5]
[29] Ronald Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture: a history of caste and clan in Middle Period Bengal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 143.

their British and Bengali contemporaries. If anything, procuring and consuming beef was the most scandalous gastronomic transgression an upper caste Hindu could undertake: Radhakanta Deb (1784-1867) – a close associate of Bhabānīcaraṇa, the driving force behind the *Dharma Sabha* and an influential member of the Hindu College's managing committee – lexicalized "the cut meat of cow" in his contemporary Sanskrit dictionary by cataloguing the harsh penances necessary to atone for the sin of eating it. Deb concluded his dictionary entry by supplying four infamous lines from a medieval Puranic text, the *Haṭhayogapradīkā*: a sinner eating beef murdered the karma of his lineage, for "the eating of beef meat is a great sin and the destruction [of karma]".[30] Unsurprisingly, it was Radhakanta Deb who raised the matter of the students' consumption of prohibited substances with the College's British authorities, precipitating the scandal further and inaugurating a wave of resignations, expulsions and withdrawals that would shake Kolkata society deeply.

Radhakanta Deb's invocation of the prohibition on beef-eating only testifies to the momentousness of the 1831 student revolt against the order of dharma. The taboo on beef consumption and the wider order of prohibitions it underpinned had come to constitute, by the eighteenth century, a foundational social norm, distinguishing the upright from the wrongful, and caste Hindus from their others.[31] Some early modern texts equated the tasting of cow's meat to patricide and matricide combined. Bandyopādhyāẏa's *Chandrika* Press reprinted, in 1827, the early modern hagiographic classic *Caitanyacaritamr̥ta,* reminding Kolkata's inhabitants that:

> *prabhu Kahe: "Dogugdha khāo gābhī tomār mātā;*
> The Lord Caitanya said: "you drink its milk, the cow is your mother
> *brisha ānna upajāẏ, tate teñha pitā.*
> And the ox gives birth to your crops – as if he were your father
> *pitā mātā māri khāo e ba kona dharmma?*

[30] S.v. "gomaṃsa" in Radhakanta Deb, *Śabdakalpadrumaḥ*, (Kolkata: Nutanbangalayantra, 1874-75)
[31] Kriṣnadāsa Kabirāja, *Caitanyacaritārita* (Kolkata: Debiprasanna Raẏacaudhuri, 1896). "Prabhu Kahe "Bede Kahe Gobadh nishedh/ Ataeb Hindu mātre nā kare gobadh", Adi Parba, XVII, 382.

To kill and eat your parents, what kind of dharma is it
kon bale kara tumi emata bikarmma?"
Would you do this kind of upside-down act?"[32]

And, so, predictably Middle Bengali literature suffered no shortage of memorable beef-eating villains (*gomāngsa-khāḍak* or *go-khāḍak*) devoted to the destruction of the proper order of things and the harassment of Brahmins.[33] And beef-eating villains were not just literary tropes, for the nefariousness of the crime made even its mere allegation eminently usable as a polemical slur. In the 1820s, as dissenting Vedantists first gathered around Rammohun Roy, a slighted patron – the Kayastha magnate Jaykrishna Sinha – had smeared the emergent religious congregation by describing it as a secret conventicle devoted to the slaughter and consumption of beef.[34] The accusation was picked up by Kasinath Tarkapancanana, who dug out obscure passages in the *Mahanirvanatantra* – a text Rammohun was thought to use – to luridly ask if it was not licit, "in their made up agama (…) to always eat beef, to unendingly drink liquor, and, seizing an ascetic woman who is a widow, to rape her", forcing Rammohun to respond at length and vehemently disavow the vile charges brought against him.

Now however young students were openly consuming beef, playing "gomāngsa-khāḍak". This was an act of generational rebellion and normative transgression that symbolically enacted the murder of one's parents and ancestors alike, degraded one's standing in a complex hierarchy of ritual standing and, if left unexpiated, threatened to consign the youthful perpetrator outside of

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[32] Krişnadāsa Kabirāja, *Caitanyacaritārita,* 382.
[33] A particular nasty case is the "Sudra Urbishu":*Tretāẏuge Urbbishu nām sūdra ekjan /*There was a Sudra named Urbishu in the Tretā age*/ Nitya-pāparata dharma-nindāparāẏaṇ/* He sinned every day, against dharma he'd rage/ *Brahmasva-hārī bipranārīgaṇete rat/* He'd steal from the Brahmins and their women he'd take*/ Kuṭila asatyabhashī pāshaṇda-saṃgat/* he knew only untruth and deceit, he was a rake*/ Brāhhmaṇer Britticchedī śānta-hantārak/* The peace of the Brahmins he stole like a thief*/ Beśyāgāmī surāpān gomāngsa-khādak*/ Going to prostitutes, drinking and – of course – eating beef. See Yadunandan Dāsa, "Urbbishur Upākhyān" in *Gobindā-Līlāmṛit* in Dineschandra Sen, *Baṅga-Sāhitya Paricaẏ,* (Kolkata: University of Calcutta, 1913), 1302-1305.
[34] Nagendranath Chaṭṭopadhyāya, *Māhatmā Rāja Rāmmohan Roy* (Kolkata: De'y Publishing, 1928), 299. Jayakrishna Sinha was the father of Nandalāl Sinha and grandfather of Kalīprasanna Sinha.

the boundaries of caste society altogether. The gravity of the events was unmistakable, and the *Samachar Chandrika* noted in panic that the practice was widespread, for “now in this city in every single Hindu home there is someone who has become a denier of the Vedas (*nāstik*) by way of conduct and of practice (*carccāpekkha*)”.

Inaugurating an enduring trope of dismissing Young Bengal’s acts, Bandyopādhyāẏa described the student’s willful transgressions as both grotesquely imitative and doomed to fail: in so far as the rebellious students ate food substances proper (*khādya*) to the English, but improper (*akhādya*) to them, they hoped to achieve an impossible wholesale transformation of their own bodily selves from Bengali to British and from “black” to “white”. The joke’s bitter punchline was that no such transformation was ever possible, or desirable. Unable to become white, the student’s face would at most carry the perturbing marks of vitiligo, or the scars of a disfiguring encounter with fire: they would be pock-marked, neither dark nor white.

> I have heard a certain gentleman say – “the thing is this – if they share in the food of the *sahebs* they will become part of the same *varṇa* [a caste, or a color]. In the first sense of the word *varṇa* which is caste (*jāti*) this means that by eating the food that is proper to the English (*iṃrejider khādya khaile*) they will come to be accepted in that caste (*tajjāti prāpta haibek*) and in the second one which is whiteness they will become white in color (*śbete barṇa haibek*) and though – admittedly – it is an unlikely possibility that the whole body may come to be white, their desire will be fulfilled even if only their faces become white, so that by wearing [European] clothes all others will see only their white face and their black body will be hidden.”
>
> And another person answered: “dear sir, think what will it be if the entirety of their faces does not become white but only certain parts of them or a few spots. I tell you this – people will call them burned faced (*mukhapoḍā kahibek*), and none will be able to bear the sight of these men and their burnt looking faces”[35]

[35] The joke is recalled and modified by Bankimchandra Chaṭṭopadhyay. “Confessions of a Young Bengal” in Bankimchandra Chaṭṭopadhyay, *Bankim Rachanavali,* (Kolkata: Sahitya Samsad, 1968), 141: “The transmigration from “black” to “white” defies the existing resources of chemistry and cosmetics”.

The theory of the positively transformative power of licit food-substances and negatively transformative power of illicit food-substances which drove Bandyopādhyāẏa's jibe was lost in later discussions of the beef-eating incident. But Bandyopādhyāẏa's broader point that the transgressions of the Hindu College youths were animated by the desire to imitate the English remained influential. Recalling his student days at Hindu College in the 1840s the one-time philosophical radical turned Hindu apologist Rajnarayan Basu noted that eating beef "passed for enlightenment" amongst the students at the College. Basu saw in the brazen violation of dietary norms and the uptake of beef-eating the sign of a new kind of anglophile mania, and sketched a bitingly polemical portrait of a beef-eating "young Bengali" whose commitment to emulation culminated in abject self-debasement.

> The "notorious cow-eater" went into a European hotel and wanted "veal". "Nahi hain Khudawand" was the reply of the Khansama. Grown desperate the cow-eating "black sahib" came gradually to beef-steak, oxtongue, calf-foot jelly or anything of the cow, and each time the khansama had the polite excuse "nahi hain Khudawand". Another Babu, seated at a different table, told the waiter that if there was no meat to be had, he should at least be served a little cow-dung.[36]

Basu's sketch of an imitative and culturally deracinated Young Bengal shaped the dismissive attitude of later historians, ensuring something of a belated victory for Bandyopādhyāẏa's jibes. Yet, as Andrew Sartori has pointed out, when Basu and others – including more 'liberal', later figures such as Kaliprasanna Sinha (1840-1870) and Dinabandhu Mitra (1830-1873) – relegated Young Bengal to comical infamy, they shifted the object of critique away from "the new civilization" to "Young Bengal's instantiation of the new civilization" ridiculing not the quest for freedom itself, but merely the "petty Anglicism they mistook for emancipation".[37] By the 1860s and 70s – long after the Dharma Sabha had ceased

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[36] Rajnarayan Basu, *Sekāla ar Ekāla*, (Kolkata: Baṅgiẏa Sahitya Parishaṭ), 1951, 44

[37] Sartori *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 102-103.

to matter, and the *Chandrika* to exist – beef-eating was of course merely a problem of cultural codes, and thus a problem of "Anglicism".

But for those instantiating such a transgressive act in the 1830s, the philosophical momentousness of the event in itself was inescapable. Radhanatha Śikdār, who "made beef his hobby" left a laconic entry in his diary, noting tersely that his "not living as a Hindu" had ensured that his father – "a man of very good intentions" – died "an unhappy man".[38] Few reflected on the gastronomic transgressions with as much lucidity as the expelled Krişṇamohana Bandyopādhyāẏa, one of the College's foremost rebels and the heir to a distinguished Brahmin family employed as court-pandits by the Siṃhās of Joḍāsaṅko.[39] With unsparing autobiographical reflexivity, Krişñamohana Bandyopādhyāẏa explored the meaning of the transgressive beef-eating in a tragi-comical English language play, *The Persecuted*, which redoubled as a critical attack on "bramincraft".[40] In it Bandyopādhyāẏa staged a furtive aside between two Naiyāyika characters – "Turkolunkar" and "Bydhobagis" – to demonstrate the alleged absurdity of Hinduism's normative horizon and the purportedly conspiratorial and self-interested character of the logicians who upheld it. While the exact European source that could have inspired the dialogue of "Turkolunkar" and "Bydhobagis" remains unknown, there is a distinctly Voltairean strain in his depiction of Hinduism as a conspiracy of scheming knaves and duped fools – a trope common to most Enlightenment denunciations of "priestcraft".[41]

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[38] "Radhanatha Śikdār" in *Āryyadarśanā* vol. 10 (Kolkata: J.C. Basu, 1884 (B.S. 1291)), 290.
[39] "Deoẏan Śāntirāma Siṃher Baṃśa" in Harisādhana Mukhopadhyaya, *Kalikātā Sekāler o Ekāler,* (Kolkata: Bagchi, 1985), 1009-1010.
[40] Krishnamohan Banerjea [Krişñamohana Bandyopādhyāẏa] *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society*, (Kolkata: publisher not given, 1831).
[41] François-Marie Arouet Voltaire, *The Important Examination of the Holy Scriptures, attributed to Lord Bolingbroke but written by Voltaire and first published in 1736 now translated from the French*, (London: R. Carlile, 1819), 26: "The first knave that met with a simpleton".

The Persecuted did not, however, just repurpose European tropes. It was also written as a deeply personal act of retaliatory *vatertötung*. Bandyopādhyāẏa's grandfather, Rāmjaẏa Vidyābhūṣaṇa, was one of Kolkata's foremost Naiyāyikas, and had turned Bandyopādhyāẏa out of the family home on hearing of the beef-steak party that had been hosted there, and in the aftermath of discarded cow-bones were tossed into the neighbor's plot. Bandyopādhyāẏa's portrayal of the scheming pandits was then at once a rewriting of commonplace, enlightenment tropes and the personal memoir of an expelled transgressor in rebellion against his own family:

> <u>Turkolunkar:</u> To be a Brahmin is a great blessing. Is it not Bydhobagis?
>
> <u>Bydhobagis:</u> Is it not? Ha Ha! – who the devil will fatten so well upon the bounties of others. By once going at uttering "Babo Assyrbad" [Blessings on you, sir] we return home with pockets full. The fellows that feed [us] are Jackasses in the strictest sense of the word. They understand none of the tricks we play upon them. Fools, they adore us, they bow to us, they drink the water dropped after washing our feet (…) what asses are they!
>
> <u>Turkulonkar:</u> Greater brutes never lived in the world. They call us Gods, as if we had more hands and noses than other people. O how I wish that these asses continued involved in all these prejudices!
>
> <u>Bidyhobagis:</u> All the better for us. We care little whether they are superstitious or not, so long as our pockets are filled.

Crucially, *The Persecuted* reimagined Kriṣñamohana's own story of beef-eating as key to breaking the spell of "Bramincraft". Bany Lal, a young Hindu student standing in for Kriṣñamohana himself (but with a change of caste, as a Kayastha) decided to consume beef in his own home. When his transgression was discovered, Bany Lal offered audiences a meditation on beef-eating that transformed the act of gastronomic transgression into a philosophical kind of parricide, explaining that beef eating finally broke down, for the sake of truth, "the chains of filial duty".

> a father may weep, a mother may shed tears (…) but let them not triumph over truth. A father's feelings are not more to be consulted than (…) Truth. Bear witness

my mind, I neglect a Father for her. I break down the chains of filial duty for Truth.[42]

2.3 Enlightened Obscenity and the Hypocrisy of Moralists

Bandyopādhyāẏa's description of the "breaking down of the chains of filial duty" captures the monumental quality of Young Bengal's beef-eating transgressions, buried under the sneering jibes of a later generation for whom the import of the śāstric prohibition on beef had already lost the terror and force of law. In summoning "truth" as the justification for the sin of beef-eating, Bandyopādhyāẏa was of course deliberately underscoring the ethical concerns that prompted the students' deliberate violation of dietary norms and paternal injunctions. Historian Sumit Sarkar observed that Young Bengal was "distinctive" for "the open rejection of rituals and defiance of caste and religious taboos in the name of a new conception of integrity".[43] Here I seek to extend Sarkar's argument by showcasing just how Young Bengal came to believe that a transgressive break with extant norms would constitute the truest form of "moral" action possible. I investigate their characterization of those who upheld social conventions and smriti norms as immoral and deluded. Predicated on such thinking, compliance with extant norms came to be understood to be unethical, and transgression instead as moral. As Kisorīcā̃d Mitra put it in a later recollection, the very public assault on the "strongholds of superstition" by Young Bengal initiated derived from the fact that the young "felt and asserted in their life that what is morally wrong cannot be theologically right".[44]

Most accounts of *how* Kolkata's young patricians came to reappraise not just the act of beef-eating, but to positively reevaluate the social and psychological fact of transgression *tout*

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[42] Banerjea, *The Persecuted,* 11-12

[43] Sumit Sarkar, "The Complexities of "Young Bengal" in Sumit Sarkar, *Essays of a lifetime* (Ranikhet, Permanent Black, 2018)*,* 31

[44] Kissorychand Mitra. "The Hindoo College and its founder" (1861) in Pearychand Mittra [Pyārīcā̃da Mitra] *A Biographical sketch of David Hare,* (Kolkata: W. Newman & Co. 1877) Appendix B, xxxiii.

court invariably evoke the English literature instructor, English-language poet and sometime deputy editor of the *India Gazette,* Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) as key to the youthful revolt– and with good reason. In contemporary accounts, Derozio is cited by admiring students and concerned guardians alike as the instigator of Young Bengal's iconoclastic revolt. Historians have since sought to reconstitute something akin to a positive program in political philosophy for Derozio, going so far as to swap the nineteenth century, self-descriptive term "Young Bengal" for a twentieth century adjectival neologism worthy of a mid-century Marxist current – "Derozian".[45] In some cases, the quest for a clear-cut Derozian program has produced fantastical misattributions and fictitious reading lists.[46]

The Kolkata-born Derozio was instead widely known amongst his contemporaries for his efforts to creatively "rework" themes and literary propositions most noticeably associated with Britain's Regency-era radical poets, especially Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), George Gordon Byron (1788-1824) and Thomas ("Tom") Moore (1779-1852).[47] In this chapter, I suggest that his original engagement with Britain's rebellious second-generation Romantics was consequential for those Hindu College graduates who would go on to stage their own singular, beef-eating revolt. Perhaps it provided a very loose model: the abovementioned authors had all forcefully broken with the conformist pieties of Regency Britain and the moralizing tropes of the "Lake school" poets, enduring as a result banishment, boycott, censorship, or self-imposed exile. These were all outcomes that loosely paralleled the familial ostracism and caste boycotts that

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[45] Amit Sen [pseudonym of Susobhan Sarkar] *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance* (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1957), 21-27 likely inaugurated the trend. In an unsurprising move, M.N. Roy's *New Humanist* once argued the "Royists" where the "New Derozians".
[46] The following is typical: "Derozio … set the trend of inculcating Rousseau's ideas in his students". Tithi Bhattacharya, *Sentinels of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 15. Derozio never cited Rousseau, nor was Rousseau ever on the curriculum of Hindu College.
[47] Manu Samriti Chander "The first Indian poet in English: Henry Louis Vivien Derozio" in Rosinka Chaudhuri (ed.) *A history of Indian poetry in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 23.

some of Young Bengal's most determined firebrands had to endure. Byron and Moore in particular – the poets to whom Derozio was most frequently compared by reviewers eager to belittle his efforts as "imitation"– were both notoriously characterized as the founders of a distinctly "Satanic" school of poetry defined by "a spirit of pride and audacious impiety", a set of adjectives impatient Christian missionaries would later use to describe Young Bengal.[48]

The label "Satanic" – replete as it was with moral, rather than aesthetic, connotations – was especially significant in establishing the importance of the rebel poets of Regency Britain. It had originated in an angry retort by the Tory poet Robert Southey (1774-1843) and was meant to avenge the preface to the first volume of Byron's sensationally popular longform poem, *Don Juan*, in which Southey had received a great deal of abuse. Southey's embittered retort stuck – and yet the identification between the devil and Byron had only increased Byron's standing as a literary celebrity. In fact, as Clara Tuite has pointed out, the "figure" of Byron productively embraced the "scandalous celebrity" guaranteed by the censure of his many adversaries, and the charges of nefarious crimes and sinfulness that he faced came to be transfigured into a kind of oppositional fame, as if infamy could become the surest proof of one's antagonistic defiance in the face of a hypocritical and corrupt society.[49]

Byron himself seems to have made much of this: in a new periodical launched from Pisa with Percy Bysshe Shelley and inventively titled *The Liberal* – a term Byron consciously borrowed from Spanish anti-absolutist insurgents, and whose political valences would later find their way into the English language and into political conversation in Kolkata – the "aristocratic

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[48] Robert Southey, *A Vision of Judgment* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1821), xxi. For an influential sketch of Young Bengal's "pride and overweening contempt for parents and relatives" see the Presbyterian missionary W.S. Mackay "History of Native Education in Bengal" in *Calcutta Review,* 34 (1852): 353 and J. Bryce, *The Schoolmaster and the Missionary in India,* (Edinburgh: Paton and Ritchie, 1856), 8-9.
[49] Clara Tuite, *Lord Byron and scandalous celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 168-200.

Jacobin" ridiculed the pretensions of his conservative antagonists with unmitigated ferocity. In the 1822 Preface to a new set of Cantos for *Don Juan* Byron even went so far as to cite Voltaire's saying that the more truly degraded the moral character of an age, the more shrill and fastidiously hypocritical would its public moralizers be in their jeremiads. Drawing parallels between himself, Christ and Socrates, Byron suggested that true moral transformation was always invariably born under the charge of blasphemy.

> The hackneyed and lavished title of Blasphemer – which with Radical, Liberal, Jacobin, Reformer etc, are the charges which the hirelings are daily ringing in the ears of those who will listen – should be welcome to all who recollect on whom it was originally bestowed. Socrates and Jesus Christ were put to death publically as blasphemers, and so have many others who dare to oppose the most notorious abuses of the name of God and the mind of man.[50]

What is key for Young Bengal in all this is that Byron's shocking, transgressive effrontery was, in the late 1820s, no longer a merely European affaire. A newspaperman joked that "in Calcutta, even the bearers now read Byron", while local English poets in Kolkata cheekily wondered if they, in far-off Bengal, could "out-Juan Juan" – Byron's masterpiece – by writing poems with "neither plot, beginning or finale".[51] One Kolkata paper in particular – the *India Gazette* – adopted a self-consciously Byronic note in literary politics, reprinting long extracts of *Don Juan* and celebrating the aristocratic rebel through editorial endorsements. The *Bengal Hurkaru* was quick to satirize its "ultra-liberal" rival, calling it "the Calcutta Liberal" in imitation of Byron's short-lived émigré periodical.[52] The writers at the *Hurkaru* even issued a

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[50] George Gordon Lord Byron, *Don Juan: Cantos VI, VII, VIII*, (London: John Hunt, 1823), iv.

[51] Humorous mention of Byron being quoted by palanquin-bearers: "Letter to the Editors", *India Gazette*, June 15 1835, for the ambition to "out-Juan Juan" see Augustus Sesostoris Weymess [pen-name] "A curious poem" in *The India Gazette*, November 17 1823. For an introduction to Byron's influence, see Priyaranjan Sen, *Western Influence in Bengali Literature,* (Kolkata: University of Calcutta, 1932), 140-143 and Máire Ní Fhlathúin, "Transformations of Byron in the Literature of British India" in *Victorian Literature and Culture* 42, No.3 (2014): 573-593.

[52] Byron's founding of *The Liberal* helped secure some of the term's semantic implications in the early nineteenth century, as contemporaries noted. See Jonathan David Gross, *Byron: the erotic liberal,* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield), 153 "*The Liberal* represents one of the first uses of the word in English as a noun."

thinly veiled depiction of the most "Byronian" of the *Gazette's* contributors – likely Derozio – mocking him for being such a "devoted admirer of Lord Byron (…) and indebted to *Don Juan* for the tone of his politics, his religion, and his wit". Mocked for his stated desire to introduce "the Don to the good people of Calcutta" through an allegedly farcical plan to "land him" in the city in a new, "thousand" stanza long poem, Derozio was not discouraged.[53] His four-part *Don Juanics*, published in the *India Gazette* in 1825, ensured that the beef-eating libertine alighted for a quick visit in the city of palaces.[54]

Byron's revaluation of transgression was widely embraced amongst the students and graduates of Hindu College, even after Derozio's teaching career came to an end following his expulsion in 1831 and his untimely death later that year. An unknown graduate of the College wrote to *The Englishman* in 1838 that a new instructor, Tytler "hated" Byron, "not only as one of the new school", but as one whose poetry was "tinged with immorality". As the students of the College frequently had copies of Byron's works at hand, the outraged Tytler would seize the texts shouting "woe onto him who calls good evil and evil good!".[55] Students would even recite Byron's verses from memory in order to drive Tytler to despair. "We are the admirers of Byron", another young College graduate wrote to a missionary publication in 1841, disagreeing with the widely held belief that the works of the exiled poet contributed to immorality, asserting instead that the poet was a model for all to follow, "uncramped by petty rules … subject to no shackles … directed only by the impulses of his genius".[56]

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[53] Don Juan longs "for food, but chiefly beefsteak". For the Don's preference for beef above all other dishes, see Byron, *Don Juan*, (London: Thomas Davison, 1819) vol.1 Cantos 1-V, Canto II verses CLIII-CLV, 195-197.
[54] Henry Louis Vivien Derozio "Don Juanics" in Chaudhuri (ed.) *Derozio*, 33-49.
[55] See "The Hindu College" excerpted in *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Miscellany*, Vol. 27, September 1838, 10.
[56] Tydus "On the Poetry of Lord Byron" *The Telescope,* Year 2 Issue 2 (2 August 1841).

Byron and Young Bengal gradually became more intertwined in the recollections of their later critics. In Bankimchandra's *Confessions of a Young Bengal*, a set of Byron's *Poetical Works* represented, alongside imported furniture and a music box, the surest marker of a Young Bengal's home. To Max Muller – a man who never visited Kolkata – Young Bengal comprised "young Hindus who read Byron and Voltaire (…) laugh at their priests (…) and believe nothing".[57] There existed as well less scathing assessments of the Bengali entanglement with Byronic subversion: Byron, as literary critic Haraprasad Śāstri (1853-1931) recalled, had been embraced by the youth of Bengal like no other English poet, for he first had taught "the pleasure of violating social norms (sāmājik niẏam-laṅghaner sukha)" when these are confining and hypocritical, a lesson that had made him an unprecedented kind of "moral teacher" for Bengali youths.[58]

Byron was only the most distinguished of a set of rebellious Regency authors who were read in Kolkata in the 1820s and 30s. Tom Moore's influential 1817 orientalist fantasy *Lalla Rookh* supplied another key text.[59] Moore's now forgotten romance had used the setting of Aurangzeb's India to castigate the pious hypocrisies of religious men and the interested bigotry of kings through the voice of a fictional free-thinking poet named Feramorz. Feramorz – his unsubtle politics more émigré Irish radical than Mughal-era court poet – did not shy away from

[57] Bankimchandra Chaṭṭopadhyaya, "Confessions of a Young Bengal" in *Bankim Rachanavali* (Kolkata: Bangiẏa Sāhitya Parishat, 1969) Vol.3, 137 and Müller, M. *Lectures on the Science of Language: delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in 1861 and 1863*, (London: Longmans, 1866), 110.

[58] Haraprasad Śāstri "Baṇgīẏa Yubaka o Tīn Kabi (The Youth of Bengal and Three Poets)", B.S. 1285 [1879-1880], essay reprinted in Nripendranātha Bhaṭṭācārya, *Bāṃlā Tulanāmūlak Sāhitya Samālocanā,* (Kolkata: Chandam Printing and Publishing Company, 1993) 189.

[59] Students at Hindu College turned lines by Moore into Bengali poetry as early as 1829. See Ghose, H. "Anacreon: Ode XXXV" in Richardson, D.L. *The Bengal Annual,* (Calcutta: Samuel Smith, 1830). Micheal Madhusudhan Dutt's first surviving essay is an assessment of the works of Tom Moore. See Micheal Madhusudhan Dutt's "On Poetry" (1840) in Micheal Madhusudhan Dutt, *Madhusudana Racanbali* (Kolkata: Haraph Prakaśanī, 1934), 263-265.

issuing sweeping condemnations of the extant order of things, singling out those who prized inherited knowledge over enlightened reason:

> Ye wise, ye learn'd, who grope your dull way on
> By the dim twinkling gleams of ages gone
> Like superstitious thieves who think the light
> From dead men's marrow guides them best at night[60]

Perhaps even more than Byron's lines, Moore's invitation to readers to realize that: "Ne'er did Faith with her smooth bandage bind / Eyes more devoutly willing to be blind" no doubt redoubled as a radical invitation to those questioning the value of norms they felt they could no longer believe in.[61]

Finally, Derozio himself reworked a great many of the radical themes of Moore and Byron in original creations, offering another set of defiant texts. Literary historians have pointed out that Derozio's writings swapped a metaphorical India replete with Orientalist tropes which Moore had used for the setting of *actual* 1820s India, in the throes of a wholly different, but no less profound, normative crisis. Derozio's 1829 *The Fakir of Jungheera* in particular discarded the tired Orientalist plot-line of the virtuous widow offering herself to the flames of her husband's funeral pyre in favor of a tale of doomed lovers eloping against the scruples of priests, rulers and relatives, warning readers that:

> Alas! In fairest seeming souls / The tide of guilt all blackly rolls;
> And then they steal religion's ray /Upon its surface but to play
> As o'er the darkest sea a gleam / Of brightest sunshine oft may beam
> Gilding the wave while dark beneath / Are lurking danger, woe and death. [62]

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[60] See "The Prophet of Khorassan" in Thomas Moore, *Lalla Rookh: an Oriental Romance*, (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1817), 35.
[61] From "The Prophet of Khorassan" in Moore, *Lalla Rookh*, 35.
[62] Derozio, "The Fakeer of Jungheera" in Chaudhuri (ed.) *Derozio, poet of India*, 176.

Inspired as they may have been by the Romantic critique of what Young Bengal later termed the dangerous "thralldom of priestcraft" the graduates of Hindu College soon took to enthusiastically writing and publishing their own critiques of pharisaic hypocrisy and priestly "cant". Throughout the 1830s a number of periodicals and magazines were brought out in Kolkata by radical students and graduates of the Hindu College, their contributors denouncing the moral order of caste and its many purported absurdities and iniquities. Few of these publications equaled in enduring fame and notoriety as the *Jñānānbeṣaṇa* ("The Search for Truth") a bilingual publication whose stated mission – expressed in a bilingual couplet of Sanskrit and Bengali poetry – was the exposure of "insincerity and deceit" wherever they be found.

The first issue of the *Jñānānveshaṇa* – edited by Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee (1814-1878) – appeared in the summer of 1831, just as the most iconoclastic amongst the College's graduates finally and decisively broke with the moral order of caste and with their outraged families by publicly eating beef.[63] Rumored to have courted Derozio's sister in defiance of the hardening racial attitudes of the 1820s, the Brahmin Mukherjee emulated Derozio's fictional Fakir of Jungheera to marry – in defiance of all norms – the Khattri princess Basanta Kumari, widowed eighth wife of the late Maharaja of Burdwan.[64]

Aided by the pen of fellow Hindu College graduate Rasick Krishna Mallick (1810-1858) a man notorious for publicly disavowing the sacredness of the Ganges before stunned relatives and associates, and that of a renegade Nyayayika, Gaurīśankar Tarkabagīśa (1799-1859), Mukherjee's *Jñānānveshaṇa* soon scandalized the city's pious in ways that were out of

[63] The history of *Jñānānveshaṇa* is best detailed in Suresh Chandra Moitra, *Selections from Jnanannesan* (Kolkata: Prajñā: 1979).
[64] See the portrait of Mukherjee extracted from *The Philantropist,* reprinted in *Samacar Candrika,* 20 October 1832 in Bandhyopadhyaya, *Sangbad Sekaler Katha* vol. 2, 308

proportion with its small circulation.[65] The *Timirnāśaka* ("Dispeller of Darkness") a rival and more established periodical, left a memorably scandalized testimony of *Jñānānveshaṇa*'s eruption into Kolkata's increasingly crowded press scene. *Jñānānveshaṇa* was a "Hindu-hating paper" (Hindubidbeśi kāgaj) where Dakshinaranjan, aided by a "Brahmin from Naṭor who is a real boozer" (madhyapāẏike paṇḍit) "slanders the editor of the *Candrika* and writes whatever ill-thing it pleases on the śāstra". [66]

A decade previously Rammohun and the "editor of the Chandrika" had also infamously debated the valences of smriti in a spirited, scurrilous pamphleteering war – but always invoking the normative authority of the Vedas against one another. For the young writers behind *Jñānānveshaṇa* however there was no recourse to any such normative ground. Devoid of the Vedantic commitments and Unitarian inclinations that had made Rammohun so detestable to Presbyterian and Baptist missionaries, the Hindu College radicals found themselves entangled in a tacit alliance of opportunity with the missionary critics of Hinduism. Crucially, the paper of the Baptists – *Samachar Darpan* – would often reprint and endorse their articles.

Why the Baptist-edited *Samachar Darpan* took special delight in reprinting and endorsing Jñānānveshaṇa's articles is obvious: the sweeping critiques and lurid depictions of the world of "bramincraft" offered by Young Bengal's mouthpiece were fiercely uncompromising. In one early article *Jñānānveshaṇa* accused Kolkata's wealthy caste-leaders of commissioning elaborate and ostentatious sacrifices solely to mask an obsessive pursuit of adulterous sex.[67] Following the charge with a complex description of how the rituals offered in Kolkata were often

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[65] Bandhyopadhyaya, "Gaurīśankar Tarkabagīśa" in Bandhyopadhyaya, *Sahitya-sādhaka caritamālā,* Vol. 1 Issue 8, 1956. Circulation seems to have never exceeded 210 copies.
[66] *Timirnāśaka* extracted in *Samacar Candrika,* 21 January 1832 in Bandhyopadhyaya, *Sangbad Sekaler Katha* Vol.2 132
[67] "Bhaṇḍa Samājpāti" [The Hypocritical Notable] extracted in *Samacar Candrika* 14 April 1832 and reprinted in Moitra, *Selections from Jnanannesan*, 1.

but an elaborate ploy for illicit sex, the writers at *Jñānānveshaṇa* also commented that Kolkatans would accrue no merit from so insincere and base a practice.[68] In a similar vein, another article provided "proof" (*pramāṇa*) of Brahmnical degradation, detailing how men from ritually distinguished Brahmin lineages (Kulīn) purchased their wives (then a licit practice termed *kanyā-bikraẏ*) without regard for norms of caste purity. *Jñānānveshaṇa* noted that some Kulīn men had gone to extraordinary lengths of deception in order to marry good-looking Muslim girls ("surūpā bālikā"), even fabricating fake Brahmanical genealogies. *Jñānānveshaṇa*, a paper founded by a Brahmin who had married outside of his caste published this story to point out that such practices would inevitably result in "the disappearance of Kulīn lineages in the Brahmin caste of this country".[69]

As is obvious from the above tales, the scandalized charges of hypocrisy and depravity *Jñānānveshaṇa* levied against the custodians of the moral order did in some ways participate in the same values its conservative rivals sought to uphold. In other words, insofar as *Jñānānveshaṇa* upbraided the defenders of the moral order for being corrupt and insincere, its outraged authorial voice always implied a degree of commitment to the said order's foundational values. Protesting the promiscuity of the organizers of the Pujas, issuing dire warnings about the degradation and disappearance of true Kulīn lineages and underscoring the polluting consequence of liaisons with "Brahmin" women who were but disguised Muslim *arrivistes*, where all factors which tapped into the predictable concerns with ritual purity and status of all upper-caste Kolkatans. Finally, in offering to Kolkata's readers stories of religious virtue

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[69] *Jñānānvesha* "Kanyā Bikraẏa o Brāhmaṇa Samāj" (Brahmin society and the purchasing of wives) extracted from *Samacar Candrika* 17 June 1837, reprinted in Moitra, *Selections from Jnanannesan*, 49.

threatened by libidinal transgression, the authors at *Jñānānveshaṇa* undoubtedly matched Bhabānīcaraṇa Bandyopādhyāẏa's conservative *Chandrika* in both style and content.

Yet the young College radicals and their prescriptive adversaries differed in one crucial respect: in heaping onto Kolkata's prescriptivists and moralizers their scandalized opprobrium, and in offering to Kolkata's readers a profusion of tales focused on the sordidness of paṇḍits and the insincerity of the religious, *Jñānānveshaṇa* derided and diminished those seeking a śāstric solution to Kolkata's normative crisis. Perhaps, not unlike the pornographic pamphleteers of 1780s Paris, the *Jñānānveshaṇa* could be said to be "revolutionary" in an unusual way: its sacrilegious irreverence towards the Brahmin scholars seeking to greater purchase for smriti norms in Kolkatan life, and its single-minded undermining of the moral authoritativeness of all those committed to a prescriptive solution to the crisis brought about by the confusions of metropolitan life invariably made the turn to neoprescriptivism – shot through with self-serving hypocrisy – appear as an implausible solution to the social ills of the age.[70]

On some rare occasions the *Jñānānveshaṇa* went beyond merely accusing the upholders of Brahmnical norms of self-serving hypocrisy and deceitfulness, and chose to question the moral order of caste *tout court*. In an 1833 article entitled "women under the rule of śāstra" the authors of *Jñānānveshaṇa* singled out the gendered character of the caste system and the self-interested taboos maintained by Brahmin men to argue that extant śastric norms violated the truth that "all humans are equal" (*manuṣya sakalei samān*) – probably the first occurrence of such a statement in Bengali prose.[71] Establishing what later became an enduring parallel between the

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[70] See Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime,* Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1982.

[71] "extract" in *Samacar Candrika* 4 January 1833 reprinted in Moitra (ed.) *Selections,* 14. This *Jñānānveshaṇa* piece anticipates the famous 1839 English speech by Maheshchandra Deb, "A sketch on the Condition of Hindoo women" reprinted in Gautam Chattopadhyaya, *Awakening in Bengal: Early Nineteenth Century – Selected Documents*, (Kolkata: Progressive Publishers, 1965). Deb argued that "the Hindoo shastras [are] religious codes of our countrymen which render their wives literally slaves both in body and mind to their evey whim and caprice".

degraded condition of lower-caste men in society and that of upper-caste women in their own households, *Jñānānveshaṇ* ironically noted that it was curious that even though the ancient lawgiver Manu had stated that in ritual settings the touch of a Brahmin woman might pollute sacrificial offerings and male relatives alike, he had nonetheless made it invariably obligatory for women to keep up "the cleaning of the house, the shedding of tears and scorching of hands that occurs in the smoke-haze of a kitchen when laboring to cook a meal" in service of their male relations, with no such risk of pollution or contamination. Striking a radical note, the *Jñānānveshaṇa* contended this could only mean that the ritual and social status of women and Sudras had been degraded only by the self-interested wiles of Brahmin men, confidently adding that the lies that sustained the śāstric order of things and the fraudulent holiness of Brahmin men was no longer tenable: "A great many distinguished Sudra youths have reasoned about the matter of Sudras having no rights to Vedic study and found it to be false because all humans are equal" the paper defiantly offered, adding it was only a matter of time before women too found a way of rebelling against the iniquity of the norms disciplining their life.

2.4 Scotch Bacon

Throughout the 1830s, *Jñānānveshaṇa* forcefully and repeatedly argued that the "hypocritical" moral order prescriptivists sought to uphold was characterized by patent "absurdities" and insisted that the upholders and defenders of "priestcraft" were depraved and self-serving. Yet the question as to *why* Young Bengal came to describe established forms of moral knowing as absurdly untenable has remained unexamined. There was nothing straightforward or given about the dogged contention that Smriti norms were unreasonable and cognitively untenable, and very little justified dismissing the serious logic of Naiyayikas as fundamentally flawed.

On the contrary, smriti norms had acquired plausibility and purchase in Bengali intellectual life throughout the previous decade: in the face of the transgressions and omissions enabled by new forms of metropolitan life, and of Rammohun's spirited Vedantic opposition to dharmaśāstra, paṇḍits such as Mrityunjaya Vidyalankara and polemicists such as Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyaya had attempted to generate a wider respect for the norms of dharmaśāstra, pioneering new and innovative Bengali prose forms dedicated to moral instruction, encouraging the observance of its precepts by way of new media such as printed pamphlets and newspapers, and organizing the Dharma Sabha so as to best extoll the virtuous and discipline the sinful. Furthermore, as historians have long pointed out, the exigencies of colonial rule and the proclivities of Orientalist scholars found a common ground in reifying the propositions of Smartas into a coherent and consequential body of "Hindu law", transforming enjoinments and jurisprudential reasoning into the enforceable law of an increasingly assertive and intrusive colonial state.[72]

In other words, most historians agree that the reach and purpose of Smriti traditions and the social significance of caste had been expanded rather than diminished by the challenges of a new social and political order and the intrusions of the colonial state. Young Bengal's dismissal of Smriti norms and ostentatious violation of dharmaśāstra principles as ridiculous and obscene is thus all the more striking. I propose that scattered statements occurring in contemporary texts and in later memoirs show that Young Bengal's dogged rejection of the extant moral order of caste drew on the widespread reception and creative re-elaboration of Scottish "moral sense" theory and allied epistemological propositions, variously known as the "philosophy of common-sense", the "inductive philosophy" and, in a more generic sense, the "Baconian philosophy".

[72] See Bernard Cohn, "Law and the Colonial State in India" in Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

In 1820s and 30s Britain, "moral sense" theories and common-sense epistemologies had combined into an increasingly influential tradition of Scottish metaphysics, generally known as "Mental philosophy" or "The Philosophy of Mind". This title primarily described a set of arguments associated with Thomas Reid's (1710-1796) foundational works – the 1764 *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* and the 1785 *Essay on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, that of his most distinguished continuator, Dugald Stewart's (1753-1828) *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* and finally the work of his most intimate and articulate critic, Thomas Brown's (1778-1820) posthumous *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*.[73]

To these intimately related works some added a different but not completely unrelated tract in moral intuitionism, Adam Smith's (1723-1790) celebrated 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Barring important differences, all the works cited above were understood in the early nineteenth century to share something in common, insofar as they all responded to the challenges that traditional moral philosophy and ethics faced in the wake of Hobbesian psychological egoism and Humean epistemological skepticism; by way of rebuttal, they all argued in divergent ways, that proper moral knowing proceeded from a capacity or ability intrinsic to humans, which was located in a generalizable ability for "sympathy" a cognitive "moral sense" "moral faculty" or "moral instinct" or "feeling".[74]

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[73] The literature on Moral and Mental Philosophy in general, and Reid in particular, is vast. Throughout I have relied primarily on Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*, 378-403. A classic introduction to Reidian common sense is also supplied in Sophia Rosenfeld, *Common Sense: a political history,* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011) 56-89 but see more particularly Alexander Broadie "Reid in context" in Thomas Cuneo (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Reid,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Also Knut Haakonsen "Dugald Stewart and the Science of a Legislator" in Knut Haakonsen *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy* (Cambirdge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Thomas Dixon "Revolting against Reid: The Philosophy of Thomas Brown" in Gordon Graham (ed.) *Scottish Philosophy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2015.

[74] See especially Christel Fricke, "Moral sense Theories and Other Sentimentalist Accounts of the Foundation of Morals" in Alexander Broadie and Craig Smith (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

The arguments of the philosophers of mind were enormously consequential: nineteenth century Britons debated what place of "mental and moral philosophy" ought to have in higher education, and wondered whether an individual's moral character depended on God's grace, specific doctrinal allegiances, or – as the mental and moral intuitionists suggested – the correct workings of an ordered mind and its capacity for moral knowing. Utilitarians such as James Mill (1773-1836), irritated by the Scotch dismissal of utility as a moral principle, criticized the "school" by asking "if instinct be the ground of moral action" might not men who steal or murder instinctively be said to be moral in so far as they possessed an "instinct to steal".[75] Others instead fretted about the appropriate relationship of moral philosophy to Christian ethics, though most moral intuitionists – perhaps inspired by Reid, a Presbyterian minister – insisted that the truths of the Gospel rendered the natural workings of the moral sense more perfect.[76]

Matters finally came to a head when, in the face of dogged opposition, a new University College was founded by a tenuous coalition of "modern whigs", dissenting evangelicals and Utilitarians with no provision for doctrinal instruction in the Church and no chair in Theology, but with endowed professorships in "moral" and "mental philosophy". The Tory periodical *Bell's Weekly Messenger* announced for instance that in the new "Scottish confederacy" that passed for a London University "Jew, Turk, Infidel and Scottish lecturer" would sit in an aberrant "perfect equality", with deleterious effects for the probity of London's future College students, soon to be corrupted by a moral instruction devoid of any substantive Christian content. "A plain man," *Bell's Weekly Messenger* sentenced, "would have Scotch reason assigned to him

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[75] James Mill, "Elements of the Philosophy of Mind by Dugald Stewart" in *The British Review,* Vol. IV (August 1815): 170-200.
[76] For the controversy between "mental philosophy" and Presbyterianism see Thomas Ahnert *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment 1690-1805,* (Yale: Yale University Press), 2014.

against everything he proposes, there will be an end to all peace and quietness, and what is worse, an end to all admitted principals in truth and morals".[77]

The panicked strictures over the provision of "lay" moral instruction in London were consequential in colonial Kolkata too. The *India Gazette* – edited by Scotsmen – took note of *Bell's* admonition and defended the nascent institution and the Scottish tradition of moral philosophy against what it termed a "vulgar diatribe against Scotch lecturers".[78] In a subsequent editorial, the *India Gazette* wondered what the "Bulls and Bells of London … who betrayed such an edifying antipathy to Jews, Turks and Scotch lecturers" might make of instruction at the Hindoo College, where students were not expected to be Christian, yet "hundreds" were "rescued" from "the degradations and miseries of ignorance" through a completely secular program of instruction that paid no attention to the self-interested Jeremiads of reactionaries.[79]

In the wake of such debates, it was almost inevitable that the question of whether "moral and mental philosophy" would be taught at Hindu College should follow. On the 28th of May 1828 the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* published an essay – signed with the pseudonym "Odd Fellow" – on the crucial importance of offering instruction in "mental philosophy" in Kolkata. An editor at the *Bengal Hurkaru*, who had received a copy of the essay prior to its publication, pre-emptively endorsed it in a warm editorial. Admitting that it would be difficult "in the present month of May, thermometer on 95, to get past Locke on the Understanding, or Reid or Brown or Stewart on the Philosophy of Mind" the *Hurkaru's* reviewer nonetheless concurred that it was essential: "the study of the Philosophy of Mind," it offered, "is proper to men, it is in fact "the study of mankind, not as a mere animal race but as an intellectual species".[80] By January 1829,

[77] *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 10th September 1827.
[78] *India Gazette*, 31st January 1828.
[79] *India Gazette*, 4th February 1828.
[80] *Bengal Hurkaru*, 17th May 1828.

officials running Hindu College proposed "to introduce some knowledge of metaphysicks" to the College's most advanced students, and procured copies of Thomas Reid's *Enquiry into the Human Mind* and *Essay on the Powers of the Human Mind,* as well as Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature* for the course they planned to institute.[81]

The individual tasked with teaching the new course was Henry Louis Vivien Derozio. Though few British commentators at the time would have ever imagined Reidian philosophy to be radically sacrilegious, or associated it with Byronian poetry, the later recollections of Young Bengal's adherents and the contemporary observations of British officials all underscore philosophical instruction as key to the Byronian beef-eating revolt that shook the summer of 1831. Pyārīcañda Mitra, who gained the sobriquet of "philosopher" as a result of his accomplishments in the course, remembered that "Derozio used to impress upon his pupils the sacred duty of thinking for themselves" so as to be "in no way influenced by those *idols* mentioned by Lord Bacon".[82] Mitra's recollection of Derozio teaching Lord Bacon's polemic against the "idols of the mind" is especially significant in this regard. Against the dangers of skepticism, the vagaries of "reasoning by syllogism" and the reversals of Humean skepticism, Reid had praised Bacon's "slow and patient method of induction", inaugurating an "assault on the syllogism", as British intellectual historians have termed the 1810s and 20s.[83] In his methodological classic *Novum Organum,* Bacon had disparaged conjectural thinking and abstract reasoning on norms and principles, assimilating them to cognitive error. In his attempt to investigate and correct forms of wrongful thinking, Reid turned to Bacon's *Novum Organum*

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[81] See Anita Coomer "H.H. Wilson and the Hindu College 1823-1832" in *Calcutta Historical Journal* 6, No. 1 (July-December 1981).
[82] For Mitra's accomplishments in "moral philosophy" and the award of a medal by Sir John Peter Grant, see "Peary Chand Mittra" in *Calcutta Review,* 240 (April 1905): 38.
[83] The happy expression is found in Steffen Ducheyne & John P. McCaskey, "The Sources of Mill's View of Ratiocination and Induction" in Antis Loizides (ed.) *Mill's A system of Logic: critical appraisals,* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 63.

when composing the foundational classic of “common sense” philosophy, the *Essay on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. Reid – who discusses no other philosopher as extensively and admiringly – states that he followed Bacon on the question of errors of cognition.

> Lord Bacon in the fifth book of the *De Augmentis Scientiarum* and more fully treated in *Novum Organum.* He divided them [errors of prejudice] into four classes – *idola tribus, idola specus, idola fori* and *idola teatri.* I think the division judicious, like most of the productions of that wonderful genius (…)
> To every bias of the understanding by which a man may be misled in judging, Lord Bacon gives the name of an idol. The understanding, in its natural and best state pays homage to truth only. The causes of error are considered by him as so many false deities, who receive the homage which is due only to Truth.[84]

These are, of course, the very “idols of the mind” that Mitra felt a “sacred duty” to bring down – a proposition formulated first by Bacon, reprised by Reid and finally endorsed by Mitra. The charge that Bacon’s method had consequences for the determination of moral right and wrong was not exclusively Reidian, but was broadly repeated by Reid’s many successors in “common sense” philosophy – especially Dugald Stewart, helping give birth to a “Bacon-facing generation”.[85] Stewart objected to Reid’s reduction of moral judgment to “common sense”, and proposed instead the existence of a “moral faculty” responsible for moral judgments. Despite significant differences with Reid, Stewart remained certain that Bacon (and Reid) were the indispensable starting points for the task of “Moral and Mental Philosophy”. He also compared his own key text, the *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* to Lord Francis Bacon’s *Novum Organum*, and argued that he hoped to achieve in moral philosophy the epistemological certainty the “philosophy of Induction” had achieved in the natural sciences, stating that the objective of the “Philosophy of the mind” was to “correct” by “applying to these subjects

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[84] The entirety of Reid’s eighth chapter in the *Essay on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, titled “Of prejudice, the causes of error” is dedicated to Bacon’s discussion of *idola*, from the *Novum Organum.* See Thomas Reid,. *Essay on the Intellectual Powers of Man,* (Edinburgh: MacLachlan, 1858), 469.

[85] John Robertson, “A Bacon-facing generation: Scottish Philosophy in the Early Nineteenth Century” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy,* Vol. 14 No. 1 (January 1976): 37-49.

[“metaphysics and moral philosophy”] the method of induction”, which was “[Bacon’s] (...) method of philosophizing”.[86]

The dual Scotch proposition of anti-conjectural, inductive reasoning and certain, self-evident moral knowledge enjoyed widespread popularity in Kolkata, and sustained the iconoclastic certainties of Young Bengal’s war against the “idols of the mind”. Historians since Susobhan Sarkar have often cited a long-lost critique of Kant penned by the young Derozio, or the existence of an abridged translation from Pierre Louis de Maupertuis’s *Essai de philosophie morale* published posthumously, to showcase Derozio’s wide-ranging engagement with Enlightenment traditions originating in Germany and France, the continental homelands of the Enlightenment. But contemporary accounts show that it was Derozio’s teaching of Reid’s *Enquiry into the Human Mind* and *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of the Human Mind* and Hume’s *Treatise on Human Nature* that became directly embroiled in the generational rebellion of 1831.[87]

As scandal spread, Radhakanta Deb pushed the College’s authorities to put an end to the “atheism” passing for moral instruction at the College and demanded Derozio’s expulsion.[88] Derozio replied to the charges by insisting that while he had taught Hume’s “celebrated dialogue between Cleanthes and Philo” where “the most subtle and refined arguments against Theism are adduced”, he had done so only in order to supply students with “Dr. Reid and Dugald Stewart’s more acute replies to Hume, replies which to this day continue unrefuted”.[89] Derozio’s answer –

[86] Dugald Stewart, *The Works of Dugald Stewart in Seven Volumes: Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, (Cambridge, Hilliard and Brown, 1829), 6-9.
[87] H,H. Wilson to General Committee of Public Instruction, 23 January 1829, Copybook of letters 1 Jan.-26 June 1829, West Bengal State Archives cited, in Coomer, “H. H. Wilson and the Hindu College (1823-1832)”, *Calcutta Historical Journal* 6, No. 1(July – Dec 1981): 41.
[88] H,H. Wilson “Report to the General Committee of Public Instruction” 31 January 1832, Copybook of Letters, January-November 1832 cited in Coomer, “H. H. Wilson and the Hindu College”, 41.
[89] H.L.V.Derozio to H.H. Wilson “Letter” 26 April 1831, cited in Coomer, “H. H. Wilson and the Hindu College”.

sometimes celebrated as a model of philosophical sincerity – was just as disingenuous as the malicious question which was posed to him: the explosive philosophical charge of Derozio's course in "moral and mental philosophy", so confusingly represented by his adversaries as "atheism" – an asymmetrical translation of the charge of Vedic denialism, or *nāstikatā* – was clearly driven not by Humean skepticism, but rather by the Reidian "common sense" theory of morals and Stewart's commensurable search for the "moral faculty". Young Bengal's beef-eating philosophers were anything *but* skeptics of the cognitive ability to figure out moral truth, as Kriṣñamohana reminded readers of *The Persecuted*. They argued instead that they chose the sin of beef-eating for the sake of "truth", and in answer to the commands of conscience, even against their own families.

Young Bengal's enthusiasm for Bacon in the 1830s was hardly exceptional. Even as the beef-eaters left, Scottish "mental and moral philosophy" remained on the Hindu College menu. Bacon's Advancement of Learning and his essays were folded into a nascent English curriculum developed by Capt. Richardson, who in 1835 was "tasked with the delivery of a course of weekly lectures on moral philosophy".[90] A parallel course in jurisprudence developed for the College at the same time by the Supreme Court Barrister Sir John Peter Grant (1807-1893) – in later years a governor of Bengal – also made sure to include the works of "the great philosopher Dr. Reed [sic]" as key to any true understanding of "moral law".[91] In a lecture on "the chief doctrines that morality recommends", Grant turned to the fifth chapter of Reid's *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* and argued that the moral law of men needs to be modelled on the natural laws of the Creator. The *Reformer* – a paper conducted by "young men educated at the Hindoo College",

[90] See Proceedings of the General Committee of Public Instruction, 22 May 1835.
[91] "Law Lectures delivered at the Hindu College" extracted from *The Reformer,* no date given, reprinted in *The Calcutta Monthly Journal* (February 1836): 64-65.

foremost amongst them Prasannakumāra Thākur – reprinted Grant's lecture on moral law and Reid's assertion that man – "a free being and at liberty to follow or reject laws as he pleases" – needed to make laws only with "regard for truth, justice and the good of our species".[92]

Of course, not all of Kolkata's 'enlightened' subscribed to theories of moral sense. A scattered few ageing individuals – most prominently David Hare (1775-1842) and David Drummond (1787-1843) – retained commitments to the skeptical age when Hume had held sway. When a Bengali student published a short essay in the Presbyterian *The Telescope* discussing "the moral sense" as a "universally admitted susceptibility in the human mind for a set of emotions which accompany our conceptions of good and evil upon which distinctions of morality mainly depend" Drummond's *The Weekly Examiner* issued a spirited rebuttal arguing that if the "confident wisecraker" had done any research he would have discovered "that an original susceptibility of perceiving good and evil is considered by the far greater number of writers on the subject to be a baseless chimera" and that "all our notions of mental approbation and reprobation depend entirely on what we are taught".[93]

Few shared Drummond's uncompromising skepticism. For many Britons, Reidian "mental philosophy" had offered a way out of angsty eighteenth century impasses in moral skepticism, psychological associationism and epistemic uncertainty. Common-sense theorists were also, in the early nineteenth century, politically consequential: Dugald Stewart's celebrated university teaching had helped form a generation of politicians and writers – later known as the "modern whigs" – who held fast to the Reidian credo that insofar as philosophical principles were inductively drawn from experience, one's commitments in moral philosophy could and ought to guide action. The "school of the north" was especially key in shaping the reformism that

[92] "Law Lectures delivered at the Hindu College," 64-65.
[93] See Weekly Examiner, 26 September 1840.

had gained ground in 1830s parliamentary politics, and in the wake of the great reform act of 1832 some even came to power.[94] Since Eric Stokes' *The English Utilitarians and India*, historians have paid great attention to the influence of the Utilitarian "philosophical radicals" gathered around James Mill and the *Westminster Review,* seeking to establish a connection between philosophical radicalism and the governorship of Bengal under the rule of the Benthamite Lord Bentinck. Yet, the "modern whigs" were just as influential in Indian affairs as their uncomfortable and occasional allies, the Utilitarians. The historian James Mackintosh for instance – a professor at the East India Company's College at Haylebury – found a place of commanding influence on the East India Company's Board of Control; the redoubtable Whig politician Henry Peter Brougham, who helped found the *Edinburgh Review*, the "Library for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge" and the University College at London notoriously became –like his idol Bacon – Lord Chancellor of the Realm, holding sway over appointments all across the empire.

Mackintosh's essays on Dugald Stewart's introduction to the new Encyclopedia Britannica – the *General View of the Progress of Metaphysical*, *Ethical and Political Philosophy* – and Lord Brougham's introductory *An Account of Lord Bacon's Novum Organon Scientiarum* and *Discourse on the Advantages and Pleasures of Science* helped the cause of a more popular philosophical reception of Reid and Stewart's reading of Bacon, consecrating a vulgate history of philosophy that saw modern philosophy, moral and natural – but above all Bacon, Reid and Stewart – break with the tired speculation of the past.[95] Brougham was especially effusive in his

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[94] Donald Winch, "The system of the North: Dugald Stewart and his pupils" in Stefan Collini, Donald Winch & John Burrow (eds.). *That Noble Science of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 33.

[95] James Mackintosh "A general view of the progress of metaphysical, ethical and political philosophy since the revival of letters in Europe by Dugald Stewart [Preface to the supplement of the Encyclopedia Britannica]" in *Edinburgh Review,* Vol. 27, 180-244 and also Mackintosh, "Stewart's introduction to the Encyclopedia" in *Edinburgh Review,* Vol. 36, 220-267.

verdicts: "Lord Bacon was the first who taught the proper method of studying...he gave a set of rules by which mankind may deliver themselves from slavery to names, and from fanciful systems, and return once more, as little children, to the school of nature".[96] At the Hindu College, one of Derozio's most prominent students, Kāśiprasāda Ghosh, even translated Brougham's *Discourse on the Advantages and Pleasures of Science* into Bengali as Bijñan Sebadhi, thus inaugurating the modern semantic equivalence between "Bijñan" and "Science".[97]

This was the intellectual climate the essayist and critic Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859) found on reaching Kolkata in September 1834. Macaulay famously disliked a great deal of India. He also found prevalent readings of Bacon – a recent but significant British import – gratingly unsatisfying. But Bacon could not be avoided: dispatched to India to preside over a law commission, the young Macaulay was also appointed President of the General Committee of Public Instruction in Bengal. In the new role, Macaulay served as examiner for the Hindu College's First Class – twenty-one boys in their early twenties – and their exam reading was, predictably, Bacon's *Essays.*[98] What Macaulay exactly made of their Baconianism is impossible to know, but he spent his time in Kolkata mulling over the problem of "Baconian philosophy" in British intellectual life and in August wrote to the editor of the *Edinburgh Review* that he had decided to send in a "prodigiously long" article on Bacon he had finished writing.[99] Tellingly, he cautioned the editor that the article ran against "nine tenths of the people who talk about Bacon", and that his piece was bound to be most "at variance" with "Dugald Stewart and Mackintosh".[100]

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[96] Henry Brougham, *Account of Lord Bacon's Novum Organum Scientiarum*, (London: Baldwin: 1827), 1.
[97] Henry Brougham (tr. Kāśiprasāda Ghosh) *Bigyana Sebadhi or Treasures of Science,* (Kolkata: Society for Translating European Sciences), 1832.
[98] See General Committee of Public Instruction, *Report of the General Committee of Public Instruction of the Presidency of Fort William in Bengal* (Kolkata: Baptist Mission Press, 1837), 68.
[99] Macauley to Macvey Napier, 30 August 1836 in Macvey Napier (ed.) *Selections from the Correspondence of the Late MacVey Napier*, (London: MacMillan, 1874), 180.
[100] Macauley to Macvey Napier, 26 November 1836 in Napier, *Selections*, 181.

In this ensuing *Edinburgh Review* article Macaulay argued that Bacon had been taken to be a "soaring angel", but his virtues were more akin to those of the "creeping snake". His paternity of the great philosophical method of "Induction", furthermore, for which Reid and Stewart had eulogized him, was patently false. Induction was tantamount to "common sense" and so practiced "ever since the beginning of the world by every human being": it had never required any discovery whatsoever. Further, if credit was to be given at all to the philosophical effort to systematize methods of knowing, then recognition ought to rest with Bacon's bête noir, Aristotle. Even more damningly, Macaulay quipped that studying Bacon's reasoning method through the *Novum Organum* – whether in the original Latin, in Reid's abridgement, or in Brougham's vulgarization – simply could not contribute to better thinking. "The inductive process" he damningly sentenced "like any other processes is not going to be performed better merely because men know how to perform it". If Bacon deserved to be celebrated at all, Macauley alleged, it was only because of his belief in the progressive movement of society.[101]

Macaulay's 1837 essay on Bacon has at times been described as a turning point in British intellectual history, a moment that stemmed the tide of popular approbation for Reid and Stewart's theories of "common sense" epistemology and the gospel of Baconianism preached by Lord Brougham. Conjectural forms of thinking and formal logic had been returned to a measure of philosophical dignity by James Herschel's 1830 *Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy*, and in later years seminal controversies such as that between Whewell's *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* and John Stuart Mill's *A System of Logic* would be conducted with no reference to Reid and Stewart's dismissal of formal logic. In its repudiation of the philosophy of mind for the movements of history, Macaulay's essay also marked a key

[101] Thomas Babington Macauley, "The works of Francis Bacon, Lord Chancellor of England. By Basil Montagu esq." in *Edinburgh Review* Vol. 132 (July 1837): 1-104.

moment in the development of British historicism.[102] Lord Brougham, who had grown estranged and embittered from Macauley in previous years, was predictably incensed: "greater blunder never was committed" he shot in a letter to the *Review's* editor "that the one Macaulay has made on the inductive philosophy".[103] Brougham did not mince his words regarding Macaulay: "he has no science at all, and cannot reason. His contemporaries at Cambridge always said he had not a conception of what an argument was".[104]

When Macaulay's sensational article reached Calcutta – where Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* was an assigned reading in English classes – it was greeted with similar dismay, with the *Bengal Hurkaru* worrying that the "moralist" Macaulay had turned against "ethics".[105] The Presbyterian Sanskritist John Muir (1810-1882) wrote in a review for the *Calcutta Christian Observer* that while the *Edinburgh Review* article showcased "the deplorable weakness and meanness of the groveling and servile man of the world", in no way did it diminish the philosophical standing and "prophetic wisdom of the sage".[106] Contrary to what Macaulay asserted, Muir argued only a theoretical turn to "inductive" philosophy would regenerate India, whose philosophical systems were as "speculative" as those of a darker age in Europe.[107] People in Kolkata needed to bring about a Baconian "revolution", and the question Muir insisted needed to be asked was not so much "how the revolution would be effected" but – unironically – "where is the Bacon? Or rather where are those humble followers of Bacon, who require no fresh

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[102] Brian Young. "History" in *Historicism and the Human Sciences in Victorian Britain* ed., Mark Bevir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
[103] For the controversy see Joanne Shattock, "Politics and Literature: Macauley, Brougham and the "Edinburgh Review" under Napier" in *The Yearbook of English Studies,* Vol. 16 (Literary Periodicals Special Number) 1986: 32-50
[104] Lord Brougham to MacVey Napier, July 28 1837 in Napier *Selections*, 196-197.
[105] "Review" in *Bengal Hurkaru*, extracted in the *Calcutta Monthly Journal and General Register*, December 1838.
[106] John Muir, "The Baconian Philosophy applicable to the Mental Regeneration of India" in *The Calcutta Christian Observer,* Vol. 70 (March 1838): 123-126.
[107] Muir, "The Baconian Philosophy", 123.

principles to place before the schoolmen of Hindustan the tried principles which the latter know not?"[108]

Muir – later principal of the Sanskrit College in Benares – would eventually attempt to render common-sense textbooks into Sanskrit, and to translate the key texts of "Mental philosophy" into a science of *mānasadharma*. Missionaries were not alone in clamoring for moral education. "Moral philosophy", *Jñānānveshaṇa* argued the same year, "ought to have been weightier" in the curriculum of the Hindu College.[109] The most significant figure pushing for the institutionalization of "moral and mental philosophy" as an academic discipline in Bengal was however neither a missionary nor a member of Young Bengal, but Brougham's old protégé Charles Hay Cameron (1795-1880), the scion of a distinguished political family and once an uncompromising Benthamite. In his younger days Cameron's bid for the moral philosophy chair at the newly established University College London had been one of the events that catalyzed the indignation of publications such as *Bell's Weekly Messenger* and of conservative opinion against atheistic mental philosophers and Utilitarians.[110] Frustrated in his attempt to land as career as a "Scotch lecturer" in London by Zachary Macauley's evangelical faction, Cameron was then forced to seek new and better opportunities in Britain's expanding empire.[111]

Recommended by Brougham to lead a legal commission in Ceylon that would parallel Macauley's better-known one in India, Cameron eventually found a place on Bengal's nascent Council on Education, just as "Anglists" and "Orientalists" sparred and the younger Macauley

[108]Muir, "The Baconian Philosophy", 125.
[109] "Rev. Alexander Duff and the Hindu College Managers" in *Jñānānveshaṇa,* January 25 1838 reprinted in Moitra, *Selections*, 101.
[110] For Cameron's failed bid to the chair of "Moral and Political Philosophy" see Hugh Hale Bellot, *University College London 1826-1926* (London: University of London Press, 1929), 108-109. Zachary Macauley – father to Cameron's law commission colleague Thomas Babington Macauley – was instrumental in defeating George Grote's motion to appoint Cameron.
[111] Lord Brougham to C.H. Cameron, 9 November 1834 in Brougham Papers, University College London special collections.

launched his assault on Baconianism. A seat on the Council allowed Cameron to return to his philosophical interests, and he soon attempted to reinstate "moral and mental philosophy" as a formal subject after the decade of disorganized, unstructured teaching that had followed Derozio's dismissal. Eager this time around to appease the evangelical opposition that had cost him a London professorship, Cameron slyly volunteered in 1840 that insofar as no Christian moral instruction could be provided to Hindus at the College "it is more particularly incumbent on us then upon other Ministries of Public instruction to teach morality in the form of Moral Philosophy".[112] "Moral philosophy" at the College, Cameron hoped, was to be a special kind of discipline. Every year, a student who showed "proficiency in the study of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*" -- the text he argued would be the best suited for a lay moral education – would be awarded an engraved medal called the "Cameron prize".[113]

Cameron's efforts were endorsed by Young Bengal's new mouthpiece, the *Spectator* – a paper founded as *Jñānānveshaṇa*'s decade-long run came to an end – where an editorial agreed that it would be very good if students read "Smith or Bentham or some other text in moral philosophy" (*Smith Benthyām prabhritir niti pustak*).[114] But as the new course failed to materialize, some began to worry that either jealous instructors at the College might have sabotaged the creation of the new discipline or that missionary interests had conspired to thwart lay philosophical instruction. An anonymous member of Young Bengal – perhaps Pyārīcaňda

[112] Charles Hay Cameron, "Appendix No. IX: Mr. C.H. Cameron on Instn. In Moral Philosophy" in General Committee of Public Instruction of the Presidency of Bengal, *Appendix to the Report of the General Committee of Public Instruction of the Presidency of Fort William in Bengal, Appendix No.I-XVI,* (Kolkata: Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1842), lxix.
[113] Cameron, "Appendix…," lxix.
[114] Early endorsements to the plan for moral education via Smith were supplied in articles "Nitī ebaṃ Byabsāẏīśāstra siksa (Instruction in Moral Philosophy and in Political Economy)" *The Bengal Spectator,* Vol.1 April 1842 "Nitī siksa (Moral Instruction)" *Bengal Spectator* Vol. 2 May 1842 and "Nitī siksa" (Moral Instruction) *Bengal Spectator* Vol. 5 July 1842. See Binoy Ghosh, *Sāmaẏikapatre Bāmlār Samājcitre*, (Kolkata: Pyāpirās, 1964, vol.6), 112-114, 114-118, 120-123. The qutote is from *Bengal Spectator* Vol. 2 May 1842, 116.

Mitra – went on the offensive in December 1842, penning what was probably the first review of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* ever written in a non-European language and offering a spirited defense of Cameron's plan. It was a "matter of regret," to the writer, that Cameron's efforts had remained merely dead letter. Only Bentham's posthumous 1834 *Deontology or the Science of Morality* would have been a better (*ati uṭkrishta*) choice of a text, and Cameron's choice of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was excellent nonetheless:

> The Book titled "Sentiment" [*in English*] by Smith is so excellent and so thoroughly founded on a systematic knowledge of philosophy (*darśanaśāstra*) that people are able to obtain happiness simply through those precepts that it dispenses, and the language of the book is so profound and the composition so beautiful and its stated hypothesis (*anumānā*) so good (…) that no doubt except the most trifling ones arise in so far as the work is concerned (…). It offers an excellent account of truth itself, and of all matters on the topic of "sympathy" (*ār daẏar prasaṅge ei pustake ye sakala biṣaẏe likhita hayache*). [115]

Others took more oblique routes to ensure the institutionalization of the course in "moral and mental philosophy" in the face of paralyzing government inaction. The merchant Dwarkanath Tagore, freshly returned to Kolkata from travels in Britain and France, wrote to the "schoolmaster" (Tagore's words!) of empire, Lord Brougham – the two had become personally acquainted while in London, and Tagore had agreed to import a set of the *library of useful knowledge* – entreating him not to let down "enlightened natives and Europeans" on the crucial question of moral instruction.[116] In April 1843, backed by new supporters, Charles Hay Cameron secured for himself the Presidentship of the Council of Education and quickly wrote "by the same post" as Dwarkanath to his erstwhile patron Brougham, endorsing Tagore's complaint and asking for support. Cameron's case to Brougham for philosophy in the colony was brazenly

[115] "Hindu Kālejera Chatradigera Nitīśikkhā Bishaẏe Meṃ Kemerin Saheber Abhipraẏa [On Mr. Cameron's proposal regarding moral instruction at the Hindu College]" *Bengal Spectator*, 1st December 1842 in Ghosh, B. *Sāmaẏikapatre Bāmlār Sāmajcitre*, 128-130.

[116] See Dwarkanath Tagore to Brougham, H. September 23 1842 and Dwarkanath Tagore to Brougham, H. April ? 1843 in Brougham Papers, University College London special collections.

simple: "the young men in the government colleges" who "know by heart Bacon's *Essays* and the *Advancement of Learning*" were "wiser and better men and better subjects of Queen Victoria than those made by means of the Shuster and the Koran".[117]

Whether Lord Brougham ultimately pleaded the case of moral philosophy with the beleaguered governor-general, Lord Ellenborough – at the time embroiled in a disastrous invasion of Afghanistan– remains unknown. But once Cameron seized control of the Committee on Instruction the rollout of the course in mental and moral philosophy became unavoidable. In the spring of 1843, copies of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* were dispatched to a dozen of the newly founded Collegiate schools scattered across provincial centers across Bengal. A copy of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* joined six copies of Bacon's essays in the library of the new school at Medinīpur,[118] in Jessore, the library put in a book order for Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and for five copies of Bacon's essays,[119] while in Kumillā, the school library catalogued its newly received copy of Smith alongside a copy of Paley and two copies of Bacon's *Essays.*[120] Even in far off eastern Bengal, the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* made its way into the library of the government College in Chittagong.[121] Yet not all the new schools joined Tagore and Cameron in imagining their students as budding "Scotch lecturers": one principal

[117] Charles Hay Cameron to Brougham, H. April 19 1843 in Brougham Papers, University College London special collections.
[118] BL IOR Public Consultations, General Committee of Public Instruction: Secretary of the Council on Education to the Local Committee at Midnapore, 10 May 1843.
[119] "Account of Receipts and Disbursements for Books for the Jessore Institution for Circular No. 23 ending April 1843" in Proceedings of the Council on Education, 24 May 1843.
[120] "Statement of School Books in Store in the Library of the School at Comilla on the 30th April 1843" attached to the Proceedings of the Council on Education, 12 June 1843.
[121] Chittagong: Local Committee of Public Instruction at Chittagong to the Undersecretary of the Government of Bengal's Education Department, 4th of September 1843 in Proceedings of the Council of Education, 25th September 1843.

returned the copies of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and Bacon's *Essays* upon receipt, for "being too literary for the standard of attainment of our school".[122]

Despite Cameron and the *Spectator*'s vigorous endorsements, Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* did not remain the mainstay of the newly founded course in "moral and mental philosophy" for long. An expanded plan for philosophical instruction written for the Department in 1845 supplemented Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* with more canonical texts such as Reid's *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* and his *Essay on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, and Dugald Stewart's *Elements of Philosophy of the Mind.* More ominously still, the new list of textbooks endorsed by the Bengal government's Council on Education expanded to include the "Calcutta edition" of John Abercrombie's (1780-1844) *Intellectual and Moral Powers*, a rather simplistic summary of the more banal propositions of common-sense philosophy particularly beloved by Presbyterians such as John Muir.[123]

A review of philosophical instruction at the Hindu College undertaken in June 1846 reveals that Abercrombie's *Intellectual and Moral Powers* was soon taught alongside Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and Bacon's *Advancement of Learning.* In August, *Intellectual and Moral Powers* was even set as a possible book for the scholarship examination alongside the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.[124] Still, the successful institutionalization of moral philosophy was cause enough for celebration. When in 1848 Cameron resigned his presidency of the Council and prepared to sail back to England, Young Bengal allies such as Dakkhinaranjan Mukherjee, Pyārīcā̃da Mitra and Kriṣṇamohan Bandyopādhyaẏ organized an extensive celebration for the

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[122] From Secretary of the Local Committee of Public Instruction at Gorakhpur to Undersecretary of the Government of Bengal, 26 August 1843 in Proceedings of the Council of Education, 2 October 1843.
[123] From the Secretary of the Council of Education to the Government of Bengal Letter No. 651, 25th November 1854 in Proceedings of the Council of Education 21st January 1846.
[124] For the review: Proceedings of the Council on Education, 3d June 1846. For the exam list: Proceedings of the Council of Education, 5 August 1846 in IOR/P/15/39.

jurist, praising his efforts to transform the Hindu College into a "chartered university" and his unwavering commitment to "moral and intellectual improvement".[125] Cameron's Smithian legacy did not survive his departure. The following year, with a new president in charge of the council of education, the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was dropped from the "moral and mental philosophy" exam for senior scholarships, never to seriously return.[126]

Whether the text read in class was Smith, Reid, Stewart or Abercrombie, the objective of the course in philosophy, educational officials insisted, was ultimately straightforward: "to make our students acquainted with their mental and moral nature" and to give them, in Bacon's simple words, "a knowledge of the mind" by directing their attention to the various facts and laws directing this science".[127] Surviving essays from exams written during the 1840s and 1850s suggest instruction remained predictably focused on questions of common-sense epistemology, invariably exhorting students to link cognitive error with formal logic and abstract thinking. Exam questions asked students to explain what Bacon meant when he stated that "in the mind of man" there arose the possibility of "affection" that "perverted the true proceedings towards an active and operative knowledge". Students supplied suitably Reidian answers: one stated that "affection" had proceeded from the fact that the "ancient philosophers" were "untutored by the truths of inductive philosophy" and so "delighted themselves in the luxuriance of the

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[125] "Address to the Honorable Charles Hay Cameron by the Native Inhabitants of Calcutta delivered on the 22nd February 1848" in *Public Meeting at Calcutta in Honor of the Hon'ble C.H. Cameron* (Kolkata: Publisher not given, 1848).
[126] The questions for 1849 were on Reid's *Inquiry* and – surprisingly – Mill's *Logic.* See Council of Education, *General Report on Public Instruction in the Bengal Presidency,* Kolkata: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1850. On Abercrombie's *Intelectual and Moral Powers* the scathing essay by the English positivist Samuel Lobb (1833-1876), briefly Professor of History at Presidency College, titled "Abercrombie as a textbook in the Calcutta University", *The Calcutta Review* Vol. 48 (1869): 32-53 is especially instructive. A brief biography of Lobb is supplied by Geraldine Forbes, *Positivism in Bengal: a case study in the transmission and assimilation of an ideology* (Kolkata: Minerva Associates, 1975).
[127] James Kerr, *A Review of Public Instruction in the Bengal Presidency from 1835 to 1851* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1852), 63.

imagination", adding that "superstition" was only equivalent to holding a belief in "the immediate interference of the Deity in all operations of nature by some sort of supernatural agency".[128] The conclusion of the student's essay was that "the schoolmen were particularly famous for their singular array of arguments, compact and beautiful in their superstructure, but based on an unsteady foundation".

Rajnarayan Bose – earlier quoted as a vehement critic of beef-eating Young Bengal – wrote similarly in his youth that "Lord Bacon is the founder of Modern science. It is he who freed philosophy from the cloister of the monks and the jargon of the middle ages (…) out of the gloom of the dark ages [he] conducted men to the land of true science and true philosophy". To be sure his commitments to Scottish Baconianism were not missed, Basu added that Bacon had shown that "Aristotle" was worth abhorring "like the tyrannical Ottoman who kills his own brothers so that he may be the sole sovereign" – a strange aside – before emulating John Muir in establishing a parallel between Europe's medieval schoolmen and Bengal's Naiyayikas, custodians of a purportedly abstruse orders of knowledge that only adherence to the true "Baconian philosophy" could replace for good. [129]

When eventually the College's first dedicated philosophy teacher – the journalist William Knighton (1833-1900) – took up his appointment, he found the treatment that students and colleagues reserved for formal logic dispiriting and completely contrary to his own interest in the

[128] See A.K. Bose's "Essay on Bacon for the 1843 Senior Scholarship Examination" reprinted in Bhagaban Prasad Majumdar (ed.) *First Fruits of English Education [1817-1857]* (Kolkata: Bookland, 1973), 159-160.
[129] See Rajnarayan Basu's "Essay on Bacon for the 1843 Senior Scholarship Examination" reprinted in Majumdar, *First Fruits*, 162-165. Comparing schoolmen to Nyayayikas, Basu wrote, sounding almost like John Muir: "Theological controversy was the chief employment of the learned in the middle ages. Any University who could puzzle and confound a rival one with their subtleties was declared victorious and its renown was spread far and abroad. There were prizes given to the parties victorious in metaphysical disputation".

new philosophical developments then occurring in Britain[130]. In 1846, as he attempted to deliver an inaugural series of lectures "On the Utility of Aristotelian Logic" he was forced to note that:

> The works of Bacon, Locke, Reid and Stewart are continually in the hands of the students of the Government Colleges in this country and in these works they find reiterated charges against the discipline that it is in part my duty to teach.[131]

Pressure soon mounted on Knighton to change the contents of his course and forego Aristotle and logic altogether. The *Calcutta Review*, sounding almost like a member of Young Bengal, suggested in a dispiriting review that Knighton's teaching of Aristotle would be welcome only if it could "be brought to bear on the enormous family of self-blending prejudices or the "idols" of Lord Bacon so as to effectively expose and demolish them".[132]

2.5 Idols in and out of the Mind

In early nineteenth century Kolkata, the figurative exhortation to demolish the "idols of the mind" was inevitably burdened with its literal meaning. Few exploited this short-circuit between mental and tangible material idols as effectively as the missionary Alexander Duff (1806-1878), the Presbyterian clergyman and Scottish Baconian who saw in Young Bengal's ostentatious, beef-eating *vatertötung* the dawn of an enlightened, Christian India. In the wake of the August beef-eating incident which had seen Kriṣṇamohan Bandyopādhyāẏ expelled from his family home, the rebellious students had gathered to organize themselves into a "Reform association". Duff eagerly joined their meeting.[133] Impressed by their avowed quest to "destroy

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[130] Knighton, later assistant commissioner in Lucknow, would eventually acquire considerable notoriety for his hit-piece on the last Nawab of Awadh, Wajid Ali Shah: William Knighton, *The Private Life of an Eastern King,* (London: Hope & Co. 1855).
[131] William Knighton, *The Utility of the Aristotelian Logic: Three Lectures delivered to the senior students of the Hindu College*, *Calcutta* (Kolkata: Thacker & Co. at the Sumachar Chundrika Press, 1847).
[132] Anon. "The Utility of the Aristotelian Logic; or Remarks of Bacon, Locke, Reid and Stewart on that subject considered being the substance of three lectures delivered at the Hindu College, Calcutta; by William Knighton, M.R.A.S. officiating professor of literature in that institution" in *Calcutta Review,* No. 16. Vol. 8 "Miscellaneous Notices", xxxix.
[133] Alexander Duff, *India and Indian Missions,* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1839), 628.

Hinduism, because it is absurd, wicked and false" but convinced that the radicals did not go far enough, Duff spoke up at the meeting and stated that the Young Bengal radicals amounted only to an "eradication society" and could not in no way call themselves a "Reform association".

Duff argued that members of Young Bengal shared considerable similarities with the reformers of sixteenth century Europe in so far as they too "were casting aside the shackles of a degrading superstition and a domineering priesthood", but unlike them, Duff argued, "they could only destroy and lay waste – for they had nothing to substitute – nothing to offer in exchange".[134] Anxious that Young Bengal's Byronian norm-breaking was "atheistical" and Jacobin, Duff argued that it would be "the height of madness to supplant the social idolatry of Superstition by the savagely anti-social idolatry of … Infidelity" demanding that the students look for "something that might be *more than an equivalent* for what they wish to destroy".

Duff's invitation to embrace the moral order of Christian Europe was also accompanied by a warning. If Young Bengal failed in the exercise to embrace a better and truer moral order, he warned, "your names may be doomed to perpetual infamy, and descend in the same category of the Voltaires and De L'Amberts [sic.], and the whole ignoble army of destructives in revolutionary France".[135] No Voltaires were produced that night, and Duff and Young Bengal found themselves intimately entangled instead. Over the course of the following months and years seventeen Bengalis of distinguished family – Kriṣṇamohan Bandyopādhyāẏ amongst them – converted and joined Duff's Presbyterian church. Hinduism did not topple either, though, and the greater part of the students – the many who did not convert – made a melancholic peace with the society they had disavowed.

[134] Duff, *India*, 629.
[135] Duff, *India*, 630.

In contemporary historiography Kriṣṇamohana Bandyopādhyāẏ's journey from critic of priestcraft to Presbyterian minister has come to signify something akin to a story of Enlightenment eclipsed. Sumit Sarkar has influentially argued that the "limited and distorted applicability" of Enlightenment ideas and the lack of a meaningful social context for "European radicalism" set the intellectuals of Young Bengal up for an inevitable failure. The ensuing triumph of Christianity over philosophy even meant, Sarkar suggested, the final ascendency of "a sharply opposed kind of influence" and the domestication of Young Bengal's radicalism.[136]

Duff protested a great difference between himself and Derozio. But his Presbyterianism was not so distanced or "opposed" an influence. Derozio's exhortation to a young Mitra "to be in no way influenced by those *idols* mentioned by Lord Bacon" did not simply precede and parallel Duff's exhortation to Young Bengal to forsake mental and material idols: it was identical, and its valences were equally iconoclastic.[137] Trained in philosophy in Scotland, Duff's Kolkata school – the General Assembly Institution –offered the same set of classical texts in "moral and mental philosophy" one could study at Hindu College, and the essays on Bacon and Reid written for the Presbyterian *Telescope* could have been penned for a Hindu College debating society. As Thomas Ahnert has shown, even in Scotland "mental philosophy" and Presbyterian theology were frequently intertwined.[138]

In Kolkata, such entanglement was complicated by the fact that the rejection of idols was never just a metaphorical affair. When Duff set up school in the city, some twenty or twenty-five "Hindu" students accompanied by a European foreman attacked the shop of an unfortunate idol-maker – one Poorun Bysack – sparking a general brawl with the local potters and clay-

[136] Sumit Sarkar "The Complexities of Young Bengal" in Sarkar, S. *Essays of a Lifetime: Reformers, Nationalists, Subalterns,* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2018), 27.
[137] Mitra, *A Biographical sketch of David Hare* 31.
[138] Ahnert, *The Moral culture of the Scottish Enlightenment 1690-1805* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

workers.[139] While Duff seems to have played no role in the event, and the September 1831 Chitpur Road idol-smashing rampage is only a minor episode in the criminal annals of a metropolis in moral crisis, it is nonetheless a powerful testament to the unsettling proximity between transgressive, iconoclastic actions and Baconian repudiation of the "idols of the mind" on the one hand, and a fantasy of European assimilation and Christian conversion on the other.

Caught between a new capacity to diagnose the extant moral order of caste society as iniquitous and immoral and the crushing realization that their turn to the autonomous workings of the moral sense depended on the political and social order brought about by British colonialism and European ideas, Young Bengal discovered moral autonomy heteronomously. The troubling equivalences between moral action and transgression and the unsettling overlap some found between ethical self-determination and Christian conversion raised questions Bengalis would seek to address in later decades, as a new generation of intellectuals led by Akshay Kumar Datta strove to untether the quest for the "moral sense" from its European point of origin and free the quest for better morals from its adversarial entanglement with the śāstra.

[139] A great many of Duff's lectures would involve the handling of representations of idols. George Smith, *The Life of Alexander Duff,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1879, Vol.1, 10). The clash is only detailed in "A curious affray" *The India Gazette,* September 10 1831.

Chapter Three: Intuitive Hearts, Moral Brains and the Dharma of "Reform" in Colonial Bengal

3.1 Introduction

In an 1871 talk delivered in Chittagong, a town located on Bengal's south-eastern fringe, Rajeshwar Gupta –the Dhaka native who was to become headmaster of its new teacher training college – celebrated what he understood as the beginning of India's escape from a benighted, ignorant past to a future of enlightened religion where virtue, belief and reason would finally come to coincide. Gupta's promise of epochal change doubled up as a personal tale of "enlightenment": when he first joined the school, he was not yet aware that "East Bengal was afflicted by a deep sleep (*gabhīr nidrāẏ abhibūta*)" and that he and others lived lives blinded by unreasoning conventions and debasing "superstitions" (*kusaṃskār*). Gupta gushingly explained that in school the "sharp reason" (*pragāḍ yukti*) and "critical approach" of Debendranath Tagore's *Brāhmadharma grantha* ("Brahma Dharma") and Aksaykumar Datta's *Bāhyabastura sahita mānob prakritir sambandha bicāra* ("The Constitution of Man according to External Objects") and *Dharmanīti* ("Principles of Morals") dispelled long-held prejudices, inspiring him to break with inherited convention and convincing him that "reforming" the iniquities common in his upper-caste milieu was the truest way to uphold the injunctions of dharma itself.[1]

Gupta's connection of education and schooling with the "enlightened" impulse to overcome prejudice and abrogate time-honored injustices was neither new nor notable: Whiggish administrators, Missionary do-gooders and Young Bengal radicals alike had all argued that British rule ought to provide the educational institutions necessary for Indians to escape the

[1] Rajeshwar Gupta. *Bhārat-saubhāgya ebaṃ Caṭṭagrām brāhma samājer itibṛtta,* (Kolkata: Publisher not given, 1877), 5-6.

duping chicanery of priests purportedly obfuscating their natural capacity for moral reasoning. What was new to Gupta's age was Datta and Tagore's proposition that a life lived in conformity with the dictates of "moral reason" and "common sense" would be congruous with one lived following the injunctions of dharma. Confusingly, this would mean that the truest "dharmic" acts would be those undertaken against the more commonly accepted stipulations enjoined by the śāstra of dharma itself.

The new reformist proposition drew on an original series of correspondences neither Young Bengal radicals, Utilitarian administrators or śāstric-minded paṇḍits had ever contemplated. A venerable Sanskrit adage holding that "what is established by practice (*ācāraḥ*) is the highest Dharma (*paramo dharmaḥ*)" that had become something of a slogan for Kolkata's once powerful Dharma Sabha now stood turned on its head.[2] Reformist intellectuals would ensure that the pursuit of dharma would be alienated once and for all from its specific, authoritative śāstra, and in the ensuing break the virtuous were to be incited to reject the received ("*paramparā-siddha*") authority of widely revered texts, and to hold that truly "dharmic" behavior would find its basis in the intuitions of the heart or the edicts of reason. The originality of this inversion cannot be overstated: for all their opposition to each other, Young Bengal radicals and their Dharma Sabha opponents had at least agreed on the existence of a shared normative order, fighting each other over its purported ethical content (or lack thereof): the former had prized their transgressions as ethically subversive, exalting rule-breaking, while the

[2] The full citation of this well-known line (in Manusmṛiti 1.108.1) is as follows: *ācāraḥ paramo dharmaḥ śrutyuktaḥ smārta eva ca/ Tasmād asmin sadā yukto nityaṃ syād ātmavān dvijaḥ*. "Custom is the highest dharma, as stated in the śruti and in the smṛti too. Therefore, a twice-born who is in control of his self must perpetually attach himself to it". For translation and comment See John Duncan Martin Derrett "The conception of Duty in Ancient Indian Jurisprudence: The Problem of Ascertainment" in Wendy Doniger and John Duncan Martin Derrett (eds.) *The Concept of Duty in South Asia* (New Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1977).

latter insisted on the virtuous value of their śāstric, rule-following behavior. From now on, truly dharmic behavior would be the rejection of superstition.

In this chapter I seek to understand the complex ways in which advocacy of dharma and the cause of reform came to be the understood as an intimately intertwined task. I note that starting in the 1840s an eclectic "Deist party" composed primarily of graduates from Kolkata's new Collegiate-level institutions and led by Debendranath Tagore and Aksay Kumar Datta began gathering in a "Society of Truth-Seekers" (the *Tattvabodhinī Sabhā*) to explore the "confluence" between one of India's hoariest philosophical traditions –the Vedānta– and British theories of moral intuition. An earlier, nationalist historiography has long celebrated this moment as a key episode in India's conquest of modernity, but since the 1970s historians have tended to view the mingling of reformist radicalism and theological language with suspicion, arguing that the persistence of the latter invariably compromised the former. In a variety of influential essays Sumit Sarkar for instance argued that the "roots of compromise, failure and tragedy" could be found in the reformist "refusal to abandon Brahminical society even while seeking to change its norms in specific ways".[3]

Others have more generously alleged that radical reform– under colonial conditions – faced an impossible predicament. In an especially thoughtful critique of mid-century reformism Asok Sen glumly noted that mid-nineteenth century Bengalis, forced to disguise their abysmal lack of social power under colonial conditions, began to fatally "mix up the task of social improvements with questions of religious faith" so much so that the "Bengali middle-class" ultimately came "to embody its fruits of enlightenment in several twists or turns of religious

[3] Sumit Sarkar, "Vidyasagar and Brahmnical Society" in Sumit Sarkar, *Essays of a Lifetime*, (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2018), 256.

conversion or renewal".[4] Drawing from Sen's insight that mid-century Bengali reformism ought to be understood in terms of a broader history of "Enlightenment" I propose that the eclectic "confluence of terms" proposed by the "truth-seeking" deists gathered in a mansion along Kolkata's Chitpur road was no "retreat". Rather, it built on the tremendous intellectual success of their Young Bengal predecessors, who had effectively reduced to ridicule the sophisticated formality of earlier paṇḍit discourses on ethical obligation.

As noted in the previous chapter, just as the value of a once revered śāstric order of knowledge waned, the call for a morally transformative modern "education" acquired increasing traction. Some paṇḍits even hoped that śāstra they revered could be wedded to the new order of knowledge: the Vedāntist Rāmacandra Bidyābāgīś – a former associate of Rammohun Roy – insisted in lectures and articles that the new philosophical propositions advanced by Europeans were in fact already congruous with the fourteen *vidyās* sanctioned by the Veda, and that cultivation of India's revered philosophy could be made to coincide with the pursuit of Europe's new moral knowledge. Bidyābāgīś's determined effort to link the Vedāntic quest for illuminating Self-knowledge with the enlightenment striving for "education" promoted by the Whiggish Committee of Public Instruction was eclectic and idiosyncratic, but not inconsequential.

Authorized and perhaps even inspired by Bidyābāgīś's protestation of universal equivalences, a group of young intellectuals led by Debendranath Tagore and Akshay Kumar Datta – both younger collaborators of his in the nascent *Tattvabodhinī Sabhā*– resolutely rejected the connections between Christianity, Europe and moral reason proposed by their missionary adversaries to seek a deeper connection between the inner moral law purportedly possessed by

[4] Asok Sen, *Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and his elusive milestones,* (Kolkata: Riddhi India, 1977), 142.

the self-legislating subject of European moral philosophy and the exhortations to Self-knowledge intrinsic to Vedāntic philosophy. Their arguments and essays – published at first in an enormously influential periodical – the *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā*– and then in a host of books were not premised on a rejection of theories of moral intuition or "common sense" philosophy, but on their extension and generalization. They also did not resurrect śāstric lore: as one witty conservative poet quipped, these new philosophers "established the meaning of the Veda by way of their study of Bacon".[5]

Tagore, the guiding figure of the Chitpur road truth-seekers' society after Bidyābāgīś's passing, argued extensively that moral authority resided in the workings of the "the pure heart, filled with the light of intuitive knowledge" (*ātmapratyaẏa-siddha-jñanojjvalita biśuddha hr̥daẏa*). The periodical's chief editor, Akshay Kumar Datta, wondered instead if such intuitive pronouncements could truly ground moral knowing, and turned to George Combe's phrenological "science" of cerebral localization to place the human capacity for moral reason in the fleshy workings of cerebral lobes. In two successive works condensing and revisiting George Combe's work Datta unhesitatingly located the source of good action in the workings of a human "faculty of moral sense", the *dharma-pravr̥tti*. Dharma, he influentially argued, was to be found in the brain itself.

The ensuing controversy between Tagore and Datta split the reformist society of truth-seekers apart, but not before the *dharmapravr̥tti* had found its way into periodicals, books and – above all – classrooms, inspiring across Bengal a new generation of reformers and propagating the quest for "moral reform" as a generalizable social ideal. It would be the task of a later

[5] The line "Bekana Paḍiẏa Karena Beder Siddhanta" was penned by poet and journalist Īśvaracandra Gupta (1812-1859). The anecdote is told by Rajnarayan Basu, *Bāṇālā Bhashā o Sāhitya*, (Kolkata: Nutan Bāṇālā Press, 1879), 32.

generation of "neo-Hindu" critics to relentlessly expose the European debt of Bengal's reformist philosophers and mock their inventive resignifications of classical terms, caustically wondering if it were not an absurd travesty to seek moral self-legislation in a time of colonial subjugation.

3.2 The Philosophical Irrelevance of Transgressive Effrontery

As discussed in the previous chapter, in 1830s Kolkata a small number of young, College-educated patricians–eventually known as the "Young Bengal" generation – had come to be horrified by acts and practices that their parents had prized as virtuous but that they understood as both iniquitous and immoral.[6] In their ensuing quest to break with the moral order of caste Kolkata's young radicals found themselves aligned with a diverse group of colonial critics of Indian society – mostly Whiggish administrators and Presbyterian missionaries – arguing the case that the truest purpose of colonial rule was to bring about India's ethical transformation through the provision of a new order of "education". This small band of philosophically minded College graduates drew on Britain's anti-scholastic tradition of "inductive" philosophy and on related enlightenment critiques of "priestcraft" to propose that the provision of courses in "moral and mental philosophy" would enable Indians to recognize and reject those entrenched "idols of the mind" that obfuscated an innate capacity for true moral judgment already available to all humans.

Young Bengal's advocacy of "moral and mental" philosophy was poorly received in society at large, and ferociously opposed by the Hindu College's conservative Managing Committee and its pugnacious leader, Radhakanta Deb. Suspecting that the teaching of moral intuitionism and "common-sense" philosophy underwrote the transgressive, Byronic antics of the

[6] One of the earliest mentions of "Young Bengal" identifies it as the group surrounding the sometime editor of *Jñānānveṣaṇa,* Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee (1814-1878). See *Bengal Catholic Herald,* December 17 1844. "Baboo Nuckhinarayan [sic.] who made such flaming speeches about Young Bengal".

rebellious band of graduates and fed their stated desire to “arraign Hinduism at the bar of reason” the Committee cancelled the course, forced its notorious instructor to resign and ensured that the practice of reading Reid, Stewart and Bacon migrated to loosely associated disciplines, such as John Peter Grant’s jurisprudence course and Captain Richardson’s English Literature course. Yet within a decade the connections between “moral and mental philosophy” and Young Bengal’s egregious violations of the moral order of Hindu society were becoming less and less obvious: the inclusion of Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in the College curriculum in 1841 escaped the censure of the Hindu neo-prescriptivists to encounter only the ineffective grumblings of Kolkata’s Presbyterians missionaries, ever mindful of Smith’s alienation from the Kirk. Just as Charles Hay Cameron and his Young Bengal allies finally succeeded in institutionalizing courses in “moral and mental” philosophy across Bengal’s nascent Collegiate system, Scottish moral intuitionism’s own explosive entanglement with transgressive forms of iconoclastic action began to loosen and the erstwhile connections between “moral philosophy” and effrontery disappear.

This story of retreat and discursive resignification is difficult to track: practices and acts that had possessed a previously inescapable significance came to be understood as banal and ethically trivial, unworthy of positive appraisal and outraged condemnation alike. Some vanished from the historical record in ways directly proportional to their growing acceptance: biscuit eating or trouser-wearing, for instance, obviously ceased to excite the censure of newspaper writers, and by the mid-nineteenth century even the complete social boycott previously reserved to beef-eaters had been replaced by more prosaic forms of censure and banal ritual expiation.[7] Young Bengal’s slide into irrelevance in the mid-nineteenth century has been generally taken to

[7] The diminishing penalty for the infraction is tracked by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Culture and Hegemony: Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Sage, 2004), 54. Bandyopadhyay argues this is part of the “piecemeal adjustments to accommodate attitudinal change”, allowing caste as an institution to withstand the pressure of “rationalist modernity”. The dissolving import of śāstric injunction itself remains unaddressed.

indicate the social and political failure of College educated Bengalis to truly challenge the iniquities of their time. I suggest instead that a growing sense of Young Bengal as a brazen but frivolous coterie of licentious youth was directly proportional to Young Bengal's resounding success in making early nineteenth century neo-prescriptivism appear absurd: the more College educated Bengalis refused to accord any significant intellectual value to the prescriptions they contested, the more the intellectual order sustaining such propositions appeared to be irrelevant. The paradoxical outcome of Young Bengal's success is thus the following: the more absurdly obsolescent they considered the moral order they revolted against, the less meaningful the act of normative defiance they had previously prized became. So the growing philosophical irrelevance of Young Bengal's effrontery did not occur in an intellectual vacuum, but was directly consequential to the changing value of Smṛti norms their advocacy of "common sense" had successfully brought about. This transformation ensured that their own violations of the normative order would become increasingly irrelevant to the society they inhabited, insofar as the less prized a norm became, then less morally significant its contestation would inevitably be.

Some of the clearest evidence that Young Bengal's irrelevance was produced by its success in denouncing the moral order of dharmaśāstra can be evinced from a debate on the moral significance of beef-eating carried out on the pages of Calcutta's new liberal periodical, *The Reformer*. In the June 1842 issue an anonymous correspondent who signed himself as "X" argued that the ethical transformation of Bengalis into truly moral subjects could not happen by way of instruction alone, but needed to be supplemented by the adoption of a new diet centered on the consumption of beef. Mr. X argued – in the radical manner associated with Young Bengal radicals – that moral courage was consequent to meat-eating and that a general turn to steak would help overcome the absurd order of interdictions present in the "śāstra" that he understood

as the “main obstacle to our progress” (*āmāradigera unnatira prati ihāo pradhāna pratibandhaka*). X concluded by arguing that breaking with an obsolete normative order was essential if Bengalis were to become truly moral, and beef-eating was the only way to free Indians from the shackles of superstition and prejudice.[8]

It is easy to see that Mr. X’s were not substantively different from arguments advanced by Krişṇamohan Bandyopādhyāẏa’s 1831 play *The Persecuted* or by the 1832 issue of the *Calcutta Literary Gazette*. What was unprecedented in the debate that followed his announcement was that the beefeater’s enjoinment to violate dietary norms and turn to beef was quickly contested by another College-educated respondent who denied any connection between moral transformation and gastronomic transgression. This critic – who only announced himself as “Reader” (*ekjan pāṭhak*) –argued eating had nothing to do with the moral capacity of individuals: north Indian soldiers who ate only dal and ruṭi had shown tremendous courage in the British India’s ongoing war with the Afghans.[9] If anything, Mr. Reader argued, the moral significance of eating steak was doubted even in Europe and America, in so far as Thomas Tryon’s (1634-1703) *The Way to Health, Long Life and Happiness* (cited in the rebuttal as “the book by the author, Tryon”)[10] had influentially proposed that the countenancing of animal pain implicit in the meat-eating was in itself due to an unnatural and execrable failure of mankind’s own moral capacities. Mr. Reader concluded by arguing that whether beef-eating was moral or not was an ultimately unresolvable question, but added that medical specialists nonetheless objected to meaty diets in hot climates. In other words, by 1842 the pages of the radical

[8] “Bāṇgālidigera Śakti o Sāhasārthe Māṃsa Bhakkhaṇera Praẏojana” (The Utility of Eating Meat for the strength and courage of the Bengalis”) in *Reformer*, Vol.1 No.3 (June 1842) cited in Binoy Ghosh (ed.) *Sāmaẏikapatre Bāṃlāra Samājcitra*, (Kolkata: Papirus, Vol. 6), 142-144.
[9] “Māṃsāhārer Bishaẏa” (“On the Subject of Meat Eating”) in *Reformer* Vol.1 No.5 (July 1842) cited in Ghosha, Sāmaẏikapatre Bāṃlāra Samājcitra, 151-154.
[10] “*Triẏan nāmak kana granthakār*”, 152.

Reformer could offer readers a new evaluation of Young Bengal's most notorious transgression: no longer virtuously defiant, the turn to steak was ethically dubious and unhealthy.

What is key in these arguments is that the anonymous Mr. Reader made no mention of the śāstra, and so was in no way defending the order of injunctions and prohibitions the neo-prescriptivists had sought to uphold a decade earlier. Yet the argument advanced against beef-eating and for vegetarianism nevertheless robbed gastronomic transgression and the subversion of dietary rules of any intrinsic ethical significance, and reconstituted – albeit according to a new, completely different philosophical logic – the abstention from meat-eating as an ethically meaningful act. Revaluating the prohibition of meat in general and beef in particular as a virtuous abstention was possible only by way of the most curious reversal of roles: philosophically speaking, the new apostle of vegetarianism – Mr. Reader – was willing to go one step further than the apologist of steaks, Mr. X, in the disavowal of śāstra.

If Young Bengal radicals had prized transgressive defiance to śāstric norms as intrinsically moral, their up and coming critics took śāstric norms and their injunctions as entirely irrelevant to the question of appraising the ethical content of an act, and so their arguments regarding the morality or immorality of any given act made no reference to śāstra whatsoever, implicitly holding that the formulation of moral judgements would be an operation entirely independent from whatever injunctions the normative order of śāstra offered on the question. Mr. X and other advocates of beefsteaks had of course never been able to take such a position: while they had been the first to propose that the normative horizon of śāstra was absurd, they had necessarily attributed to it a kind or normative significance "in reverse" by way of the ascription of positive moral meaning to the violation of its rules. Matters had now come full circle: if śāstric norms were irrelevant in determining the moral content of a given act, it was not

just rule-following that lacked justification, but transgressive action too. In other words, the more the śāstra appeared absurd or irrelevant, the more meaningless Young Bengal's dedication to its violation became. By the mid-nineteenth century growing numbers of College-educated Bengalis started dismissing the value of Young Bengal's ostentatious acts of rebellion and openly discounting the philosophical significance of their transgressions, refusing to acknowledge the positive value of their effrontery and describing their action as both ethically insubstantial and at worst grotesquely imitative.

The newspaper editor Girish Chunder Ghose protested the developing caricature of Young Bengals as "blustering fellows (…) eating beefsteaks with you at your table and drinking to your health and now and perhaps then making amour to your wife or daughter".[11] Ghose insisted that those who "have read Bentham and Smith" and "who understand that the progress of improvement cannot be stopped" could not be confused with the grossly licentious, but in 1862 admitted that "Young Bengal is now a term of derision", and that the movement was merely synonymous with meaningless rule breaking.[12] Others went further: in the 1860 play *Ekei ki bole sabhyatā* ("Is this what we call Civilization?") Micheal Madhusudhan Datta, likely the foremost Bengali poet of his generation and an unstinting admirer of Byron, offered an enduringly biting representation of Young Bengal gatherings as assemblies where license masqueraded as liberty and craven imitation as freedom.[13] The reformer Keshab Chunder Sen, in a speech that was taken to herald the movement's end – "Young Bengal, this is for you" – argued that whereas Young Bengal had liberated Kolkata "from the galling yoke of Brahmanical

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[11] "Young Bengal" in *Calcutta Monthly Review,* May 1858. Reprinted in M.M. Ghosh, *The Writings of Grish Chunder Ghose,* ed. Ghosh, M.M., (Kolkata: The Daily Indian News Press, 1912), 120.
[12] "Vices of Young Bengal" in *Hindoo Patriot*, 5 December 1860 in Binoy Ghosh, *Selections from English Periodicals of 19th Century Bengal, Vol. V 1858-1860 Hindoo Patriot,* (Kolkata: Papyrus, 1980), 282.
[13] For convincing reading see Andrew Sartori, "Emancipation as Heteronomy: the crisis of liberalism in later nineteenth century Bengal" in *Journal of Historical Sociology* 17, No. 1 (January 2004): 56-86.

priesthood", it had precipitated the young in a world of ethical anomie: "In flinging away the shackles of corrupt doctrines and institutions", Sen argued "you scattered to the winds the holy bonds of morality".[14]

3.3 Unanticipated Affinities: Vedāntic Self-Knowledge and Colonial "Education"

As śāstric prescriptivism and Byronic defiance, locked in mortal embrace, slid into irrelevance, conversion to Christianity too began to lose its plausibility as a solution to Hinduism's alleged immoral unreasonableness. The Presbyterian missionary Alexander Duff had insisted that tearing down the absurdities of "Bramincraft" would invariably lead Indians to Christianity. Missionary papers had followed his lead, amplifying and expanding Young Bengal's campaigns against the moral order of caste and their depiction of Hinduism as a creed of duping priests and duped devotees. In fact, the exhortation to College graduates to supplement the truth of philosophy with conversion to Christianity became something of a mantra in those years: "Let our readers, who are generally of the studious classes", the Presbyterian-run magazine *The Telescope* wrote in 1841, "and who are imbued with the spirit of the inductive philosophy as to be able to judge systems by actually testing them […] rise up" and declare on "whose side bigotry lies" and on whose side "truth" is to be found, for "we fear not to make them our judges".[15]

But the missionary decision to gloss over the doctrinal and theological centrality of Christianity's "mysteries of faith" in order to promote a religion that could be one with an Enlightenment "religion of reason" had effectively subjected Christianity to a litmus test it could

[14] Sen, Keshub Chunder Sen, "Young Bengal: This is for You" in Keshub Chunder Sen, *Keshub Chunder Sen's Essays: Theological and Ethical,* part II, (Kolkata: The Brahmo Samaj, 1892), 18. The text was originally published as a pamphlet in June 1860.
[15] "The suitableness of Christianity to become the Universal Religion" in *The Telescope,* February 15, 1841 No. 12, 183.

not pass. In late 1843 the *Saṃbād prabhākar*– Kolkata's first Bengali daily – answered the *Telescope's* challenge by reviewing whether Christianity was really "conformable with reason" or if the two were destined to separate as if oil and water.[16] The *Prabhākar* found the equivalences wanting on at least four counts: first, Christianity was internally inconsistent, in so far as missionaries claimed it was a Monotheistic religion but Trinitarian dogma was an essentially polytheistic proposition; secondly, its scriptures were mutually contradictory, for the Gospel of Luke and Matthew offered inconsistent genealogies of Christ; third, its truths relied for proof on inadmissible evidence, such as dreams and visions, and fourth and finally, its theology was premised on absurd and unreasonable doctrines, such as the virgin birth of Jesus.[17] Though the *Calcutta Christian Advocate* protested that Christianity had been slandered by a "mind diseased […] by skeptical propensity" Duff's religious apologetics were now increasingly regarded as implausible: in so far as missionaries had presented Christianity as an enlightened alternative to the purported absurdities of Hinduism, critics only needed to underscore the inconsistencies between Christianity and reason to effectively refute the facile, instrumental correspondence of the two. In fact, the *Saṃbād Prabhākar*'s polemic with the *Calcutta Christian Advocate* inaugurated a growing body of skeptical, polemical literature devoted to exposing Christianity's absurdities, and its example would put missionaries on the defensive for decades.[18]

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[16] The first Bengali to argue the inadequacy of the equivalence between Christianity and reason had been Rammohun Roy, in a series of English tracts penned while disputing with the Baptists. See especially Rammohun Roy. *A dialogue between a missionary and three converts* (no date given) in Kalidas Nag & Debjyoti Burman (eds.) *The English works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* vol. IV, e (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1947), 74-80. Following Roy's departure (1830) and death (1833) their influence seems to have been minimal, especially when compared to the success of Duff's preaching.

[17] "Reply to the Objections of the Prabhakar's Correspondent" in *Calcutta Christian Advocate*, 23 December 1843.

[18] The most influential was undoubtedly the 1845 anti-Christian polemical tract "Rational Analysis of the Gospels". More details on the polemic in Muhammad Mohar Ali, *The Bengali Reaction to Christian Missionary Activities 1833-1857*, (Chittagong: Mehrub Publications, 1965), 49. Another analysis of Christianity's inconsistency with reason was published in "Sampādakiẏa", *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā*, Vol. 3 No. 20 Caitra Śaka Year 1766 [1845] and argued that it was absurd that a just God would punish the entirety of humanity for the sins of one man, that a woman would be convinced to sin, in defiance of a direct command of God, by a talking serpent, and that God the Father and God the Son could be eternally co-existent and still be father and son.

"Just as the idolatrous party had been silenced", one missionary complained, "the Deist band sprung up in strength to prove active enemies. One head of the hydra had been vanquished, only to give place to another and stronger one".[19]

The facile equivalence of Christianity and reason suffered further in April 1845 when Umeśacandra Sarkār, the fourteen-year-old scion of a respectable family fled alongside his eleven-year-old wife to Duff's home to embrace Christianity. When the outraged father sought the return of his son and daughter-in-law through the courts, the judges decided it was lawful for adolescent husband and child bride to remain in reverend Duff's care. The *Tattvabodhinī Sabhā* ("Association of Truth-seekers") a new, eclectic association of Vedāntists, "deists" and wealthy do-gooders who met in a house off Kolkata's Chitpur road to discuss how "to abolish those iniquitous practices (kukarma) that are inconsistent with growing knowledge of the Supreme Deity, and to give advice for the purification of the mind (mana pariśuddhi) those who are engaged in said iniquity" joined other upper-caste Hindus in outrage.[20]

"What kind of understanding of religion can a fourteen year old boy and an eleven year old girl have?" Aksaya Kumar Datta, the editor of their periodical – the *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā* ("Truth-seeking Journal") – furiously argued against the court, mockingly asking the missionaries to explain "what principle of reason could they have made use of in order to abandon their religion?".[21] If Duff had argued that the progress of reason would inevitably lead to Christianity, Kolkata's "deist party" argued that his conversion of unreasoning children proved Christians preferred duping those who were deficient in it. In the ensuing polemic

[19] Joseph Mullens, *Brief Memorial of the Rev. Alphone François Lacroix of the London Missionary Society,* (London: Nisbet, 1862), 363.
[20] "Sampādakīẏa" in *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā*, 1 Bhādra Śaka year 1765 [1843], Series 1 No.1.
[21] "Sampādakīẏa" in *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā* 1 Jaiṣṭha Śaka 1767 [1845], Series 3 No. 22. A discussion of the vivid impact of the event, and of Datta's article (termed a fiery piece - "tejasvī prabhanda") see Debendranath Thakur *Ātmajībanī* (Kolkata: Biśvabhāratī Granhālaẏa, 1898 [1962]), 62-25. As Tagore notes, even Young Bengal member Ramgopal Ghosh – no friend of Brahmanism – joined the protest meeting objecting to the court's decision.

another anonymous "truth-seeker" penned a long English editorial in the *Patrika,* resolutely rejecting any connection between Europe's enlightenment civilization and Christianity. "What explanation does he [Duff] give", the editorialist mockingly wondered, "of the centuries of darkness and ignorance which followed the introduction of the faith of Christ [in Europe] (…) in the age of abbacies and nunneries?", when the horrors of priestcraft were in full swing. In truth, the editorialist retorted "Europe owes (…) its present state of civilization" not to Christianity, but "to the philosophy of Bacon and his followers […] and to the spread of education".[22] In other words, as the Chitpur road Deists argued, while Christianity and Enlightenment shared a European point of origin, Bengali deists were truer heirs to Europe's enlightenment than their missionary adversaries, who, far from being recognized as apostles of a religion of reason, were dismissed as the upholders of a medieval cult Europe itself was superseding.

The rejection of Christianity as an unreasoning creed amongst Kolkata's rebellious youth was accompanied by a renewed interest in India's own philosophical and religious traditions, and between the late 1830s and the early 1840s some of Hindu College's rebellious graduates turned to Vedāntism, the Hindu creed once reinvigorated by Rammohun Roy and the most significant Indian philosophical tradition discussed in the meetings of the Chitpur road *Tattvabodhinī Sabhā* One of Hinduism's six orthodox traditions of philosophy (darśana), Vedāntism had – quite unlike its rival Nyāẏa– possessed little in the way of an autonomous tradition of philosophical scholarship in precolonial Bengal, though key Vedāntic concepts had undoubtedly played an outsized role in the theological development of Gauḍiẏa Vaiṣṇavism, one of the region's key devotional traditions.[23] It was only in colonial Kolkata that Rammohun Roy's quest for an

[22] "Sampādakīẏa" in *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā,* 1 Aśvin Śaka year 1767 [1845] Series 3 No.26

[23] There is a vast literature on the incorporation of Vedantic philosophy in Early modern Gauḍiẏa Vaiṣṇavism, and the key figures responsible for it, especially Jīva Gosvamī (1511-1608) and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa (c.1700-1793). For a summary, Sudhindra Chandra Chakravarti, *Philosophical Foundations of Bengali Vaiṣṇavism: a critical*

original “Vedic religion” had severed once and for all the umbilical cord tying Vedāntism to Vaiṣṇavism, and had ensured Vedānta’s re-eemergence as a philosophically independent proposition, antagonistic both to Vaiṣṇavite devotionalism and to the deontic prescriptivism affirmed by Bengal’s Naiyāyikas. Roy’s insistence that Bengalis ought to swap the purportedly dubious and “idolatrous” authority of assorted Dharmaśāstras, Puranas and Gods for the indubitable authority of the Vedas and Upanishads – the ancient texts that constitute the key archive of Vedāntic philosophy – had famously ignited a bitter controversy amongst Hindus as to what kinds of action were truly moral. But little had come of it, and after his departure and death critics had come to believe that “the boasted reformation of Rammohun Roy” had ultimately come to naught.[24]

It was not so. In the late 1830s, Paṇḍit Bidyābāgīś, Rammohun’s successor at the helm of the Brāhma Samāj, began sponsoring an enormously consequential equivalence between whiggish “moral and mental philosophy” and Vedāntic philosophy. At the June 1839 inauguration of a new Bengali school designed to supplement the English curriculum of the Hindu College – the “Hindu College pāṭhaśālā” – paṇḍit Bidyābāgīśa celebrated the fact that Bengalis and Britons alike believed that “the purpose of knowledge (*bidyā*) was to bring about the purification (*saṃskāra*) of the mind (*antaḥakaraṇera*)” and the ethical transformation of

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exposition (Kolkata: Academic Publishers), 1969. As a result of this entanglements, the defenders of Bengal’s dominant philosophical school, the Naẏaẏikas – who were invariably stalwart epistemological realists, and so opposed to Veḍantism –had frequently found themselves arguing against Vaiṣṇavite intellectuals committed to recognizably Vedāntic positions such as the unreality of the world and the need for the soul’s liberation through the esoteric pursuit of Self-knowledge (*jñanayoga*). The most extensive reconstruction of the debates opposing the two schools in early modern Bengal was undertaken by Asutosh Bhattacharya, *Studies in post-Saṃskara dialectics* (Kolkata: University of Calcutta), 1936. See also Micheal Williams “Mādhava Vedānta at the turn of the Early Modern Period: Vyāsatīrtha and the Navyā-Naiyāyikas” in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, Vol. 18 No. 2, (August 2014): 119-120 and Sanjukta Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism: the philosophy of Madhūsudana Sarasvatī* (Abindgon: Routledge, 2006).

[24] Howard Malcom, *Travels in South-Eastern Asia embracing Hindustan, Malaya, Siam and China with notices of numerous missionary stations and a full account of the Burman empire* (London: Charles Tilt, 1839 Vol. 2), 31-33. Howard Malcolm visited Kolkata between 1835 and 1836.

learners.[25] This was not a trite statement: imagining that Vedāntism's prizing of ethically transformative Self-knowledge and the colonial quest for India's moral and pedagogical "improvement" could be understood as equivalent projects was in many ways a daring proposition, especially because only a handful of years earlier Macaulay – the infamous president of the Committee of Public Instruction – had condescendingly dismissed the entirety of India's intellectual traditions as irrelevant to India's moral improvement.

Bidyābāgīś even proposed that in so far as any "vernacular" (*bhāṣā*) was *only* a conveyance (*bāhaksvarūpa*) for the knowledge necessary to ethical transformation, the question of mediums of instruction was ultimately just one of linguistic convenience, and English ought to be understood as not possessing any real moral advantage over Bengali. "Any vernacular (…) capable of occasioning such purification without throwing up impediments may in fact be a source of knowing for the people" the paṇḍit explained to the notables present at the ceremony.[26] The Committee of Public Instruction's decision to applaud and publish such a text marked a remarkable change of policy: only a few years earlier arguments regarding the medium of instruction had divided the administration into competing factions of Orientalists and Anglicists, with the former supporting conservative prescriptivism and the latter advocating cultural assimilation as the only way to ensure India's moral regeneration. Now a paṇḍit, craftily subverting Macaulay's assumption that anglicization was necessary for India's moral

[25] Some confusion may be occasioned by the fact that a pathaśāla is in contemporary Bengal invariably a primary school. In truth, the new Hindu College pāṭhaśālā was – at birth – very much a parallel institution to the Hindu College itself. As Sen's 1834 English-Bengali dictionary shows, early nineteenth century Bengalis understood by the term *pāṭhaśālā* – originally a Sanskrit compound signifying a room or building dedicated to study –any kind of establishment dedicated to learning, such as an "academy" or a "college". Rajiblocana Mukhopādhyaẏa *Mahārāja Kṛṣṇacandrarāẏacaritraṃ* shows that in eighteenth century Nadiẏa for instance the king "had many *pāṭhaśālā*s built" so that "renowned scholars (*pradhān paṇḍiterā*) could teach therein and scholars from all lands (*nānā deśiẏa jñaṇabāna loka*) would come to either give or receive instruction". See Rajiblocana Mukhopādhyaẏa,, *Mahārāja Kṛṣṇacandrarāẏacaritraṃ* (Kolkata, 1811), 32.

[26] Rāmacāndra Bidyābāgīśa, *Speech given at the inauguration of the new Hindu College pathshala,* (Kolkata, 1840), 3.

transformation, affirmed that the pursuit of enlightenment could coincide with the goals of Bengali Vedāntism.

Bidyābagiś' efforts paid off, and in 1841 the Board of Managers of the College and the Committee of Public Instruction helped Bidyābagiś offer a "course on moral philosophy in classical Bengalee" at the new Hindu College pāṭhaśālā.[27] When the *Bengal Hurkaru* published a translation and summary of the paṇḍit's first lecture, the ever-grumbling Humean philosopher, David Drummond, complained that the Indian philosopher took for granted "the existence of a *moral sense of good and evil* as the great distinction between the brute creation and the rational being".[28] Bidyābagiś's turn to moral sense theory certainly matched the aims of the Committee of Public Instruction: that year Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* had been finally enshrined as the required textbook for the new course in "moral and mental philosophy" (though copies would only be distributed in 1843). Yet the paṇḍit's turn to moral sense theory was more than merely derivative: in so far as Bidyābagiś was more learned in Upanishadic and Śāstric lore than in British "moral and mental philosophy", his lecture series – eventually published as a series of incomplete pamphlets under the title *Nītidarśana* ("Moral philosophy") – did not so much translate British philosophical propositions for a Bengali audience as they expand the range of doctrinally-enjoined learning to include and assimilate British moral philosophy.

To his Bengali audiences Bidyābāgīśa explained that all universally extant "Vidyā" – a term we may loosely translate as a true, disciplinary knowledge – was already authoritatively held (by reputed sources – he cited the Viṣnupurāṇa) as being contained in the four Vedas, their six "limbs" (or Vedaṇgas), and another eight canonical disciplines (one of which was the Vedānta) for a grand total of eighteen established, doctrinally-sanctioned, vidyās. Bidyābāgīśa

[27] Rāmcāndra Bidyābāgīśa, *Nītidarśana*, (Kolkata: Hindu Kālej, 1841), 2-7.
[28] "Ethical Lecture at the College Pathshala", February 6-13 *The Weekly Examiner and Literary Register*, 1841.

proceeded to argue that the universal applicability of the traditional schema of eighteen vidyās meant that new knowledge received from abroad was always already Vedically sanctioned, and that "failing to pay attention to the study of new forms of knowledge and following only already established forms of knowledge" ultimately betrayed a lack of respect for the Vedic authorization all true knowledge possessed, and was "contrary to reason" (*yukti biruddha haẏ*).

3.4 the Authority of the Intuitive Heart

Bidyābāgīśa's exhortations to pay attention to new knowledge were taken up by the *Patrikā*, the deist periodical whose popularity was ensured by its bitter, successful polemic with the Christian missionaries. Unsurprisingly, few disciplines were as significant as "moral and mental philosophy" to the new publication. Starting in January 1847 the *Patrika* began accompanying editions and translations of the Upaniṣad with chapters from Thomas Brown's (1778-1820) posthumous and enormously influential *Lectures on the Philosophy of Mind.* [29] Brown, an unorthodox common-sense philosopher, had produced an interpretation of Scottish philosophy that critics noted was premised "not [on] a misconception (…) but on an absolute reversal" of Reid's philosophy, and he famously refused to entertain that the mind could be explained with reference to discreet faculties, for it "is simple, and admits of no integral separation of parts".[30]

For Bengalis schooled in Smithian sympathy, Thomas Brown's writings had a lot to offer: as part of his singular philosophical project, Brown had revised some of the central themes

[29] The serialization commences in *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā,* No. 42 (Magh 1768 [January 1847]) and continues in No. 44 (Caitra 1768) No. 46 (Jaiṣṭha 1769) No. 47 (Asaḍh 1769) No. 48 (Śraban 1769) No. 50 (Aśvin 1769) No.52 (Agrāhaẏana 1769) No.54 (Magha 1769) and No. 55 (Phalgun 1769). This is the first work by a European philosopher ever to be serialized in an Indian periodical.

[30] By Brown's foremost critic, William Hamilton, in "Philosophy of Perception: Reid and Brown," *Edinburgh Review* No. 52 (1830). The summary of Brown's critique of faculties is drawn from his biographer, the Presbyterian clergyman David Welsh. See David Welsh, *Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Brown, M.D. Late Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: W. & C. Tait, 1825), 203.

of Scottish moral intuitionism, elaborating what Thomas Dixon has helpfully termed a "theory of ethical emotivism" and proposing that mankind's capacity for virtue rested on an emotional capacity to be moved by iniquity and be affected by the sight of wrong.[31] Reprising what were broadly Smithian themes, Brown had argued that "moral judgement (…) was effectively some kind of emotion" and had proposed that "to say that an action excites in us this *feeling* and to say is that it appears to us right, virtuous and conformable to duty are in effect to say the same thing".[32] Brown's arguments conceded that different people would feel differently about whether an act was virtuous or not, and that it may appear as if "the universality of virtue" was made by his philosophy to be merely "coextensive with the [number of] minds in which the emotions arise", but in so far as "the constitution of minds" of all humanity was the same he also proposed that "all mankind is (…) supposed by us at every moment to feel precisely the same emotions".[33]

Brown's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Mind* and their emotional theory of moral universality were serialized in the *Patrika* precisely as the enquirers after truth wondered about the status of Veda and Vedanta vis-à-vis moral knowing. Rammohun Roy and paṇḍit Bidyābāgīśa had both insisted on a return to Vedic foundationalism, but to many of the Chitpur road deists this seemed an increasingly implausible proposition. The 1885 biography of Aksay Kumar Datta noted that the editor of the *Patrikā* – the leading figure in the chastisement of missionary unreasoning – "was completely broken-hearted" (*sarbbadā bhagnicitta*) because the "Vedaśāstra was treated (…) as directly revealed by God (*sākṣāt Īśvar-praṇīta*) and therefore infallible (*abhrānta*)" by the group's leader, Debendranath. Datta considered it especially

[31] Thomas Dixon, "Revolting against Reid: The Philosophy of Thomas Brown" in Gordon Graham (ed.) *Scottish Philosophy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 40. See also for a harsh judgment, see Jerome Borges Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 78-84.
[32] Thomas Brown, *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind* Vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Grigg, 1824), 119.
[33] Brown, *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind* Vol. 3, 122.

humiliating that texts that were “indicative of the lack of civilization (*asabhyatā*) and the commanding ignorance (*ajñān-prabhāb*) of ancient men” could be “taken to be God’s own (…) in the nineteenth century, which is to say in an age of enlightenment (*jñānojjbalita samaẏe*)”. Though Datta protested, Debendranath Tagore purportedly “expressed complete devotion to the Vedas and held them up as infallible scripture (*abhrānta śāstra*) …. Though Aksaybabu tried with criticism (*tarka*), with logic (*yukti*), and with science (*bijñān*) to make him understand, Debendranath babu could not give up on the Vedas, for this was a deeply entrenched habit (*sudriṛa saṃskārabaśataḥ*).” [34]

In truth, the rift between the two intellectuals was not so pronounced. Debendranath himself appears to have been profoundly ambivalent about regarding scripture as an ultimate source of normative authorization, even as early as the 1840s. In an 1864 speech he admitted that he had felt a time would come when the “learned would stop admitting that the Vedic tradition was revealed (*āptabākya baliẏā nā manibe*)” for its great many “faults” had become obvious.[35] In his 1898 autobiography he admitted that his expectation that the Upaniśāds could supply a “foundation” (*bhittibūmike*) for thought fell to pieces almost as soon as the Truth-seekers’ society was set up.[36] For a start, he felt there was no defined Upaniśādic textual corpus to turn to: after he had dispatched a group of Brahmin scholars to Benares in 1845, he came to know that instead of sixteen Upaniṣads there were at least one-hundred-and-forty-seven, and no single reliable text for any of them could be established.[37] The venerable tradition of Vedāntic philosophy dedicated to making sense of the cryptic, gnostic hymns appeared to him unhelpful,

[34] Mahendranātha Rāẏa, *Śriyukta Bābu Akhṣaẏakumār Datter Jīban-Brittānta*, (Kolkata: Nutan Saṃskrita Yantra, 1885), 292.
[35] Debendranāth Thākur, *Brahmadharmmaḥ* (Kolkata: Brahma Miśan Press, 1949 [1975]) 222-223
[36] Debendranāth Thākur *Ātmajībanī* (Kolkata: Biśvabhāratī Granhālaẏa, 1898 [1962]) 122-123.
[37]Thākur, *Ātmajībanī,* 124.

and Vedānta as a whole was "like a thorny bush" (*kanṭāraṇya*). Ultimately, he noted, his hope to guarantee a scriptural basis in Indic tradition for enlightenment deism and moral sense theory was "built on nothing but sand (*bālukāmaẏa*)".

Neither Debendranath Tagore nor Akshay Kumar Datta were however skeptical about the ability of humans to figure out moral truth. Debendranath recalled that even as he was beset with doubt, he felt he could discover a true "foundation" (*paṭṭabhūmi*) for moral knowing in the workings of "the pure heart, filled with the light of intuitive knowledge" (*ātmapratyaẏa-siddha-jñanojjbalita biśuddha hṛdaẏa)*, an organ that was available to all humans, at all times, universally. In 1848, aided by fellow truth-seekers Rajnarayan Basu and Akshay Kumar Datta, Tagore began the inspired dictation of a volume of sentences similar to Upaniṣadic utterances in order to found a new, purified "dharma" that could be seen as a religion of the heart.[38] Further expansions of the project saw the collections of Upaniṣadic lines and lines from other venerable authorities that were conformable to the heart's capacity for intuited moral knowledge. The end result was an enormously influential multivolume endeavor, the *Braḥmadharma grantha*, which would become a bible for Bengal's new religion of "moral feeling".

The Brahmo historian Ajitkumār Cakrabartī (1886-1918) noted in 1916 that Debendranath Tagore creatively linked the esoteric Sanskrit term *ātmapratyaẏa* (found in the 7th line of the *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad*, a favorite text of Debendranath) with British "intuition" and with related theories of moral feeling, though he never argued that one term translated the other

[38] Thakur, *Ātmajībanī,* 131-139 discusses the process. See also Arun Kolay *Rājanārāẏaṇa Basu: Jībana o Sāhitya,* (Kolkata: Jijñāsā, 1975), 211-214. The collaboration of Aksay Kumar Datta was noted by Rajnarayan Basu, but is absent in other texts. "The first part of elucidations was written by the Maharishi [Debendranath], Aksayabābu and me" [Prathama bhāger tātparya maharishi, akhaẏabābu o āmar dbārā likhita haẏa]. For the decision to collect the Upaniṣadic sources that were truth see Thakur, *Brahmadharmmaḥ*, 224.

isometrically.[39] Debendranath's turn to moral intuition was enormously consequential, and as his philosophical disciples became more and more of a religious school, British intuitionists even emerged as a kind of doctrinal corpus. In 1859 Tagore set up – alongside other devotees – a new educational institution meant to be free of the influence and control of reformist rivals with whom his disagreements remained unresolved. It would be a matter of special pride for the students of the newly established "Brāhma Bidyālaẏa" that they sat an exam modelled on the entrance exams for the "mental philosophy and morality" course at Calcutta University, and a matter of even greater pride that "Brahmo" students at Calcutta University would invariably place above all others in "mental philosophy".[40] Keshab Chandra Sen, Debendranath's close associate and a later rival was tasked with teaching the course in the "philosophy of mind" at the new Bidyālaẏa. In later years he would argue that the "Brahma Dharma" he preached was the religion of "moral feeling itself", and argue that "all philosophy is but a striving after Intuition, and the history of philosophy unmistakably proves that mental science is gradually coming round to the doctrine of the unity of common sense". [41]

A wide range of philosophical readings never dislodged the centrality of "the pure heart, filled with the light of intuitive knowledge" as the key source to true knowing. In the summer of 1858 Tagore wrote to his close friend, Rajnarayan Basu, that he was especially struck by Kant's argument that "Man's natural gifts (…) and especially *the moral law in him*, stretch so far

[39] Ajītkumar Cakrabartī, *Maharsi Debendranātha Thākura,* (Allahabad: Indian Press, 1916), 664. Cakrabartī is also careful to point out that ātmapratyaẏa and "intuition" are ultimately different concepts, even when insisting on their equivalence for propositional purposes. See pp.649-663 for a discussion of these terms and concepts.
[40] Cakrabartī, *Maharsi Debendranātha Ṭhākura*, 261. The course in philosophy at the University of Calcutta was essentially a course in Scottish common sense. See C.H. Tawney "Studies of the Calcutta University" in *Calcutta Review,* Vol. LXXXII (1865): 297-317 "It is perhaps a matter of congratulations that the University of Calcutta have adopted the philosophy or what is called the Scotch school, which was founded by Reid". The 1st and 2nd years studied Abercrombie's *On the Intellectual Powers and Moral Feelings,* the advanced classes (3 and 4th yrs) George Payne's1828 *Elements of Mental Philosophy* and Francis Wayland's 1835 *Elements of Moral Science.*
[41] K.C. Sen, "The Brahmo Somaj Vindicated – Speech delivered on 18 April 1863" in K.C. Sen, *The Brahmo Samaj: Keshub Chunder Sen's Lectures in India,* Vol. 2, (Kolkata: Brahmo Tract Society, 1900).

beyond all mere earthly utility and advantage, that he feels himself bound to prize the mere consciousness of probity apart from all advantageous consequences (…) [and so] is conscious of an inward call to constitute himself by his conduct in the world, without regard to mere sublunary interests, as the citizen of a better world".[42] But Kantian practical reason did ultimately little to dislodge the place of intuition as the source of mankind's "inner moral law". In a new, influential 1860 collection of anecdotes, *Brāḥma-dharmmer mat o biśvās* ("Doctrine and Beliefs of the Brahma Dharma") consciousness of right and wrong was again discussed primarily by way of a knowledge or feeling that was prior to reason – this time Tagore made use of an esoteric term with a long, prior theological history – "sahaja jñān".[43]

Jilted missionary critics throughout the 1860s argued that "the present doctrine of intuition" Tagore and his followers had turned to was not inspired by the heart, but rather "was adopted not merely subsequently too, but also in consequence of their perusal of these books which they did not previously possess" – and especially those of Scottish philosophers and European deists.[44] But for reformers, the complaints of the missionaries only demonstrated that the philosophical propositions they argued were shared between all those who were capable of true moral knowing, be it in India or in Europe. That the missionaries themselves could not see this surely proved only the dullness of their capacity for true moral feeling. The Presbyterian John Murdoch recalled with particular horror that in the 1850s and 1860s whenever a missionary

[42] Thākur, *Patrābalī,* (Kolkata: Monoranjan Banerjee from the Hitabadi Library, 1909). Letter No. 18 (12 Śrābaṇ, 1750 Śaka era), 19-20. The citation of Kant is in English in the letter.
[43] The literature on the shifting terminology from "ātmapratyaẏa" to "sahaja jnana" is vast. For the most recent interventions see Vera Höke "Approaching the *rasa-lila* of "great men": interlinking Western intuitive theologues with the traditions of Bengal in the Brahmo Samaj" in *Religion,* Vol. 45 No.3 451-476 and Abhishek Ghosh, "Innate Intuition: an intellectual History of the Sahaja-jñāna and Sahaja Samādhi in Brahmoism and Modern Vaiṣṇavism" in *Religions,* Vol. 10 No. 6 (2019).
[44] Samuel Dyson, *Brahmic Intuition* (Kolkata: Baptist Mission Press, 1867), 12.

started preaching, "a schoolboy would sometimes point his finger towards him, and think he had settled him by simply saying – Intuition!".[45]

3.5 Phrenological Philosophy and the Dharmic Brain

Debendranath Tagore's localization of moral authority in the intuitive heart found its foremost and most determined philosophical adversary much closer to home –within the Society of Truth-Seekers itself. The difference was between: "where I looked for", Debendranath memorably quipped in an 1852 polemical pamphlet, and "where he looked for". "I sought to understand my connection with the Creator (*āmi khujitechi, īsvarer sahit āmār ki sambhandha*), while he instead was searching in *The constitution of man according to external objects,* and this was like the difference between heaven and earth".[46] The unbridgeable gulf, in other words, related to the source of moral knowing: for Tagore, this the intuitive knowledge buried in the heart, and for Datta – according to his adversary – the now-forgotten phrenological treatise of the same name, penned by George Combe's in 1825.[47]

Why Aksay Kumar Datta's began serializing – to Debendranath's chagrin – a translation of George Combe's treatise in the *Tattvabodhinī Patrika*, and why he felt turning to phrenological theory in order to best "understand the distinction between what is moral and what

[45]John Murdoch, *The Brahma Samaj and Other Eclectic Systems of Religion in India,* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1893), 27.

[46] The quotation (from Tagore's 1852 pamphlet Ātmatattvabidyā) is well-known, see a discussion of it in Binoy Ghosh, *Bidyāsāgara o Bāṅālī samāja* (Kolkata: Bīkshaṇa, Vol. 2, 1958), 274. A recent discussion of the controversy offered by Andrew Sartori misses the fact that the "undisguised reference to one of Dutt's most-read works" does not in fact reference an original work of Datta's, but George Combe's Phrenological treatise, which Datta abridged, translated and issued monthly in the *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā* under a Bengali rendition of its English title. The absence of any reference to phrenology in his discussion of Datta's work (or of "intuition" vis-a-vis Debendranath) makes for a confusing recapitulation of the debate. Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 116. For the various stages of Datta and Tagore's polemics see Satīścandra Cakrabartī,"The years 1853-1855 and the differences in outlook and opinion between Debendranath and Akshaykumar Datta and others (1853-1855 Sāle Akhaẏakumāra Datta Prabhritir sahita Debendranather Matera o Bhābera Pārthakya)" in appendix to Thākur, *Ātmajībanī,* 411-414 or the more favorable account of Datta's position in Muhammad Sāiphul Islām, *Akshaẏakumāra Datta o Uniśa Śatakera Bāṃlā,* (Dhaka: Bāṃlādeśa Eśiẏāṭik Sosaiṭi, 2009), 137-140.

[47] James Poskett, *Materials of the Mind: Phrenology, Race and the Global History of Science,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 2.

is not moral" will be explained further on.[48] But the gulf between phrenology and moral intuitionism was not as broad as Debendranath hoped to make it seem. Theories of moral sentiment, it should not be forgotten, had emerged in a productive entanglement with the nascent neurophysiological propositions of anatomists and medical professionals of all sorts and stripes. Joanna Bourke has for instance noted that Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* extensively repurposed Robert Whytt's (1714-1766) study of the workings of "sympathy" – a term the Scottish physician employed to describe the response to pain he observed in the tensing of stimulated nerves – to describe a human prerational responsiveness to the suffering of others.[49] Similar creative borrowings were common amongst later "common-sense" Scottish philosophers, who followed in Reid's hope to give more "power to the mind in the framing of its ideas and impressions" than Hume and Locke had. John Wright and Maurizio Maione have even proposed that Reid's two essays on the *Active and Intellectual Powers of the Mind* – on the reading list in the Hindu College – effectively offered a "naturalization of the mind" and translated into "cognitive terms" the theories of sympathetic nervous communications developing by Whytt and others at the Edinburgh Medical School.[50]

Though Reid's advocacy of a philosophy dedicated to "the powers, faculties and operations of the mind" never amounted to a call to reduce cognition to a mere nervous process, Scottish common-sense philosophers always recognized that the brain and the nervous system constituted the "seat" of the mind, and often conceded that the study of humans as minded beings

[48] The translation was eventually collected and published as a single volume. See Aksay Kumar Datta, *Bāhyabastura Sahita Mānaba Prakritir Sambhanda Bicāra* ["The Constitution of Man According to External Objects"] Kolkata: Sanskrit Press [1850] 1869.
[49] Joanna Bourke, "Pain, Sympathy and the Medical Encounter between the mid-eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries" in *Historical Research,* 85 No. 225 (2012): 430-452.
[50] Maurizio Maione, "I filosofi Scozzesi e il cervello" in Luigi Turco (ed.) *Filosofia, Scienza e Politica nel Settecento Britannico* (Il Poligrafo: Padova, 2003), 430. See also John P. Wright. "Metaphysics and Physiology: Mind, Body and Animal Economy in Eighteenth Century Scotland" in Micheal Alexander Stewart (ed.) *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

had to be key to philosophy. Few were as insistent on the connection as Thomas Brown, who had argued that the task of the new "philosophy of mind" was the study of "all those mental phenomena that constitute our sensations and all other phenomena of the mind" by way of examination of "the brain and the various nerves of sense in continuity with it (…) considered as forming one great organ" and that the sensations of the mind invariably corresponded to the "affections of the nervous system".[51]

In the same decades that common sense philosophers such as Reid, Stewart and Brown argued with each other on the exact faculties and powers the mind possessed, two eccentric German anatomists – Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828) and Johann Kaspar Spurzheim (1776-1832) – had turned to the osteological study of skulls and the anatomical inspection of brains in order to splice up human understanding into a plurality of neatly separated faculties, distributed across the brain's various lobes and folds.[52] Before packed lecture halls in Europe and Britain Gall and Spurzheim had argued that they had finally solved a number of fundamental questions regarding the structure of and working of cognition by way of a new method of cranial "observation" of their own devising. The new science they proposed – termed "phrenology" on the basis of a Greek-inspired neologism – would allegedly recognize mental aptitudes, capacities and inclinations by way of the folds of a given brain, or, in its stead, the reliefs and peculiarities of a specific skull. Phrenology, as is well known, was immediately rejected by the Scotch: Spurzheim was famously slighted by Dugald Stewart in Edinburgh, while Thomas Brown took to the *Edinburgh Review* to rubbish the efforts of the "craniologists" as proponents of a crass

[51] Thomas Brown, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Human Mind,* (Andover: Flagg & Gould Vol. 1, 1822), 286-287.
[52] The literature on Phrenology is enormous. But see especially Robert M. Young, *Mind, Brain and Adaptation in the Nineteenth Century: cerebral localization from Gall to Ferrier*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

philosophical materialism.[53] The bitterness of the ensuing "Edinburgh debates" between philosophers, phrenologists and medical practicioners even played out across empire itself: in Kolkata a pupil of Spurzheim named Patterson argued with skeptic philosopher David Drummond in a vicious pamphleteering war in the mid-1820s.[54] Yet shared concerns with the brain and its workings ensured the possibility of a great degree of common ground.

Edinburgh-native George Combe (1788-1858), Spurzheim's most prominent British disciple, established himself as the world's foremost phrenologist by arguing in 1819 that there were "obvious correspondences" between the "philosophy of mind" and the "science of phrenology" and was widely perceived as setting a new course for phrenology, from contested anatomical practice to "new philosophy of the mind".[55]Combe argued that the efforts of the Germans physiologists had substantiated, by way of "empirical" proofs such as craniological observation, the existence of those self-same faculties and powers that his own "philosophy of mind" had already postulated. He was tendentiously reported by hagiographical biographers to have even personally won over the acrimonious Thomas Brown, and he certainly exalted the memory of the deceased Brown by arguing that, in the wake of posthumous phrenological examination, the late philosopher had possessed an extraordinary acute "faculty of causality".[56] Combe was especially devoted to linking the quest for the elusive moral sense so dear to the

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[53] The question of the exact meaning and import of the debates is beyond the scope of this chapter, but there is no exact consensus. Divergent opinions in Geoffrey N. Cantor, "The Edinburgh Phrenology Debate 1803-1828," *Annals of Science,* Vol. 32 No. 3 (1975): 195-218 and Steven Shapin, "Homo Phrenologicus" in Steven Shapin (ed.) *Natural order: Historical Studies of Scientific Culture* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979), 41-71.
[54] For a favorable review of Dr. Paterson's first lecture see "Phrenology" in *India Gazette*, 15 February 1825. For objections see David Drummond, *Objections to Phrenology: Being the substance of a series of papers communicated to the Calcutta Phrenological Society with additional notes,* (Kolkata: Samuel Smith & William Thacker & Co. 1829).
[55] See especially "Dr. Brown's Philosophy" in *The Phrenological Journal and Miscellany,* Vol. 2 (1825): 319.
[56] This would have been especially galling to Brown, who of course did not believe in faculty psychology. The largeness of his faculty of causality was noted by Combe in a lecture on Phrenology at Aberdeen delivered on 30 March 1837. See "Transactions of the Aberdeen Phrenological Society" in *The Phrenological Journal and Miscellany*, Vol. 10 (1837): 618.

Scots with the workings of the brain. In 1835-6, before Edinburgh's Philosophical Society, he delivered a year-long course in Moral Philosophy, which argued that "every act that is morally right" would proceed from the congruous workings of "the moral faculties of Benevolence, Conscientiousness and Veneration", extensively arguing for locating "in the posterior and lateral parts of the coronal region of the brain" that selfsame "moral sense" first theorized by Hutchinson and Smith and confirmed by "Reid and Stewart".[57] Of course, as Sean Dyde has noted, the argumentative thrust of Combe's propositions however invariably went much further than merely recognizing a shared set of concerns with the philosophers of mind, for they insistently advanced the case that the phrenological study of the faculties objectively proved what the metaphysicians of the mind had only been able to speculate about and effectively signaled that "the common-sense school was to be subsumed into his new science".[58]

Buttressed by the success of his moral philosophy lecture series, George Combe was proposed for Edinburgh's newly vacant professorship in Logic in the summer of 1836. His candidacy was a truly global intellectual event: in Kolkata the *India Gazette* issued a full-throated endorsement, stating that "no metaphysics could be adequately taught without (…) knowledge of the new philosophy of the mind" and that phrenology offered a "more scientific classification of the human faculties than any other system of philosophy".[59] Combe's eventual failure to secure the chair –it was secured by an inveterate adversary, the common-sense philosoper Sir William Hamilton (1788-1856) – did not compromise phrenology's popularity:

[57] This citation concerning the place of the moral faculty in the brain is from George Combe. *System of Phrenology,* (Edinburgh: MacLachlan, Stewart & John Anderson, 1840 [1845] Vol. 1), 352.
[58] Sean Dyde, "George Combe and Common Sense" in *The British Journal for the History of Science,* Vol. 48 No. 2 (2015): 252.
[59] See the enthusiastic endorsement to Combe's candidacy to the chair of moral philosophy in "Phrenology" in *Supplement to the India Gazette* 24 October 1836.

research societies mushroomed across the empire, and George Combe found himself at the heart of a network of scientific correspondence spanning the globe.[60]

In Kolkata, as James Poskett and Shruti Kapila have shown, phrenology quickly established itself as a significant discipline.[61] The reduction of intellectual and moral qualities to measurable cerebral attributes fed an incipient language of racial typologies and human hierarchies, ensuring its popularity amongst a range of British colonial administrators and medical practitioners devoted to the study of human "types". But in the late 1840s it was a group of College-educated Bengalis which played an oversized role in the discipline's resurgence in Bengal, founding the *Calcutta Phrenological Society* in 1845, printing and disseminating Combe's publications and even launching a dedicated local periodical, *The Pamphleteer*, which would collect all craniological observations undertaken in Kolkata by Combe's Bengali acolytes.

Poskett has suggested that the popularity of phrenology amongst College-educated Bengalis may be linked to their desire to find in phrenological accomplishments "a new language through which to articulate national identity" and a higher place for Bengalis in the developing racial hierarchies of empire.[62] But "reform", not race, was the watchword of the *Pamphleteer.* "We deplore moral and intellectual darkness" an article on India's phrenological future protested, "we grieve to witness the system of caste (…) we denounce barbarous custom".[63] In fact, Rādhāballabha Dāsa, the secretary of the new phrenological society, insisted in his creative

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[60] James Poskett, *Materials of the Mind: Phrenology, Race and the Global History of Science,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019) 178-190 for a detailed account of the rise of phrenology in Kolkata.
[61] Shruti Kapila "Race Matters: Orientalism and Religion, India and Beyond c.1770-1880" in *Modern Asian Studies,* Vol. 41 No. 3 (2007): 471-513.
[62] Poskett, *Materials of the Mind,* 181. It is also good to keep in mind Stephen J. Gould's more sympathetic characterization of phrenology, as a "theory of richly multiple and independent intelligences" and ultimately "philosophically contrary" to any assumptive generalization that mental worth and cognitive ability could be explained by way of racial typology. See S.J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (London/New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 22.
[63] "Education of the People" in *The Pamphleteer,* Vol. 1 No.5 (June 1850): 146.

adaptation of Combe's *A system of Phrenology* – published in 1850 – that the new discipline's relevance was given by its astounding discovery that the cognitive activities and attitudinal proclivities of each individual human had to be explained with reference folds and structures of each and every singular brain. In an original section titled "the use of phrenological science" (manatattva bidẏār byabahārytā) Dāsa protested that in so far as phrenology had demonstrated that "the vigor of a given mind corresponds to a brain's structure (mastiker maner uṭsahanusāre gathana paribartte karate pare)" phrenological investigation could even determine intellectual and moral capacities of each individual, and their relative strengths – and ensure society played to each individual's strengths. Dāsa repeated George Combe's claim that "the brains of Caribs" and the "brains of Europeans" were "not of equal measure", adding the noxiously predictable qualification that whereas "the Caribs had excessively developed faculty of vitality (jibaprabrittir sthan biśesh unnata āche), Europeans tended have more developed moral and intellectual faculties (dharmaprabritti o jñānendriẏa)".[64] Much more significant were the racial typologies and classifications Dāsa omitted in his edition: his translation avoiding any discussions of "national brains" Combe had pioneered, and making no references to the specificities of the "Hindoo brain" Combe had been so fundamentally interested in.

If Dāsa's enthusiasm for phrenology issued from his sense that localizing the moral capacity of individuals in the workings of their brains would help bring about India's ethical transformation, Akshay Kumar Datta would go a step further. In his 1851 adaptation of Combe Datta proceeded from the observation that mankind was "not yet happy", and that "the world is filled with disease, grief, sickness, poverty and all other kinds of misery", but that "George Combe has described beautifully in his book, *The Constitution of Man considered in relation to*

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[64] Rādhāballabha Dāsa, *Manatattvasārasasaṃgrahā,* (Kolkata: Purnacacandrodaẏa Press, 1850), 81-88.

External Objects that "happiness may be obtained by ensuring that all action may be congruous and compliant" with the mental laws ordained by "Supreme Creator". Datta also warned that his book would offer "no exact reproduction of the English original" for he had "let go of all those examples appropriate and beneficial to Europeans but not fit for this country", exchanging them "for examples that are beneficial and well-suited to the people of this country". He was especially keen to show that the new science of the mind would show that "the inherited bad practices (*paramparāgata kuprotha*) of this country" were unreasonable, adding that by careful perusal of his arguments the "faults of each and every one of them will be demonstrated".[65] Datta concluded by asking his readers to make use of their mental faculties to consider the possibility of a different future.

> In supplication, I humbly beseech my countrymen not to turn away in disgust if they find my intention to be in contradiction with the opinions they hold or otherwise contrary to the customs of the country, but instead to give my argument a fair trial. For the Creator of the Universe granted us intelligence so that mankind's faults be rectified, just as he created particles of light so that darkness may be dispelled. No obligation prevents those endowed with the intelligence from determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done in accordance with the intellect itself and similarly no obligation compels them to continue to be enslaved to the ill-founded customs of their country (*deśācārer dās haiẏā calā*). In different countries different kinds of contradictory practices are current, and if we were to acknowledge all of them as rightful forms of conducts, we will fail to maintain a distinction between what is contrary to dharma and what is in congruence with dharma (*dharmādharma kichu mātra probhed thāke nā*).[66]

Datta's localization of the ability to distinguish what was congruous with dharma and what was not congruous with it entirely in the brain effectively made proper "dharmic" action the result of a cerebral process, and Combe's phrenology a physiological and philosophical road-map to its understanding. Bengalis were fascinated by the novel propositions of cerebral localization, though not all were convinced: "Datta scribbles on and on about skulls, but this just

[65] A.K. Datta, *Bāhyabastura sahita mānob prakritir sambandha bicāra,* (Kolkata: Sanskrit Press [1850] 1869) i.
[66] A.K. Datta, *Bāhyabastura sahita,* iv.

makes heads spin" quipped the journalist Īśvaracandra Gupta in a mocking ditty whose punning efficacy cannot be rendered in English.[67]

For all its alleged "absurdity" the proposition that a fleshy brain was the seat of the mind, and that dharma was the ability to stay true to its reasonable commands was an enormously influential proposition. Debendranath's biographer – not a sympathetic witness – recalled no other book being as consequential in the 1850s: "*The Constitution of Man* made a case for vegetarianism, and so many amongst the young started to be vegetarian. It discussed abstention from spirits and wines, and so a temperance movement picked up. Because of what this book said regarding correct social mores (sāmājik nīti) a tremendous change came about".[68] A difficult to confirm anecdote would have that Rabindranath, Debendranath's own son, was more convinced by Aksay Kumar's arguments.[69]

In his later and equally well-known philosophical work, *Dharmanīti* – a text whose English title Datta suggested ought to be "The Principles of Morals" – Datta extended and radicalized the connection between a properly functioning intellect and the capacity to discriminate between good and evil. Following Combe, Datta argued that "the supreme being has given us a variety of mental faculties (*manobṛtti*) for the purpose of our engagement in the actions we have to do and each one of these faculties has a specific use. In order to acquire we have a faculty of acquisitiveness (*arjanspṛhā-britti*), in order for us to do good we have a faculty of benevolence (*upacikīrṣa-bṛtti*), and in order that we may establish causes, we have the faculty

[67] Gupta's line "māthāmuṇḍu ghure gela māthāmuṇḍu likhe" is cited in Rajnarayan Basu, *Bāṅālā bhāṣā o sāhitya*, (Kolkata: Nutan Bāṅālā Press, 1879), 32.
[68] A.K. Cakrabartī, *Maharsi Debendranātha Thākura*, 227.
[69] M.S. Islam, *Aksaẏakumāra Datta o Uniśa śatakera bāṇlā,* 306. The anecdote seems to have originally been collected by the economist Bhabatosh Datta (1911-1997) so it appears to be late.

of inference (*anumitibṛtti*) and so on".[70] Not all actions are straightforward, Datta conceded, and "in certain situations it is necessary (*ābaśyak*) to exercise consideration (*bibecanā*) on what kind of action ought to be undertaken". This act would always and invariably be the work of "the most important of all faculties (…) the faculty of reason (*buddhibṛtti*) and our moral faculties (*dharmaprabṛtti*)". Striking a note that would not have displeased Debendranath, Datta conceded that "Humans have a natural intuition (*manuṣya … svabhābataḥ hṛdaẏaṃgam*) that these two faculties are higher than all others" but ultimately returned to understanding truly ethical behavior as necessarily consequent to one's capacity to "accept the enjoinments of the faculty of reason and the moral sense".[71]

Datta's words and sentences in *Bāhyabastura sahit mānab prakṛtir sambandha bicār* and *Dharmanīti* did not only localize the moral sense deep inside the folds of each and every Bengali's brain; they also housed faculty psychology and moral sense theory deep in the Bengali language itself, developing a new technical idiom of Sanskritic Bengali commensurate to the demands of the new phrenological philosophy they advocated. Datta's coining of a new philosophical language was aided by the remarkable principal of Sanskrit College, Vidyāsāgar, one of Kolkata's foremost champions of social reform and a commanding figure in the intellectual landscape of nineteenth century Bengal. "Datta and Vidyāsāgar (…) were in love with the Sanskrit language" a nineteenth century historian gushed, extolling "the Sanskrit garments" in which they "decked the Bengali language".[72]

The end result was more than ornamental: Datta's efforts created a distinctively new kind of Bengali philosophical language, altering the semantic range of long-established Sanskrit

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[70] Aksay Kumar Datta, *Dharmanīti,* (Kolkata: Sanskrit Press, [1852] 1863), 4-5.
[71] Datta, *Dharmanīti,* 20.
[72] Śibnāth Śāstri, *Rāmatanu Lāhiri o tatkālīn Baṅgasamāja*, (Kolkata: S.K. Lahiri, 1903), 130.

philosophical terms in order to signify new concepts drawn from the grammar of early nineteenth century European thought. Bengalis were profoundly aware of Datta's creative resignification of venerable Sanskrit terms, and in awe of the productive catachresis that resulted from such efforts.[73] But the "undertow of singular and unique histories" was ~~always~~ already invariably present in Datta's "new" Scottish terms, and it would be a mistake not to realize that the rich Sanskrit philosophical matrix in which they originated did not enrich a new world of thought commensurate, but never equivalent, to the English referents it engaged in conversation.[74]

<u>3.6 Schooling For Moral Autonomy in Provincial Bengal</u>

Retelling the glum tale of the Truth-seekers society's unravelling in factional infighting is not necessary. In the ensuing controversies, Datta and his closest ally Vidyāsāgar were accused of "Vedic denialism" (*nāstikatā*) by the disgruntled Tagore – no great upholder of its normative authority himself – and the society of truth-seekers wound down in 1858. Yet even as the differences between the reformers tore apart their Kolkata institutions, and philosophical disagreement metastasized into factional infighting, philosophy escaped the metropolis to find purchase and plausibility beyond it. In fact, no place responded to the argument that dharma's truest injunctions were those inspired by the heart (or rightly guided by reason) as enthusiastically as East Bengal's Dhaka, a declining Mughal town brought back to life by the exigencies of the jute trade and the needs of colonial administration. In the second half of the nineteenth century, across provincial Bengal dozens of individuals who had never even set foot in Bengal's "enlightened" metropolis would find in the writings of Tagore and Datta inspiration

[73] Bankimchandra's fictional guru in *Dharmatattva* gently mocks Datta's creative use of terms, but eventually sticks to them: "You have already introduced the usage of *nīti* for English morals, *bijñān* for English "science". I will not find fault with *vritti* for the English term "faculty"" Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya (tr. Sanyal, T.) *The Principles of Morals: Dharma-Tattva,* (Kolkata: Seagull 2009), 28.
[74] Dipesh Chakrabarty "Preface to the 2007 edition" in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.xxvii.

for a new adversarial stance against established social practices, going on to agitate for "reform" and striking out against polygamy and "social iniquity" long after similar campaigns had fizzled out in the metropolis.

Observers noticed that in the 1850s, inspired by the "editorship of Akshay Kumar Datta" a great many "mofussilites" had decided to subscribe to the truth seekers society periodical, the *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā*.[75] In Dhaka one especially keen reader, disgruntled at the lack of easy availability of printed issues from Kolkata, set up East Bengal's first printing press and reprinted past issues of the Patrika. Braja Sundar Mitra later explained that in so far as "almost all individuals through ignorance (*ajñānatā prayukta*) were ceaselessly engaged in some kind of iniquitous kind of conduct (*nanā kukarmme rata āchen*)" he felt the need to secure the materials that would ensure his fellow citizens could and would embrace a life of higher reason.[76]

Unlike Rammohun's Vedāntic foundationalism, Bhabanicharan's neo-prescriptivism or Young Bengal's rebellious iconoclasm – all movements confined to Kolkata and its immediate environs – the "dharmic" reformism of Datta, Tagore and Vidyāsāgar found a great many takers outside of the city. Its dissemination of "reformism" across provincial Bengal has however remained by and large unaddressed. Dhaka, like so much of deltaic Bengal, was really quite far from the metropole: as late as the 1840s journeying required many days of travel and over twenty river crossings by ferry, and East Bengal's enormous rivers and watery landscape would bring

[75] G.S. Leonard *A History of the Brahma Samāj,* (Kolkata: Newman & Co. 1879), 81.
[76] Mitra's speech is reported in Anon., *Ḍhākā Brāhmasamājera Saṃkhep Itihāsa*, (Dhaka: East Bengal Press, 1875), 3-4.

the hesitant advance of steam trains into east Bengal to a final halt eighty miles west of Dhaka in 1871.[77]

Yet even as it remained difficult for railways to link Kolkata to the deltaic East, by the second half of the nineteenth century ideas began to make the journey between metropole and mofussil with greater facility and frequency. No place was as significant for the dissemination and reception of new ideas as the new, Anglo-vernacular schools: the gushing biographers of the provincial notables who championed the cause of "social reform" in East Bengal describe the doors to their classrooms in ways not dissimilar from how Pauline hagiography had depicted the road to Damascus. Mitra entered the newly founded Dhaka Collegiate school in the early 1840s, where he found radical ideas advocated by a reformist teacher from Kolkata, Parvaticharan Sarkar.[78] Gupta, born in a respected Bouddhi[79] family in a village not far from Bikrampur, in East Bengal's Dhaka district, studied first with a local munshi and then at a nearby *tol*, but he was eventually directed to a newly established government-backed teacher training College, the "Normal school", where he would come across the writings of Datta and Tagore.[80] Others had similar experiences: the Bikrampur anti-polygamy activist Rasikabihārī Mukhopādhyāẏ (who admittedly never considered himself a reformer) remembers that on reading "cover to cover, Vidyāsāgar's *Sītār banabās*" his "heart melted (*bigalitacitta hailām*) to such an extent and the

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[77] See especially Iftekhar Iqbal, *The Bengal Delta: Ecology, State and Social Change 1840-1943,* (London: Routledge, 2010), 117-139.

[78] More on their relationship in Hemanta Sarkār, *Svargīẏa Brajasndara Mitra o unabimśa satabdīr madhyabāge pūrbbaṅge Śikkha, samāj o dharmmāndolane āmaśik citra,* (Dhaka: publisher not given, 1915).

[79] Bouddhis ("Baidhya") are the only other caste – other than Brahmins – to whom a measure of learning in one of the Vedas was normatively ascribed and for whom the practice of thread wearing typically (but not uncontroversially) guaranteed in early colonial Bengal (thus, until the partial liberalization of inscription policies, only non-Brahmins generally admitted to the Sanskrit College). For a śāstric description of their status and privileges see Lālmohan Bidyānidhi, *Sambandhanirṅaẏa*, (Kolkata: Śaśībhūshana Bhaṭṭācārya, 1896), 195-212.

[80] A vernacular school attached to the Normal school. They were both established in 1857. The superintendent, Samuel C Aratoon, was previously a teacher at the Calcutta branch of La Martiniére.

streaming of tears could not be stopped" until he took up a pen to write his first tract "against Kulīn polygamy (…) the ugly rule (*kutsit niẏam*) of my kinsmen and relatives" .[81]

The association between reform and education in the provinces dated back to a singular reform. In 1853, as pressure in the metropole mounted to ensure that the East India Company's shacky governance live up to the British Empire's alleged mission of ethical transformation Charles Wood, then Secretary to the Board of Control, began a series of consultations with missionaries and administrators known to have championed the cause of "education" in India.[82] Unsurprisingly, Charles Hay Cameron appeared before a parliamentary commission to argue that Britain's rule in India needed to proceed from the consideration of "two facts: first, that the natives of India are generally sunk in profound ignorance and superstition, secondly, they are evidently capable of very high educational attainments".[83]

Cameron insisted the "education of India" would constitute "a ministry, not only to the permanent connection of India with Great Britain, but to the progress of the human race", and that the cultivation of Indians would solder their ties to Britain, ensure empire's progress, and even, ultimately, its longevity. Indians – he loftily proclaimed – could play latter-days Gauls and Britons to Britain's Rome. Cameron advised a broad program of education both in vernacular languages and in English and affirmed that it was necessary to establish a university system in the colony. Alexander Duff, too, sent a *Memorandum* offering the predictable advice that Britain's Imperial mission, the salvation of souls and India's enlightened escape from medieval darkness, could all occur by sponsoring an ambitious program of "modern" education.

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[81] Rāsbihari Mukhopādhyāẏa, *Saṃkhipta Jibanbrittānta*, (Kolkata: Sanskrit Press, 1881), 6-7.
[82] Robin James Moore, *Sir Charles Wood's Indian Policy*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 108-123 remains the best account of the reform as seen from Leadenhall street and Westminster.
[83] Charles Hay Cameron, *An Address to the Parliament on the Duties of Great Britain to India in Respect to the Education of the Natives and their official employment,* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1843), 6.

On the 19th of July 1854, moved by such arguments, the Directors of the Company signed into law a document that would become known as "Wood's education charter", and the East India Company's government in India committed itself to a far-reaching project of "educational reform". In the 1830s and 1840s, even as Britons began to argue that the cause of empire was the educational advancements of a subject people, government commitment to public instruction had remained confined to the support of a handful of expensive Collegiate level institutions – almost all in Kolkata – now, following Wood's demand for reform, a standardized system of vernacular primary schools throughout the country was to be set up by new dedicated, provincial-level Departments of Education.[84]

Bengalis celebrated the decision wholeheartedly. "Today the government is paying great attention towards the education of its Indian subjects" an editorial in the *Saṃbād prabhākar* titled on hearing ~~of~~ the news "and the honorable sirs of the British government will finally get to know that by offering education to the Indian people, they will be regarded by them as luminously faultless (…) their rule will never again meet any obstacles".[85] As the *prabhākar* put it, the policy was as a final recognition of the "humanity" of Britain's Indian subject, and "earlier governments had maintained such a hateful policy, that the people of this country were [for them] almost like beasts (*prajārā paśu tulya*) and unfit for any task" and that only now, thanks to Wood's dispatch and Dalhousie's efforts to build a Department of Education "people have the ability to receive education in all matters, for the people here are in love with all disciplines, and

[84] Financing would remain a problem throughout the existence of the system. Indian patrons were encouraged to pay for its implementation through a new system of private contributions to school financing (a "grants-in-aid" system). This would complicate and restrict, but never halt, the tremendous diffusion of the new "Anglo-vernacular" schools across Bengal, and ensure it remained limited (at the very least) to the relatively advantaged. See Shridhar Nath Mukerji, *History of Education in India,* (Baroda: Acharya Depot), 1951.
[85] "Sampādakīẏa" in *Saṃbād Prabhākara*, 6 Śrabon 1261 [July-August 1854] reprinted in Binoy Ghosh *Sāmaẏikapatre Bāṃlār Samājcitre*, (Kolkata: Papyrus, 1978), 78.

their quickness of intellect is exceptional – especially that of the Bengalis" .[86] Similarly, the *Saṃbād bhāskara* stated that it is "our government's wish that the country be improved and that through the provision of education its subjects be civilized (*sabhya haẏ*)".[87]

Parna Sengupta has recently and importantly underscored the extent to which the government's mid-nineteenth century educational reforms marked a watershed moment in the history of Bengal, arguing that the new Anglo-Bengali schools created in the wake of Wood's charter act engendered a new sense of religious identity, reifying previously fluid communities and a new protestant orientation to texts and scripture.[88] Sengupta's arguments regarding the centrality of scriptural "religion" to the new educational dispensation is however overstated: while it is true that an exhortation to dharma was woven into the new texts, it was invariably present as a kind of enjoinment to reasonable moral action. Far from repeating or restating calls to scriptural enjoinment, the stories in the new textbooks, as Brian Hatcher has argued, emphasized sober diligence and reasoned action.[89]

This ought not to be surprising: when the new Department of Education was set up, Vedāntists and theists were quick to secure its employment and patronage, and effectively constituted the entirety of the nascent department's Bengali officialdom: Vidyāsāgar became special inspector for schools, overseeing the roll out reform as early as 1854, while Datta was the founding principle of Bengal's first teacher training College, the Kolkata Normal school, in 1855. Their tasks effectively amounted to training and supervising the new generations of teachers that would be dispersed to schools all across Bengal. Historians and biographers have

[86] "Sampādakīẏa" in *Saṃbād Prabhākara*, 6 Śrabon 1261 [July-August 1854].
[87] "Āmār digger [sic.] gabarṅamenṭera icchā" in *Saṃbād Bhāskāra,* 27́ Śrābaṇ 1261 [10 August 1845].
[88] Parna Sengupta, *Pedagogy for Religion: Missionary Education and the Fashioning of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 21.
[89] Brian Hatcher, *Idioms of Improvement; Vidyasagar and cultural encounter in Bengal*, (Kolkata: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Sivaji Bandyopādhyāẏa, *Gopāl-Rākhāl dvandvasamāsa: unpanibeśabāda o Bāṃlā śiśusāhitya*, (Kolkata: Papyrus, 1991).

long pointed out that the reformers famously found themselves at odd with foreign administrators who often possessed none of their intellectual gifts and moral sensibility. Yet despite the reformer's own somber account of what could not be achieved, the fact of the matter was that they were enormously influential: Vidyāsāgar's primary school textbook would become Bengal's most printed book of all times, Datta's middle school primer one of the most successful textbooks.[90] Normal schools mushroomed across Bengal, training new teachers who disseminated a new understanding of knowledge that was obligatory for all. All had a "right to instruction" Datta argued, in so far as "none is exempt from the supreme creator's law – irrespective of whether they are rich or poor, Hindu or Muslim, man or woman, young or old".[91] By 1863 – five years after Datta had retired – *Dharmanīti* and and *Bāhyabastura sahita mānob prakritir sambandhe* were firmly enshrined as the required reading for the new Normal schools across Bengal, preparing teachers for thousands of government-backed and inspected school.[92]

Unsurprisingly – given that it was written by the founding principle of Bengal's foremost teacher training college – *Dharmanīti* even made its way to the classroom. Reviewers in the press stated that it was "admirably suited to the higher classes of the vernacular schools", not just teacher training college.[93] In 1876 an East Bengal yearbook noted that "when the book was introduced to classrooms as reading material (*bidyālaẏer pāthyarūpe parigrihīta haoẏar*) a great movement started in Hindu society, and a little change was won. By virtue of its spread it

[90] Between 1855 and 1869, *Barṅaparicaẏa* was reissued 30 times, and at least 68,000 copies of it were printed. Between 1869 and 1880, following the exponential growth of new government schools, a minimum of 1.790.000 copies were printed, far outstripping the print run of any other Bengali book. See S. Isrāil "Sāesha Śatabarshe Barṅaparicaẏa-er prāsaṇgikata" in Lakshman Karmakār (ed.) *Barṅaparicaẏa: kale o kālottare* (Ghāṭāla: Sr̥ijan Prakaśanī, 2005), 22.

[91] The universality of mental laws, and thus the need for universality in instruction appears repeatedly, See Datta, A.K. *Dharmanīti,* 27 and then again 31. The term "right" for education occurs only once, most of the time it is "imperative for all" (kartabya),

[92] See "Appendix A" in *General report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency 1863-4*, (Kolkata: Baptist Mission Press, 1864), 26.

[93] *The Hindu Patriot*, April 1 1872.

demonstrated to the people of the country the moral wrongfulness of child-marriage and polygamy, and the moral legitimacy of widow remarriage and of marriage across castes (*asabarṇa-bibaha*), and besides, it extirpated (*mūlaccheda*) a great many more kinds of superstitions".[94] Rajeshwar Gupta, the Chittagong school-master, was not the sole provincial to find its appearance in the classroom life-changing. Another Bikrampur native – the journalist Dvārkānātha Gangopaādhyāẏa, agreed in similar ways, recalling in the 1870s that "After they started teaching *Dharmanīti* and *Bāhyabastura sahita mānob prakritir sambandhe bicār* in the school at Kalīpāḍa in the Bikrampur parish of Dhaka district the students there got together and formed an association, signing an agreement that stated that "we will only follow the rules on marriage stated in this book."[95] The quest to rid society – up to its most intimate relationships – of the influences of an older "tyranny" had begun in Bikrampur too, sparking the difficult quest that would seek to make marriages into the distinguishing test of a modern Bengali's own reasonableness.[96]

Sometimes, the reformer's mission for a new moral order was smuggled into other books: in the Bengali translation of John Clark Marshman's *History of India* prepared for schools in 1857 a new chapter on "dharma" was added by a close collaborator of Vidyāsāgar and Datta, Tārāśaṅkar Nyāẏaratna. The chapter commenced by way of a definition of Hindus and was generously expanded to include "Those worshippers of God as formless (*nirākārbādīrā*)" who "do not respect the moral order of caste (*jātiprabheda mānen nā*), and define as "dharma" the act of following the laws of the Supreme creator, and "adharma" the act of violating them, and say

[94] From the Nababārshikī for the Bengali year 1284 (1876-77), cited in Rāẏa, *Śriyukta Bābu Akhṣaẏakumār Datter Jīban-Brittānta*, 148.
[95] Testimony of Dvārkānātha Gangopaādhyāẏa cited in Rāẏa, *Śriyukta Bābu Akhṣaẏakumār Datter Jīban-Brittānta*, 118-119.
[96] For the pervasiveness of the reforming impulse, even (especially) in the most intimate of settings and its relationship to the creation of a particular kind of modern subjectivity see Rochona Majumdar. *Marriage and Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 167-205.

that we only need to realize what such norms are in order to be happy."[97] If uninformed readers had perchance missed that the text's curious definition of dharma was borrowed entirely from Datta's *Dharmanīti*, the author quickly added that Dharma's truest votaries "are mostly in agreement with the philosophy of Vedānta and the Upanishads, but disagree on some issues. Their numbers are small, for most other Hindus are idolatrous (*sākārbādī*)". In other words, classroom learning did not simply incite provincials to new, reified forms of religious identity based on some sort of scriptural originalism – on the contrary, it engendered the productive and yet confusing possibility that "enlightened" Hindus might not need to disavow dharmic injunctions or disavow Hinduness, but needed to reject only the structure of normative authorization presumed by śāstric learning to be simultaneously "moral" and "dharmic". As a result "*Nāstikatā*" – Vedic denialism – in an earlier age a very productive category for doxological polemic, vanished into growing meaninglessness and absurdity.

A more significant result of the reformer's insistence that breaking with the past and upholding dharma were one and the same action would, in time, invariably render opaque the tremendous transformation in discourse on morals they themselves had brought about, and render the conceptual break they help to bring about harder to understand by making the differences between past and present less and less obvious. As early as the 1870s Dhaka's foremost campaigner against the "iniquity" of polygamy refused the moniker of "reformer", preferring the title of "Helper to the Hindus" for his journal and association. And so, as the whiggish promise of a morally transformed India and the project of liberal imperialism dissolved, to be replaced by racist and conservative theories of empire as the natural warden of "traditional society" and the difficult political quest for a sovereign people began to gain traction,

[97] [Tārāśaṅkar Nyāẏaratna] "Dharma" in John Clark Marshman (tr.& ed. N. Basāk), *Bhāratbarshera Itihās* (Kolkata: Bidyāratna Press, 1857), 44.

the individualized pursuit of a new moral ordering of society that could be said to be congruous with reason lost its plausibility and began careering into absurdity.[98] Yet for some, the connection between the reformist quest for normative self-authorization and the political search for anticolonial independence would remain significant. After Rajesh Gupta's passing, his biographer noted that "today all are engaged in the task of *Swarāj* [self-rule]" but "the ideal of swaraj was embodied in the life of Rajeshbabu".[99] It would be the task of a later generation to argue, against the reformers' optimism, that the self-legislating subject may not be so self-possessed after all.

[98] For the end of liberal imperialism and the rise of "culturalist alibis" of empire, see Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the ends of Liberal Imperialism,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 4.
[99] Syāmacaraṇa Sen, *Caṭṭagramera Brahma Samājer Tinjana* (Chittagong: Brahma Samāj, date not given), 21.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CHARACTER OF THE AGE AND THE DUTY TO TIME

4.1 introduction

Vyāsa to Arjuna:

> Kena āsru, kena hāsi, kichui na jāni,
> *Why the tears, why the laughter – I don't know*
> Sakali tāhār icchā; ei āmi jani
> *It's all as He wishes, that much I know*
> Ei hāsi-asru-purṇa bibartana-rathe
> *On this revolving chariot full of grief and sorrow*
> Chuṭice mānab nitya unnatir pathe
> *Humanity gallops forward forever on the path of progress*
> Āmi se mānab aṃśa, putro ār
> *I am part of said humanity, so is my son*
> Āmi mar, mare putro, śok ki ābar
> *Though I'll die, my son will die, what's there to mourning*
> Mar pitra mare putra na mare mānob
> *Forefathers die, descendants die, humanity itself is eternal*
> Nahe haẏe unnatir tilārdha laghaba
> *Never a grain of progress ever is lost*

Nabīnacandra Sen (1847-1909), *Kurukṣetra*, Canto XVI, 1893.[1]

In the passage cited above, quoted from one of late nineteenth century Bengal's most popular modern epics, the Bengali poet Nabīnacandra has the sage Vyāsa inform Arjuna, a paragon of martial courage, that whereas the orders and injunctions of the Creator might be inscrutable, one of his commands is clear: it is mankind's duty to pay homage to humanity's upward movement in history. Progress is mankind's dharma.

By way of tracing the emergence of a new "duty to time" in late nineteenth-century Bengal and its growing purchase, I hope to offer a new interpretation of the arguments put forward by Nābin and the other "neo-romantic" intellectuals who took Kolkata's literary and

[1] Nabinacāndra Sen, "Kurukṣetra" (1893) in Nabinacāndra Sen, *Granthabali,* (Kolkata: Asvinīkumār Hāldār, 1904 [1311] Vol. 2), 1298-1299.

intellectual scene by storm in the 1870s.[2] The neo-romantic departure from the ethical concerns of an earlier, reformist generation have been generally explained in political terms, and their disavowal of liberal reformism has been understood as being premised on an incipient nationalist or culturalist logic, and the apologetic recuperation of past Hindu values in the face of the corrosive pressures of colonial domination. I depart from such readings by proposing that the "neo-romantic" refusal to accept the reformist proposition that men and women would be virtuous if only they traded India's inherited, unreasonable customs for new, reasoned norms was premised on a critique that was internal and immanent to the Bengali debate on morals. Against the reformist contention that reasonable norms would make society moral, the neo-romantics argued that only the progressive cultivation of "character" – individual and national alike – would ensure true moral individuation.

While the turn to "character" they proposed was grounded in ethical concerns, it also spelled the end of an autonomous discourse on moral norms, and its eventual cannibalization by a growing, fiercely public concern with history. In fact, just as imperial administrators abandoned an earlier faith in whiggish improvement to argue that the truest mission of empire was the wardship and tutelage of a purportedly static society – what Karuna Mantena calls "alibis of empire" – a new crop of Bengali intellectuals found themselves increasingly drawn to arguments foregrounding the need to attend to the "progress" of history. In fact, some would go so far as to elaborate a new understanding of good conduct that would make the patient, striving conquest of the future the defining characteristic of virtue. The proliferation of Bengali

[2] The first diagnosis was in fact contemporary to the rise of the "movement" itself. See Brajendranath Seal, "The Neo-romantic movement in literature: section III: The Neoromantic movement in Bengali Literature" in *Calcutta Review* 92 (1891): 164-195.

discourses on “unnati”, “improvement” and “progress” even as British conversation on India jettisoned the centrality of progress to the legitimation of imperial rule requires explaining.

The question of progress in mid-nineteenth century India would in fact be split between its two constituent elements: moral and material progress. If for the generation of Datta the moral imperative stood independently of the question of material progress, their successors – drawing from Victorian historicism – would find the two faces of progress to be mutually constitutive. As Nazmul Sultan observes in reference to the turn to developmentalism in mid-nineteenth-century India: “The [developmental reconfiguration] of the relationship between the moral and the material…signified the disappearance of the older assumption that the growth of the moral capacity of the people could be achieved through [mere] reason and education. The moral question now acquired an irreducibly developmental character."[3] Attending to the tensions generated by the progressivist gloss on the moral question, this chapter studies how the break with the enlightenment immediacy of “reform” was succeeded by the birth of a new paradigmatic assumption in late nineteenth-century Bengal: that the progress of history might function as a kind of metaethical category from which the evaluation of all other acts would proceed.[4]

If in Europe discourses of progress coincided with the experience of an acceleration of time, in Bengal they emerged in the wake of a growing feeling that the whiggish, reformist promise of a progress radically severed from the Indian past neither reflected the history of progress in Europe itself nor could allow Indians to ground the march of history in a lived

[3] Nazmul Sultan, *Waiting for the People: Anticolonialism and the Idea of Democracy in India* (unpublished manuscript), 117.
[4] Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the ends of Liberal Imperialism,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

register of national life.[5] As contemporary efforts to bring about social reform began to be probed for their derivative quality, a new generation of intellectuals resolutely transferred to the future – via the march of history and the authority of the Indian past – the authority of generating a truly moral world. The entanglement of progress and morals was, I note, a part and parcel of the broader nineteenth-century intellectual transformation where "a profound historicity penetrated into the order of things, isolated them and defined them in their own coherence, imposing upon them the form of order implied by the continuity of time".[6] The ensuing "temporalization" of ethics would eventually lead Bengalis to argue that the moral value of acts was based not on whether they were good or bad in themselves, but whether they furthered or hindered the realization of a hoped-for future.[7]

This chapter will first track how the reformist argument that held that virtue was to be found in ahistorical, epistemically sound moral reasoning came under philosophical pressure as intellectuals such as Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) began to argue that merely adhering to ethical prescriptions, no matter how reasonable, could never convincingly account for an individual's or a nation's moral worth. True moral personhood, Bankim suggested, could neither be accessed cognitively nor intuited: it had to be fashioned or built from the ground up. In a shocking, sensational novel that scandalized Bengal – *Bishabrikṣa* ("The Poison Tree") – Bankimchandra described how even reformist moral rationalization could be overcome by human desire. I then describe how Bankim – inspired by parallel trends in Victorian Britain –

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[5] See "The Nation and its Pasts" in Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial History,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993)

[6] Translation slightly modified from Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An archeology of the human sciences,* trans. Sheridan A., (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xxiii. See also Michel Foucault. *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 14. "A partir du XIX siècle (…) une historicité profonde penetré au coeur des choses, les isole et les definit dans leur cohérence proper, leur impose des forms d'ordre qui sont impliqueé par la continuité du temps."

[7] For "temporalization" see Reinhardt Koselleck (tr. K. Sondermann) "The Temporalization of Concepts" in *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (1997): 16-24.

proposed as an alternative kind of virtue ethics focused on the cultivation of "character". The turn to "character" extended, radicalized – and in fact, ultimately inverted – the entanglement between morals and epochal transformation that earlier reformists and radicals had advocated. He traded the conviction that Indians may immediately transform the Self with the future-oriented injunction to attend to the transformation of character over time. Earlier generations had argued better morals would make for a new age, now the argument would be decisively reversed, and the hoped-for future would guarantee the morality of acts. As the quest for progress cannibalized morality, the ethical age gave way to a new era where the duty to time and to norms could no longer be disentangled.

4.2. A novel kind of Morals: The Unsettling Desires of the Reformers

In April 1872, seeking to restore dignity and relevance to Bengali literature, supposedly degraded the insufferable didacticism of a generation of "Normal school trainees and village schoolmasters", a new monthly magazine – *Bangadarśana* – appeared on the scene.[8] Years later Rabindranath Tagore recalled its appearance as a true turning point in Bengali literary history, and describe the "*rasa*" he savored when reading the serialized novel it offered to readers – Biśhabrikṣa ("The Poison Tree") – as "something completely new (takhanakār dine se rasa chila natuna)".[9]

The novel in question, written by the magazine's indefatigable editor, Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894), offered to Bengalis a completely unprecedented kind of literary subject

[8] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, B. "Patrasūchanā" in Rabīndra Gupta (ed.) *Baṇgadarśana: Nirbācita Racanāsaṃgraha* (Kolkata: Paścimbaṅga Bidyālaẏa Paridarśaka Samiti, 1975), 1.
[9] "Sūchanā" in Rabindranath Tagore, *Chokher Bāli*, (Kolkata: Biśvabhārati Granthālaẏa, 1354 [1951]), i. In the same preface Tagore declared *Chokher Bāli* would be a "continuation" of *Biśvabrikṣa.*

by detailing the tragic vicissitudes of a modern Bengali family disintegrating under the inescapable pressure of desire.[10] In his memoirs Tagore noted that Biśabrikṣa's sudden appearance had "seized at once the Bengali heart (bāṅālir hṛidaẏa ekebāre luṭ kariẏa laila)" and that Kolkatans like himself had found themselves going through "intolerable" agony every month as they awaited its successive instalments with baited breath. So popular were the stories relating to Biśhabrikṣa's star-crossed heroines, Suryamukhī and Kundanandinī, that they:

> Circulated from house to house as if they were about members of the family (Suryamukhī ār kundanandinī āpan loker mato ānāgonā kacher ghore ghore). The whole country just wanted to know what will happen next (kī hala, kī hala, deśasuddha sabar ei bhābna). In fact, when a new issue of Bangadarśan arrived nobody in our neighborhood would sleep.[11]

Appreciation for Biśvabrikṣa went, of course, far beyond Tagore's literary-minded neighborhood. The *Calcutta Review* noted in 1873 that Biśvabrikṣa was "found in the *baitakkhana*[12] of every babu" – in fact, the novel was undoubtedly modern Bengal's first literary bestseller.[13] With a print run of 1,500 copies and hundreds of subscribers scattered across Bengal, there were few corners were readers of Biśvabrikṣa could not be found.[14] The *Review* attributed its success to Bankim's capacity to convincingly weave pathos into an everyday plot with a recognizably contemporary setting: a "handsome, healthy man", Nagendra, and his "loving, virtuous wife", Suryamukhī, would see their life unravel as Nagendra's "eyes fell in love on Kundanandinī, a simple girl who he had brought up" and who had tragically found

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[10] My analysis will thus be opposite to the very unsympathetic reading offered in Tapan Roychowdhury, *Europe Reconsidered* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 130.
[11] Rabindranath Tagore, "12" in Rabindranath Tagore, *Chelebelā* (Kolkata: Biśvabhārati Granthālaẏa, 1940), 69.
[12] The drawing room, a new kind of room in mid-nineteenth century Bengali homes. See Rosinka Chaudhuri, *Modernity at Home: a Geneology of the Indian Drawing Room*, (Kolkata: Center for Studies in Social Sciences, 2011).
[13] "Bishabriksha: A tale by Bankim Chandra Chattopádhyáya. Kánthálpárá: 1280" in "Critical Notices: Vernacular Literature" *Calcutta Review,* Vol. 57 Issue No.114 (Spring 1873): v-vii.
[14] The print run and subscribers list of *Bangadarśana* for its initial period (1872-1876) has been put together by Sanjīb Datta. See Sanjīb Datta, *Bāṃlā Sāmaẏikapatrera Itibritta,* (Kolkata: Gāṅcila, 2012).

herself recently widowed and reliant on their guardianship. As erotic tension builds up between Nagendra and Kundanandinī, the novel moves towards its tragic end: Nagendra exploits a new, colonial law enabling widow-remarriage – a famous reformist demand – in order to seduce and marry Kundanandinī, humiliating in the process the virtuous and forbearing Suryamukhī and precipitating her humiliated departure. Happiness in the end eludes all: Nagendra discovers in his second marriage the banality of the first, and sets out to find out the wronged Suryamukhī, while Kundanandinī, abandoned, is driven to a tragic suicide despite the possibility of an imminent reconciliation between the three characters.

Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that the plot in Biśhabrikṣa is driven forward by the captivating and inescapable power of Kundanandinī's "rūp" – a Sanskrit term straddling aesthetics and theology and indicating the force possessed by beauteous "external form": it Kundanandinī's beguiling "rūp's" leads Nagendra to a series of catastrophic suspensions of judgement and, ultimately, the novel's entire cast of character towards their undoing.[15] The other side of her beguiling form is certainly Nagendranath's "pralobhan" – a term often translated as "temptation", but perhaps best rendered as desire. In 1878 the young literary critic Haraprasāda Śāstrī (1853-1931) argued – with Bankim's endorsement – that whereas Byron – the poet most cherished by an earlier generation had taught a generation of Bengalis the "pleasure" (*sukh*) that came with "violating social norms" (*sāmājik niẏam laṅghanera*) Bankim was the writer that had best described the difficulties, challenges and even pleasures inherent in *trying to abide by rules*. "Bankim wishes norms could be followed" Śāstrī had argued "and he wishes for the happiness and peace that come from the victory over the senses" yet throughout his writings "the power of

[15] See Dipesh Chakrabarty. "Domestic Cruelty and the Birth of the Subject" in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 133-142 for an extended discussion of the literary fashioning of the widow's subjectivity by male authors between *Biśhabrikṣa* and *Chokher Bāli*.

human yearning rises untamable all at once (*kintu iccāśakti ek ek samaẏe durdam haẏe uthe*) (…) desire (*pralobhana*) rises in front of individuals suddenly, and all are defeated by it (*dekhān sakalei pralobhane bhule*), except by some who restrain it by keeping the inner feeling inside".[16] "Some others" he added, "like Nagendranath, just are not able to do so".

I note that the "genuinely powerful" pull of desire and the beguiling force of beauty were heightened by the particular milieu in which Bankim set the novel, for Nagendranath's desires pulled apart not just any upper-caste family, but an "enlightened" one struggling to live according to the new, higher ethical standards of the 1870s. Kundanandinī's gravitational pull and Nagendranath's spellbound, unreasoning pursuit of her were especially noteworthy because of the higher aims of "reform" they thwarted and the "enlightened" and compassionate context in which they take place. Kundanandinī's widow-remarriage saved no one – rather, the enlightened Nagendranath's "pralobhan" destroyed both himself and the novel's two heroines.

Bankim's decision to examine critically examine a reformed world was apparent from the beginning. In an extensive and unflattering description of Tārācaraṇa, Kundanandinī's first husband, Bankim noted that now "by virtue of the grant-in-aid system every village is graced by a crop-haired (*teḍikāṭa*) harmlessly gossipy (*ṭappābāj nirīha*) and well-meaning (*bhālomānush*) schoolmaster like him".[17] An insipid character taken by "the villagers to be something akin to a god" Tārācaraṇa's eminently replaceability was compounded by his conformism: all his virtuous convictions were borrowed from elsewhere, just like the "interminable speeches" he lifted from *Tattwabodhini Patrika.*[18]

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[16] Haraprasāda Śāstrī "Baṅgīẏa yubaka o tin kabi" (The youth of Bengal and Three Poets) in Rabīndra Gupta (ed.) *Baṅgadarśana: nirbācita racanāsaṃgraha* (Kolkata: Paścimabaṅga Bidyālaẏa Paridaśaka Samiti, 1975), 423.
[17] Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya "Biśhabrikṣa" in *Bankim Racanābalī,* (Kolkata: Bangiẏa Sāhitya Parishat, 1969), 212.
[18] Chattopadhyaya, B. "Biśhabrikṣa", 212.

Bankim did not simply subvert the moral worth of reformism by hinting that it could mask trivial banality. By way of Nagendranath's tumultuous inner monologues he also set out to show that the confident appeals to moral reason and ethical sensibility the reformers had turned to obscured the ways in which the pursuit of a new ethical world could be unsettled – even co-opted – by dangerous drives, and that the effort to comply with new, morally reasonable norms could be subverted by the workings of desire (*pralobhane*). Nagendranath for instance constantly rationalizes his desire for the striking Kundanandinī as an act of moral compassion towards a widow, making his own motivations opaque to himself. Similarly, the hapless Tārācaraṇa, fearful of being counted as one of "that party of *old fools* [in English, sic]" pushes Kundanandinī to join the purportedly enlightened setting of drawing room "conversation", with the predictable result of ensuring her humiliation. There is no "faculty of moral reason" at work here – just a husband's craven desire for social approval driving a reluctant woman's disastrous entry into the public. Bankim took special pains to show appeals to moral reason could be farcical by having Nagendranath attempt to convince a friend of the virtuous content of his action, even appealing to Vidyāsāgara's writings on widow-remarriage to justify his own intentions vis-à-vis Kundanandinī.

Some were incensed that a tale of moral failure could be set in an enlightened setting. Dvārkānātha Vidyabhushaṅa – a close associate of Vidyāsāgara and the editor of the foremost reformist paper – *Somaprakāśa* – began a campaign against the novel, declaring he would bring together, as a letter to one issue of *Somaprakāśa* stated, "the rising crowd of those hating *Baṅgadarśan*".[19] Lal Behari Dey – a Christian convert and a similarly zealous advocate of social

[19] Somprakāśa, 3 Bhadra 1280 (1873) cited in Amitrasudan Bhaṭṭācarya, "Baṅgadarśan o Samakālīn Somaprakāś" in Amitrasudan Bhaṭṭācarya, *Baṅgadarśan Patrikā o Bankimcandra*, (Kolkata: Mitra o Ghosh, 2009), 157. Curiously, Tapan Raychaudhury, shared in Dey's same dismay for Kundanandinī's fate, arguing that the novel did not do her justice. Raychaudhury, T., *Europe reconsidered*, 130.

reform –complained that the contradiction between Nagendranath's respectable self and his galling inability to master desires lacked any "verisimilitude", and that the novel's closing was profoundly immoral: "we should have been better pleased had Nagendra hanged himself" he quipped "he would then have simply reaped the fruit of his own iniquity".[20] Bankim's admirers argued instead that it was precisely his depiction of the struggle between norm and desire that made the novel moral, rather than the banal reverse. Bankim, Haraprasāda Śāstrī suggested, was not simply a better writer than his contemporaries – he was also a better moralist: "There is desire in Bankim's writings, there is unhappiness, and there is happiness in overcoming desire. It is for this reason that in modern society (*adhunik samāje*), we may derive the greatest moral instruction (*uccatara nitīśikkhā*) from Bankim's books".[21]

4.3 The Turn to Character

Estimators and detractors of Biśhabrikṣa alike could diagnose that, in falling prey to his desires, the reforming Nagendranath lacked – as Dey put it in English prose – "character". "Character" was the great byword in a burgeoning Victorian discussions about morals: mid-nineteenth century intellectuals of all stripes and sorts had in fact largely swapped enlightenment concerns with virtue and sociability for a new attention to "the failings of *character* as the chief source of civic, as well as private, woe".[22] The proponents of "moral and mental" philosophy had famously worried that in unfavorable circumstances mankind's immediately capacity for moral reason might be obscured by prejudice or sophistry, that mankind's inclination and propensity to virtue might be disordered or suffocated, and that its understanding of right and wrong confounded. Now however Victorian intellectuals would come to insist that humans would *not*

[20] Lal Behari Dey, "Bisha Briksha" in *The Bengal Magazine* (September 1873), 92-96.
[21] Haraprasāda Śāstrī, "Baṅgīẏa yubaka o tin kabi", 424.
[22] Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 2.

access their capacity for virtue by way of reason or common-sense, but had to build such a capacity through a kind of developmental striving– by way of a process of "building character". As Stefan Collini has argued, the great Victorian fear was no longer that humanity might not be able to tell good norms from bad ones – but that an individual's capacity for moral action may be crippled by "a weakness of the will" and that circumstances may overcome those of insubstantial, weak character.[23]

Few thinkers were as influential in establishing "character" as the go-to term for public moral discourse as the philosopher and chief examiner of the East India Company's correspondence, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). In 1843 – just as Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral sentiments* was adopted as a textbook across Bengal's Colleges – Mill's multivolume *System of Logic* was published in Britain. In it Mill sought to attack common-sense philosophy and "to drive (…) from its stronghold, the intuitive school". Against theories holding that knowledge proceeded from the "knowing faculties" Mill – recuperating the associationist psychology his father had once advocated – forcefully argued for the case that "moral and intellectual qualities" proceed "principally from the direction given to association", and that this had moral consequences.[24]

Of special interest to him when writing the *Logic* was proving that: "The notion that truths external to the mind may be known by intuition or consciousness, independently of observation or experience is (…) the great intellectual support of all false doctrines and bad institutions" and that "there never was such an instrument for consecrating all deep-seated prejudice".[25] Mill's statements were perfectly ignorant, of course, of the use made of Reid and

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[23] Collini, *Public Moralists,* 100.
[24] John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography,* (London: Longmans, 1908), 129. Mill's posthumously published autobiography was written between the 1850s and 1869.
[25] Mill, *Autobiography,* 130.

Stewart by the Young Bengal generation against the formal prescriptivism of paṇḍits. Mill's observation that moral intuitionists invariably presumed that moral knowledge was directly accessible by way some sort of cognitive process was accompanied by the critique that such an approach ultimately lacked any convincing way of accounting for the ways in which better morals supplanted obsolescent and inadequate ethical practices.

In the sixth book of the *Logic*, dedicated to *The Logic of the Moral Sciences,* Mill would propose an alternative to the inadequacy of the moral sense theories then current – a "science of Character", or "Ethology". In so far as there was scarcely any way to establish convincingly that "any given conduct or variety of feeling will be found universally" it would be best, he argued, to study "the causes which produce them", and to take stock that while:

> Human beings do not feel and act alike in the same circumstances, (…) it is possible to determine what makes one person, in a given position, feel or act one way, another in another, how any given mode of feeling or conduct (…) has been or may be formed. In other words, mankind may have not one universal character, but there exist universal laws of character formation.[26]

A true science of morals, in other words, would not be about proper moral cognition, but about the progressive, willed fashioning of the self. Mill's concern with the "laws of character formation" would even drive the argument for civic participation in his enormously influential 1859 essay *On Liberty,* where Mill he argued the case for a more active citizenry on the basis of the realization that "mental and moral powers, like the muscular, are improved only by being used" and that genuine moral personhood would be given only through the true exercise of "making a choice".[27] After all, Mill contended, just as reason "could not be strengthened" by

[26] John Stuart Mill, *The Logic of the Moral Sciences* (La Salle: Open Court, 1988), 49-50.
[27] John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty" in Dale E. Miller (ed.) *The Basic Writings of John Stuart Mill* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 133.

adopting a conclusion one had not reached by oneself, if the "inducements to an act" – even a virtuous one – were not "coinstantaneous to his own character" - then said act could not be truly moral: grounded in imitation, it would produce only a weakening of character.[28]

As Lauren Goodlad has recently pointed out, Mill's arguments were predicated on the anxiety that a broad failure to develop the moral capacities of individuals would simply lead most people to live lives "whose desires and impulses are not their own".[29] As Mill put it in the introduction to *On Liberty*, the threat the moderns faced was no longer simply that of bygone custom handing down prejudiced norms to later generations, but the broader "tendency of society (…) to impose its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them, to fetter the development – and if possible prevent the formation – of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon a model of its own".[30] As Stefan Collini has argued, these anxieties about the modularity and inauthenticity of modern character were in some ways irresolvable: moralists would prescribe the building of character – and then find themselves fretting about homogeneity and the "cant about character".[31]

Irresolvable as they may have been, they were nevertheless consequential. The early Congress leader Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909) remembered in his memoirs trading a youthful interest in "Sir William Hamilton's lectures" – the last significant text in a Reidian tradition of moral intuitionism – for the works of "John Stuart Mill and Alexander Bain".[32] Kolkatans, as Datta makes clear, participated in the broader movement away from theories of

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[28] Mill, "On Liberty", 122
[29] Lauren Goodlad, "Moral Character" in Mark Bevir (ed.) *Historicism and the Human Sciences in Victorian Britain,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 134-135.
[30] Mill, "On Liberty", 33.
[31] Collini, *Public Moralists*, 104. The expression is from H.G. Wells.
[32] Romesh Chunder Dutt,"Literary References" in *Wednesday Review* 23 April 1905 reprinted in Jnanendra Nath Gupta (ed.) *Life and Work of Romesh Chunder Dutt* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1911), 388.

common-sense philosophy then taking place in Britain and across empire as a whole. But Mill's efforts to put an end to moral intuitionism were unsuccessful in Bengali classrooms: the new university of Kolkata and its constituent colleges would maintain, in defiance of trends in Britain, and quite unlike the more receptive universities in Bombay and Madras, a fiercely "Scottish" curriculum, no doubt in great part due to the enormous influence wielded by Alexander Duff and a number of close associates.[33]

The rise of "character" as a fundamental category in everyday moral discourse in Bengal did not take place in the intellectually conservative spaces of College classrooms, where Reid remained a prescribed as a textbook well into the late nineteenth century – a longevity perhaps unparalleled anywhere in the English speaking world.[34] Just as concerns about "character" exceeded identification with any specific philosophical position or single school of thought in Britain, preoccupation with "character" in Kolkata could be voiced by individuals of all intellectual stripes and ethical commitments, from missionaries to administrators, from reformers to their critics. The Department of Education was one place were the quest for "character" became an obsession, replacing an earlier generation's whiggish confidence in enlightening education with the corrosive doubt that education would never be enough: "knowledge never yet made a dishonest man honest, a selfish man generous, or a sensual man spiritual" one sour

[33] The most embittered response to Mill's criticism of common-sense positions in Kolkata was penned by a Glaswegian transplant (and, later, Derozio's biographer) and a teacher at Kolkata's Doveton College, Thomas Edwards. See Thomas Edwards, *Notes on Mill's Examination of Hamilton's Philosophy,* (Kolkata: Thacker, Spink & Co. 1878). It was not the only polemic response: the work of Robert Jardine, the director of Kolkata's General Assembly Institution (and a former professor of "moral and mental philosophy" at the University of New Brunswick), *The elements of the Pyschology of Cognition,* (London: McMillan, 1874) was similarly polemically directed. Jardine's textbook was popular in Kolkata.

[34] An effort to expand the curriculum was made in 1885. While the new Philosophy MA curriculum was expanded to include Mill's *Logic*, it was also made to include McCosh's defense of common-sense philosophy against Mill. See *Minutes of the Senate of Calcutta University for the Year 1884-1885,* (Kolkata: Baptist Mission Press, 1886), 128. The other works were Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind,* Hamilton's *Lectures*, Mill's *Logic, Utilitarianism* and *Examination of Sir W. Hamilton's Philosophy* and McCosh's *Institutions of Mind* and *Examination of Mr. Mill's Philosophy*. The courses would be completely reorganized in the 1890s, Mill's *System of Logic* and Bain's *Logic* made compulsory BA textbooks.

British commentator observed "it expands the intellect, but it does not direct that power, or change the moral character of its possessor. Ignorance may be the parent of vice, but it is not the purifier of morals".[35] In fact, obsessions about whether education could *actually* bring about the ethical transformation of Indians began to plague colonial officials, driving a sense of "moral crisis" and chaos in schooling.[36]

Some Bengali intellectuals turned to "character" with more interesting propositions: Chatterjee's *Bangadarśana* was especially productive in making use of the Victorian concern with "character" to propose a new moral departure from what was thought to be the naïve, didactic formalism that had so far characterized reformist discourse in Bengal. Bankimchandra would argue instead that literature ("kābya") was to play a key part in aiding individuals to understand how to discipline the passions and develop their lives. "The aim of literature is not the provision of moral instruction (*kābyera uddaiśya nitījñāna nahe*)" Bankim sentenced in an influential 1872 essay written for *Bangadarśana* titled "Uttaracaritra" – "but it is the case that moral instruction and literature both have the same aim".[37] Bankim had ostensibly set out to review the Sanskrit playright Bhavabutī's *Uttararāmacaritra*, a seven act drama concerned with Sita's unjust banishment in a forest on the orders of her husband, the god-king Rāma.[38] But more contemporary concerns had drawn Bankim to Bhavabutī's depiction of an unjust exile: in 1862 the *Uttararāmacaritra* had been adapted into prose by the reformist leader Vidyāsāgara, and Sita's tragic tale of banishment had been turned into a heartrending symbol of the suffering of Bengal's grieving, disowned widows and a literary manifesto of reformism.

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[35] "Government Education" in *Calcutta Review,* December 1861, 212.
[36] Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons: the Western Education of Colonial India*, (Durham: Duke University Press), 47-78 illuminatingly follows the "moral crisis" consequent to the discovery that schooling may not form "character", but only occasion imitation and "cram".
[37] Bankimchandra Caṭṭopādhyāẏa. "Uttaracaritra" first in in *Bangadarśan*, Vol. 1 No.5 (Bhādra 1279/ August-September 1872) reprinted in *Bankim Racanābalī,* 161.
[38] The play is sometimes known as *Uttararācaritra*, but better known as *Uttararāmacaritra*.

Sudipta Kaviraj has noted that Bankim's review showed a degree of "astonishing irreverence" by arguing that Bhavabutī's *Uttararāmacaritra* made Rām less of a martial king and more of a compassionate "modern".[39] Bhavabutī, as Bankim noted, had famously changed key elements in the canonical tale of Sita's banishment from its initial rendition in Valmiki's celebrated epic, the Rāmāẏaṇa. While Rām had no qualms about banishing his wife in the original version, Bhavabutī later reimagined Rām as taking a pained, conflicted decision. Noticing this change Bankim famously quipped that Bhavabutī's Rām, with his conflicted interiority, was no longer credible as a "paragon of epic pride".

Kaviraj however misses the fact that Bankim feels that Bhavabutī's depiction of Rām's anguish had simply underscored the real extent of the monstrous criminality of his act. It was Vidyāsāgara instead who robbed him of his character. Bhavabutī had already put into Rām's mouth the compassionate words of an age distant from the epic cruelty, but "the respected modern writer does not notice this, and in his famous novel goes way over the top (*bāḍābaḍi kariẏachen*) to make Ram cry like some Bengali women may do today, if their husband gets sent out on an assignment out if town" , Bankim sneered. [40] The comparison between Vidyāsāgar's 1862 *Sitar Banabās* ("Sita's exile in the forest") and Bhavabutī's eighth century *Uttararāmacaritra* had real polemical intent, showing Vidyāsāgara's retelling of Bhavabutī's tale ruined a literary classic by turning it into a moral science textbook.

Bankim argued that in his horror at Sita's exile – and in his hurry to exonerate Rām from the crime of banishing her – Vidyāsāgara's had lost sight of the character-shaping power of true literature. Bankim noted that novels and moral instruction primers alike sought to "to improve

[39] Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Perfume from the Past: modern reflections on ancient art" in Arindam Chakrabarti (ed.) *The Bloomsbury Research handbook of Indian Aesthetics and the Philosophy or Art,* (London: Routledge, 2016), 171-172.
[40] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, "Uttaracaritra", 148.

the heart, and bring about its purification" (cittoṭkarsha sadhana o cittaśuddhi janana). But to do so directly was ultimately only a "secondary" aim for literature – and one that could hinder the "higher" aim of transforming the self by way of an aesthetic experience. "The novelist does not forbid from stealing" (*curi karate niśedha karilen nā*) Bankim states – but he teaches that one may not steal it by supplying a "universally inspiring character" (*sarbajanamanohara pabitra caritra*). The ethical transformation of readers occurs not by commands, but through characters that meaningfully wrestled with their "cittabritti" – the inclinations of the heart. "To adequately describe the movement of said inclinations is the aim of literature (*sei beger samucita barṅanadbara kābyer uddeśya*)".[41]

In an essay polemically titled "Dharmanitī" – just like Datta's immensely popular moral philosophy study of moral reasoning – Bankim returned to the topic of "character" to insist that true moral transformation did not correspond isometrically to "social reform". "As long as there is human nature, moral error (*dosha*) will exist" Bankim opined, and "no matter how much one perfects one's moral practice, that person cannot live to see the endpoint of that progress" – and if they did "no one would see them as human" for they would be, in some way, "akin to a god".[42] But men and women are not gods, Bankim noted – "human nature tends towards progress, but is never free from moral error" he argued, and this is true for the inclinations of individuals past, present and future, ranging from the "paṇḍit, crowning jewel of his own lineage of scholars" to the respectable, well-to-do moderns. The constitution of man (*mānaba prakriti*) – a paraphrase of Datta's language – is variable; it tends to improvement (*unnatiśila*)" Bankim argued "but no age will ever exist that is free of moral fault".[43] This was because "a terrifying flaw (*bhaẏanak*

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[41] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, "Uttaracaritra", 163.
[42] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, "Dharmanitī" in *Bangadarśan*, Vol. 1 No.8 (Agrahāẏana 1279/ November-December 1872) 418.
[43] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, "Dharmanitī", 418.

bipad)" existed in human nature, that Bankim characterized as a destructive "inclination to moral fault itself (*dosha prabaṅatāi sei bipād*)" by way of the selfish drives to gratification, pleasure and desire.[44]

If some degree of moral weakness may be a part of the human condition, it was nonetheless not to be passively accepted as unavoidable: true morality, Bankim argued, would consist in wrestling with the knowledge of one's ethical motivations. This would have to be done by way of an antagonistic relationship with one's own desires, a process which Bankim – a keen explorer of innermost conflicts in his novels – called "self-examination" (*ātmaparikṣa*). The fundamental aim of said process, Bankim argued, was to be "the rectification of errors in one's own character (*svakīẏa caritra saṃsodhan*) and the practice of self-development (*svabhāberunnati sadhana*)".[45]

Historians of late-nineteenth century Bengal have not made much of Bankim's concerns with "character", preferring to concentrate on the "trenchant liberalism" allegedly demonstrated by his famous collection of essays, "Sāmya" ("Equality"), published in installments between 1873 and 1875 in *Bangadarshan.* "Sāmya" has been recently described as theorizing "the independent pursuit of individual interest as the ultimate font of materialist prosperity and intellectual progress" as if it were a mid-eighteenth-century Scottish treatise.[46] It was not: published in the same magazine and written by the same man who had just authored Biśvabrikṣa, and the essays "Uttaracaritra" and "Dharmanitī," Sāmya focused on the ways in which the inequitable interference of others and the removal of opportunity from individuals stifled the

[44] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, "Dharmanitī",419.
[45] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, "Dharmanitī", 420.
[46] Sartori, A. *Bengal in Global Concept Histor*y, 106.

development of character and the moral capacities of individuals in antiquity and in modernity alike.

"Across the world (*bhūmaṇḍale*)", Bankim noted, "a felicitous mantra" has now been disseminated: its core message is "all of humanity is equal (manushyā sakalei samāna)".[47] By way of the beneficial spread of this same message across the world, "the seeds of civilization (*sabhyatā*) and progress (*unnati*) have been planted", and a new age of moral becoming inaugurated.[48] Bankim then proceeds to explain the meaning of "equality" by way of its history, retelling its story through the tale of its progressive global diffusion by way of three "incarnations" (samyāvatara) of egalitarianism who had successfully enabled its propagation: the lord Buddha, Jesus Christ, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. While the interventions of Jesus and Buddha against the tyrannies of "priestcraft" were saluted, those of the third sāmyavatara, Rousseau, were critiqued, with readers being informed his contributions to a just world were both productive and problematic. "The main thesis of the book *Le Contrat Social* is that society is the society comes from the consent of those who compose it" Bankim noted, for "just as any five businessmen can come together, make rules for themselves, form a joint stock company, so also, according to Rousseau, society, polity, government (…) come to be formed".[49] These "mistaken words" of Rousseau (Rūsor bhrānta bākye) nonetheless deserved to "receive permanent praise (anantakālasthaẏini kirtti)" because they were premised "one half on the truth – which is equality".[50]

But if equality could not merely be the equality of contracting parties, Bankim would explain, striking a vaguely Millian note, that equality would be the equality of opportunities to

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[47] Bankimcandra Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, "Sāmya" in *Bankim Racanābalī,* 328.
[48] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, "Sāmya", 328-329.
[49] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, "Sāmya", 330-332.
[50] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, "Sāmya", 334.

develop character, as in Mill's *On Liberty* and *On the Subjection of Women*. "Equality", Bankim insisted, was ultimately a kind of ethic, a particularly equitable orientation to others, "so that none may have to say that they had a capability of some sort (*kāhāro śākti thākile*), but had to let it languish through the injunction that they had no right [to develop it]. For all deserve liberty on the path to improvement".[51]

4.4 The Duty to Time

"Character", as Bankim's preoccupations made clear, was increasingly intertwined with "progress" or "improvement" (*unnati*). In fact, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has pointed out, by the late nineteenth century a particular "architecture of ideas" would solder character and providential history together, making the recourse to character – and its moral content – a key part in the development of an ethically-charged practice of history.[52] In fact, just as turning to "character" supplied a method to a generations of historians seeking to make sense of India's subjection, for the "neo-Hindu" intellectuals who could not return normative authority to the śāstra, and yet could not countenance the reformist attack on extant Hindu norms, man's "character" – the capacity to positively master the unfolding progression of time – could become the yardstick of an individual's moral capacity.

Earlier in the nineteenth century such a historicist or developmental understanding of ethics was not given. In an article for the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* titled "the greatness of humanity (*Manushyajātir mahattva kise haẏ*)" published in October 1854, the phrenological reformer Aksay Kumar Datta noted "right now (*ekkhone*)" he and other Bengalis found themselves inhabiting a completely different world from that which they had previously known, wherein "by

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[51] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, "Sāmya", 351.

[52] "Character" as Chakrabarty puts it, describing Jadunath Sarkar's (1870-1958) use of the category, "made the logic of providence open to the foibles of human beings". See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and his empire of truth*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 236.

virtue of man's incredible intellect steam ships, compasses and machines that detect storms prior to their coming (…) the sea had been turned turn into a highway" (*samudrake rājpath svarūp kariẏachen*). [53] Steam-vessels running from London to Kolkata were not the only machines shrinking time: "new steel tracks placed between towns and villages have made distant places become close, making it possible to go from one to another in no time whatsoever" and new "electrical machines" (*baidyutik yantra*) transferred news anywhere in the country in the matter of "instants".[54] Furthermore, "in an earlier age, when there was no printing press", Datta observed, "refined knowledge had been out of the reach of most. "Now thanks to the printing press heaps and heaps of books are published, and the general public (*sādhāraṇa lokerā*) buys them for trifling prices, and because of access to knowledge they live truly fulfilling human lives".[55]

Times changed, but Datta also noted that the cumulative accrual of technological innovations did not amount to moral transformation, and that the "improvement" in society he observed did not correlate to the necessary moral change he hoped to see. In fact, in *Manushyajātir mahattva kise haẏ* he critiqued the moral shortcomings of his own age, arguing that even though the conditions of possibility for a genuinely ethical present already existed, the moral future remained unrealized – women and peasants, he noted briefly in the piece, lived lives marked by "oppression" and "injustice", and norms had yet to change for the better. Yet his labor of critique presupposed that mankind's generalized turn to moral reason would immediately bring about the future, and that no temporal gap existed between the turn to moral reason and the

[53] The reference is likely to the Peninsular & Oriental Steamer Service from Kolkata to Suez, which started running in the 1850s.
[54] See Aksay Kumar Datta "Manushyajātir Mahattva Kise Haẏe" in *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, Aśvin, Saka era 1775 (October 1854) reprinted in Aksay Kumar Datta (ed. Muhammad Saiphul Islam) *Śresṭha Prabandha* (Dhaka: Katha Prakash, 2014). Many of the neologisms are likely Datta's own.
[55] Datta, "Manushyajātir Mahattva Kise Haẏe".

achievement of enlightenment: “When all is subordinated to the moral faculties (*yakhan dharmaprabrittir sakal basabartī thakibe*)”, he announced, “and when the faculty of reason and the other lower faculties have come to work under the direction of the moral sense”, humans will “come to be tied to each other in bonds of love known as fraternity and fellow-feeling (*mānabgaṅa paraspar sauhārdya o saubhrātrurūp prītimaẏa sṛṅkhala bandha haibe*)” and cease to “oppress (*pīḍā deoẏā*) one another”.

In other words, in a world where the moral sense was finally the sole authority governing human action, Datta prophesized that “courts and jails will not be necessary” and that finally “the pursuit of knowledge and the improvement of morals will emerge as humanity’s most significant action (*takhan jñānśikkhā o dharmānnati manushyadiger maddhye pradhan dharma haiẏā uthibe*)”. Datta – a fierce critic of Indian practice, and a committed admirer of Brown, Bacon, and Combe – did not participate in the growing understanding that India was chronologically located in the past of Europe. For Datta, India’s moral enlightenment was always imagined as a possibility that was chronologically contemporary to his own life, immediately achievable by way of a reordering of mankind’s mental faculties.

The lines between morals and progress became however increasingly blurred with time. In an 1873 play written by a teacher in provincial Dinajpur, a fictional Bengali gentleman accusingly enquired of a friend to explain why, if Rammohun Roy “used to consider some of the śāstra as divinely authored (*śāstra ísvarapraṇita baliẏa bisvās kariten*)”, a later generation of reformers “refuses to acknowledge [such texts] as authoritative”. The accused conceded such a change had indeed occurred, but quickly added that forsaking Vedic foundationalism was no mistake. “Just as the world has come to be more gradually perfected”, he answered, “so has our opinion on what is truly moral”, proceeding to explain the change to better morals and the

rejection of the Veda by way of a curious analogy with the technological innovations brought about by steam technology and modern warfare.[56]

In the later teachings of Debendranath Tagore, the intuitive movement of the heart was almost traded for an obligation to move in lockstep with time, shorn of prosaic material considerations, and expressed in the customary Upanishadic style that was proper to him: "today it can be clearly seen that the will of the Supreme Creator in this world is itself the progress of true knowledge of dharma. Oh humanity! Unite yourself with His will, follow His command, concentrate wholeheartedly in the realization of the progress of true knowledge. Progress in virtuous knowing is political progress, progress in virtuous knowing is social progress, progress in virtuous knowing is progress of one's line: the advancement of moral knowing is nothing but ceaseless material and spiritual progress (*ihāloke paraloke anantakāle unnati*)".[57]

Debendranath's exhortations registered a broader shift that in fact saturated Bengali intellectual discourse. Famously and controversially, in the concluding lines of Bankimchandra Chatterjee's 1882 novel *Ānandamatha* ("The Abbey of Bliss") the novel's protagonists – a band of Hindu rebels – find themselves halting their insurrection against the tottering and anachronistic Mughal regime they seek to overthrow not out of any affection or loyalty for the incoming British, but out of an understanding that British rule will engender and aid the progressive unfolding of India's own history.[58] Their obligations, in other words, would not be to Empire, but rather to a time yet to come and thus deferred, making the obligation to attend to India's progressive development superior to any other ethical consideration.

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[56] See Dīneśacandra Sen's *Gharer Kathā o Ẏugasāhitya*, (Kolkata: Karuṇā Prakāśanī 2011), 38. The unnamed play cited here was authored by Sen's father, Iśvaracandra Sen, a local reformist in provincial East Bengal.
[57] Debendranath Thakur, *Jñan o Dharmera Unnaṭi* (Kolkata: Ādi Brāḥma Samāj Yantra), 121.
[58] Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, *Ānandamaṭha*, in *Bankim Racanābalī*, 725-726.

The extraordinary proposition that a duty may be owed to progress found its way in the writing of other Bengalis anxiously denouncing the moral inadequacy of modern Indian life. Under what they saw as the dual threats of a purportedly retrograde custom and an allegedly imitative and naively prescriptive reformism, the Bengali "neo-romantics" would find in a special kind of "temporalization" a solution to the impasse they faced vis-à-vis Indian life. Perhaps, if the ethical content of acts could be judged not by virtue of whether they were presently good or bad, but only by virtue of the ways in which they helped the present become the future, then the dispiriting obligation to take stock of the fact that no moral utopia was yet born after decades of whiggish agitation and relentless reformist movements could be transferred and deferred to the future. This proposition effectively made the future the truest, hidden source of normative authorization.

One of the more extensive reflections on the "temporalizations of ethics" was offered by Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, a a school-master who would be closely aligned to the "neo-romantic" movement. Bhudev – likely in ways that would have made little sense for him – is often described as a "traditionalist" or a "conservative", albeit of a creative and an innovative bent.[59] This characterization makes little sense, in so far as Bhudev offered one of the most extensive meditations on progress written by any Bengali intellectual in the 1880s. Bhudev noted that "progress" was undoubtedly a concept borrowed from Europe, argued that a great deal of striving for "progress" was imitative and wrongheaded, and refused to entertain arguments that held material advancements could be sufficient to account for progress.[60] But he also insisted

[59] For how an "innovative traditionalism" was built by Bhudev by way of a special reconsideration of the West see Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Reversal of Orientalism: Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and the Project of Indigenist Social Theory" in Sudipta Kaviraj *The Imaginary Institution of India,* (New York: Columbia University Press), 254-289 and similarly Tapan Raychaudhuri, who terms the group, "self-consciously traditionalist", though likely none would have used such a term for themselves. See Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, xii.
[60] The considerations on progress are in "Pāścātyabhab: Unnatiśilatā" in Bhudev Mukhopādhyaẏa, *Sāmājik Prabhanda*, (Kolkata: Budodaẏa Press, 1909), 97-111.

that progress was not a false idea. On the contrary, "true progress" was the sole source of genuinely ethical behavior: "Imagine if someone builds a high ideal in the interiority of their heart (keha manomadhye ekti ucca ādarśa gaṭhana kariẏa), or receives one such ideal, and strives to live by it (jībanyātrāẏa prabeśa karila)", Bhudev wrote, "and that as a result of this said ideal enlightens their mind constantly, or comes to be transformed into a yet higher ideal, so that the love towards it does not diminish, and indeed said person remains engaged in striving to realize it (taṭsadhana ceṣhṭa prabala thake), then that person can be said to be one that is progressive (se byakti unnatiśīl haiẏa uthe)".[61] One "cannot be progressive (se byakti unnatiśil thake na)" if their aims are "vulgar" (apakriṣhṭa), "if their mind pulls them in different directions" and prevents them from focusing on a goal or, finally, if they are "lacking in the willpower" (ceṣṭāśaktir hīnata) necessary to their progressive self-realization. Those who do not possess such capacity, be they individuals or societies, would degenerate in "demonic-like, immoral action" or be "degraded like beasts".[62]

Bhudev did not stop at noting that progress was the necessary capacity for self-development, he also argued that the development of the self was oriented to a next generation and primarily functional to futurity. Bhudev asked his readers to "disregard unbelievable notions such as heaven and hell" and to notice that the plains of *pūrbaloka, barttamānloka* and *paraloka* discussed in theological literature on the antecedents and consequences of acts corresponded simply to ages past, present and future. The special enjoinment to act with the next world in mind was, Bhudev argued, primarily an exhortation to live and develop *for the future*. "If people in the present cannot achieve the refinement of their mental and physical capacities" (*yadi lokerā daihika ebaṃ mānāsika guṇa uṭkriṣṭa haite nā paren*) then, he said "the future generation will

[61] Mukhopādhyaẏa, "Pāścātyabhab: Unnatiśilatā" in Mukhopādhyaẏa, *Sāmājik Prabhanda*, 107.
[62] Mukhopādhyaẏa, "Pāścātyabhab: Unnatiśilatā", 107.

not be able to excel further than them". This was not possible because Hinduism "having a special love for the future" (*paraloker prati biśiṣṭarūpe snehabān haiaẏa*) "had enjoined all actions with regards to their benefit (*tāhāra-i hitārthe*)" rather than for the selfish gains of one's own present, allegedly making of Hindus an especially restrained and disciplined people capable of endlessly delaying gratification in the pursuit of an ever-deferred future fulfillment.[63]

Nabīnchandra's Vyāsa could not have put it better, as the quest for the future annexed ethical concerns to a new religion of progress: "Humanity gallops forward on the path of progress / Forefathers die, descendants die, but humanity itself is eternal/ and Never a grain of progress ever is lost".[64] As the twentieth century approached, the vigor of nineteenth century moral argument would carry on in the new debate about public history. But that's another story.

[63] Mukhopādhyaẏa, "Itikatha" in Mukhopādhyaẏa, *Sāmājik Prabhanda*, 124.
[64] Nabinacandra Sen, "Kurukṣetra" (1893) in *Granthabali,* 1298-1299.

CONCLUSION

Just as the ethical urgency of "reform" transferred to a nascent domain of anti-colonial politics, the declining social reform movement found its historian. In 1903 Śibanāth Śāstrī (1847-1919) – a former teacher and in youth an activist with the widow-remarriage movement – published the influential *Rāmatanu Lāhirī o Tatkālīn Baṅgasamāj* (Ramtanu Lahiri and the Bengali Society of his age), the first work of history dedicated to transformation of mores in Bengal's nineteenth.[1] Śāstri chose to tell the story of said transformation through the biography of an ordinary reformist teacher, Rāmtanu Lāhirī, and took his struggle to live a more morally reasonable life in the face of the opposition of peers and relatives to be indicative of the moral transformation Bengalis sought in classrooms and drawing rooms. Ramtanu's curious biography established itself as the definitive history of the age a few years later when Sir Roper Lethbridge (1840-1919) – a friend of Śāstrī and his former principal – published a translation of the same text in London. In Lethbridge's version – undertaken with Śāstri's approval and in close collaboration with him –Ramtanu's biography acquired a subtitle announcing it as "a History of the Renaissance in Bengal".[2] This set of equivalences would prove enduring, and the "Bengal Renaissance" quickly appeared as a term to describe the nineteenth century quest for a new ethical horizon.

Historians have however long discarded the category of "Renaissance" Śāstrī and Lethbridge proposed. In 1977 the Marxist Barun De argued with efficacy that the category was

[1] Sibnāth Śāstrī, *Rāmatanu Lāhirī o Tatkālīn Baṅgasamāj*, (Kolkata: S.K. Lahiri & Co. 1909 [2nd ed.]).
[2] Sibnāth Śāstrī, Sibnāth, *Ramtanu Lahiri Brahman and Reformer: a history of the Renaissance in Bengal,* tr. Lethbridge, R. (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. 1907).

completely hollow.[3] De charged that the category of "Renaissance" fell very short of its social and intellectual promises, and that *as a periodizing category* it obscured the crucible of colonial domination and "comprador capitalism" in which nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal had come to be embroiled, and which formed the somber context to any intellectual movement. If anything, he quipped, it would be good to understand Bengali society under colonial rule as kind of "late Medieval" society, stunted in its development and static in its progress. De's diagnosis remains compelling, and historians have since condemned "The Renaissance" to the ultimate sign of contempt: the disclaimer that it was merely the "so-called" Renaissance.

To think about the "Renaissance" analogically, as De convincingly argued, may not achieve much. But "Renaissance" as a periodizing category was primarily a late nineteenth century proposition, elaborated by European historians hoping to describe the course of modern Europe's history as one marked by a total break with a "medieval" past they objected to and sought to escape from.[4] In fact, for its foremost proponents invoking the "Renaissance" was always functional to describing a break with the past that could coincide with the inauguration of a specific kind of individual autonomy. No work was as influential in advancing such a formulation as the 1860 *magnum opus* of the Swiss-German historian Jakob Burckhardt, translated into English by Birmingham classicist Samuel George Chetwynd Middlemore in 1878 as *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy.* Against medieval custom and modern conformism, Burkhardt saw in Renaissance the age that had first inaugurated new possibilities of

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[3] Barun De, "A historiographical critique of Renaissance Analogues for Nineteenth Century India" in Barun De (ed.) *Perspectives in the Social Sciences 1: Historical Dimensions,* (Kolkata: Oxford University Press, 1977), 178-218.
[4] See the essay by Gabriele Pedullá, "Lo storico delle maree" in Huizinga, J. *Il Problema del Rinascimento*, (Donzelli: Roma, 2015) More in detail Lynne Walhout Hinojosa, "Emergence of the Renaissance Concept" in Lynne Walhout Hinojosa, *The Renaissance, English Cultural Nationalism and Modernism*, (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2009), 29-88. It is especially significant that Burkhardt elaborated the idea of the Renaissance as a consciously willed break with the past out of dissatisfaction with the "superificial… optism" implicit in later nineteenth century commitments to "progress and development". See John R. Hinde *Jacob Burkhardt and the crisis of modernity* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill University Press, 2000), 11-28.

individuation that modernity risked trivializing. John Addington Symonds seven-volume 1875 classic *The Renaissance in Italy* made an allied case for the Renaissance as the "spirit of the modern world", reaffirm the concept as one that wedded to individualism and "spiritual self-determination". Symonds argued that:

> By the term Renaissance, or new Birth, is indicated a natural movement, not to be explained by this or that characteristic, but to be accepted as an effort of humanity for which at length time had come, and in the outward progress of which we still participate. The History of the Renaissance is not the History of the Arts, of the Sciences, of literature, of Nations. It is the history of the attainment of Self-Consciousness by the Human Spirit.[5]

Professional historians since Johann Huizinga's magisterial 1920s work, the *Twilight of the Middle Ages* have objected to Burkhardt or Symonds's characterization of the Renaissance as a heroic age of self-consciousness, noting such characterizations tell us more about the late nineteenth century's understanding of the course of European history than about Italian "Renaissance society" in the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Yet none of this is significant for Bengali history. What is key for the Bengali nineteenth century is that in Bengal the term is not *misleadingly retrospective* as it may be for fifteenth century Italy.

While fifteenth century Italians would have been puzzled at the charge of living in a "Renaissance" – at least one marked by the rise of a new sense of Self, as alleged by Burkhardt and Symmonds – Lethbridge and Śāstrī's periodizing claim for their own present was one that was accepted by contemporaries as a plausible term for their times, and that Bengalis were quick to adopt. It follows that when the use of the term "Renaissance" was first pioneered for nineteenth century Bengal, it was not put forward primarily by way of an analogy with a distant

[5] John Addington Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy the age of despots,* (New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1881), 4-5.

European age, but propositionally, to state that present-day Bengalis inhabited a present in which an escape from the fetters of the past was both necessary and possible.

That by “renaissance” Śāstri and Lethbridge meant a Burckhardtian break with the past is especially clear if we turn to Sastri’s other historical work. In 1894 he had published a history of the nineteenth century in the form of a historical novel titled *Yugāntar* (“change of epoch”, also “Revolution”), a text centered on the struggle of a heroic band of College students seeking to facilitate the marriage of an upright young man and a virtuous, suffering widow in the face of predictable resistance by conservative relatives. As the title makes obvious, the novel again made the case that the nineteenth century was a moment of temporal rupture.

In the very last line of the novel the tale’s protagonist, Nabinchandra Basu makes precisely this diagnosis to a friend: “Panchu, I understand that now in truth an *epochal change* has occurred (Panchu, eibār bujhi satya satyai ẏugāṅtar ghaṭila) (…) now in Bengal *the new epoch has arrived* (Baṅgadeśe bujhi eibār nabaẏug āsila)”.[6] In *Yugāntar* too Śāstri sought to show the nineteenth century constituted a qualitatively new time *not* because new things were only now thinkable, or because change occurred in ways that was visible or cognizable, but because past and future could no longer possibly coincide: the men and women of the nineteenth century were no longer allowed to inherit their future. In the closing lines of the novel Nabinchandra axplains to his friend the events that mark the rise of a new age: these are the rejection of the Vedas as a revealed moral authority by Datta, Vidyasagar’s campaign for widow remarriage, the fact that “the youth had constituted a great movement (mahā āndolan): and finally, the fact that “many Brahmin boys had given up the thread (upabati tyāg karilen)”.[7]

[6] Sibnāth Śāstrī, *Yugāntara* (Kolkata: Jijñasa, 1967), 184.
[7] Śāstrī, *Yugāntara,* 183.

Nabin's point on the Brahmin thread bears restating: in the new age, the Brahmin's thread had not lost, but rather acquired a supplementary power: if wearing it signified participation in the most privileged of castes, discarding would allow it would its former bearers signify something even more monumental: the embodiment of an era, and the transformation of a Brahmin man into the unmarked general subject of modernity. It is significant that the same significance is given to Ramtanu's discarding of the Brahmnical thread in the *History of the Renaissance in Bengal*. Ultimately, Sastri's description of Ramtanu's historical life and Nabin's fictional life coincides: they offer biographies of men living lives where moral merit can no longer be inherited, but is to be reasoned out.

Yet not all could escape the limits of the past into the promise of the future with equal ease. In late 1860s Dhaka, four young, adolescent reformists – all classmates and members of the town's new deist discussion club, the Dhaka Saṅgat Sabha ("Union Society") went over to a close relative's house for a wedding feast. Their joy was short lived: one of the four friends was refused food by the host's family, on the grounds that supplying him with a meal would have been too grievous violation of the rules of caste propriety. Humiliated by this act of insulting act of bigotry, all four aggrieved friends vowed to not remain, and scandalized the assembled party by declaring their intension to maintain relations of commensality with each other. As rumor of their audacity spread across the east Bengal town, all four found themselves targeted by a wider social boycott, and the reformist movement itself came to be divided into opposing camps with regards to the actions of the youthful rebels.[8]

Jālāl Uddin Miẏa's experience of humiliation at the hands of the family of his closest friends did not end at the wedding: it was later compounded by the social boycott he had to

[8] Bankabihari Kār, *Bhakta Kālīnārāẏaṇa Guptera Jibana-Bṛittanta,* (Dhaka: Pūrbba Byaṅġāla Brāḥma Samāj), 22-24.

experience at the hand of members of the local Mahesya caste, who, affronted by his gall in challenging the upper-caste families of his friends, stopped selling him meals. Miẏa's difficulties were both of a dreadfully old sort, and of a tragically new kind: old, because they proceeded from the ancient proposition that Muslims ("yavanas") were defiling, as Bhabānīcaraṇa Bandyopādhyāẏa had reminded readers in the 1830s – but tragically new, in so far the humiliation he experienced resulted from a reversal: he and his friends – who clearly did not think of each other as meaningfully Hindus or Muslims – thought that it may just be possible to act as if liberated from inherited identities. It was not so.

The cruel experience of Miẏa was not singular. In the wake of Wood's reforms Muslim students like himself had come to sit alongside caste Hindus in a growing network of government backed grant-in-aid schools and collegiate institutions spread all across the country. Just as in Kolkata and its environs, the new Anglo-Bengali schools established in Dhaka district and across the rest of East Bengal were predominantly attended by Hindus from traditionally literate castes –which is to say the upper-castes of Brahmins and Baidyas, and the increasingly respectable Kāẏāsthas. But unlike in metropolitan Kolkata – where a very large proportion of the Muslim population was Urdu-speaking – in Bengal's rural districts Muslims too would and could turn to the new Anglo-vernacular schools as a plausible medium of instruction. Inspired by the same vague promises of colonial employment and social success that moved their Hindu peers, the sons of some petty Muslims notables and jute traders started trickling into the new Anglo-vernacular schools to begin studying on the textbooks of the new, reformist age.

Some, in the process, became convinced that humanity's mission was to turn to moral reason and eradicate the horrifying iniquities of the past to bring about a more equitable future. "If true morals were established" the provincial Shekh Abdul Latif argued in an 1878 tract aptly

called *Mānab Sāṃskārak* ("Reformer of men") "would we still see that ignorance which pervades everything and is the cause of misfortune and superstition, and occasions those divisive rites and practices from which false caste divisions, religious divisions and divisions of rank (…) emerge?" [9]

"False" as they may have been, the turn to moral reason did not exorcise such divisions. Recalling, at the end of his life, his departure from rural Kushtia to the town of Krishnanagara, a former center of Brahmanical learning housing since the 1840s a model Anglo-vernacular school and College to attend school, the writer Mir Mosharraf Hossain (1847-1912) could not help note that in the school an entrenched grammar of Brahminical virtues imposed itself on him, and "I saw its manners gradually imposed themselves on my character (Kṛishñanagarer cāl-calana dekhadekhi krome āmār svabhāber upar ādhipatya karate lāgila)". Krishnanagara College was famed for the radical reformism of its teachers – the thread-less Ramtanu Lahiri famously taught in the Collegiate school.

A wider world was certainly promised in Krishnagar Collegiate school, but this world was limited by the failure of its constituents to rise above a tragically banalizing politics of identification, degrading intersubjective recognition into the quest for ipseity. Hossain tragically recalled that, pressured into wearing a dhuti, he "sent the pajamas back home, and that classmates burned the tupi a few days later".[10] The overwhelming majority of Krishnagar Collegiate school students, in other words, failed to act in any ethically meaningful way, sliding into forms of action in which they would relate to Hossain only through misrecognition and identitarian reification. Such disappointments would haunt Hossain for the rest of his career.

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[9] Shekh Abdul Latiph, *Mānab Sāṃskārak*, (Medinīpur: Mission Press, 1878), 1. No more is known about Latif, and suggestions that he is the same Abdul Latif as the celebrated Nawab Abdul Latif (1828-1893) remain unestablished.
[10] Mir Mosarraph Husain, (ed. Bhaṭṭācārya) *Āmār Jībanī,* (Kolkata: Jenerel, 1977), 201.

When his first work – a prose novel – was published to some acclaim, Bankimchandra even wondered if the author's recognizably Muslim name was a pseudonym.[11] Hossain famously answered such taunts, staging, in his Basantakumārī, a dialogue between actor (*naṭ*) and actress (*naṭī*) in which the characters wondered if it was not a form of "disrespect" (*apadasta*) that critics would focus on the Muslimness of an author, and not the substantive qualities of a work.[12]

Lahiri's removal of his thread and Hossain's loss of his tupi were not equivalent acts. One proceeded from the utopistic consideration that it may be possible for one to disavow one's inherited priviledge, the other was instead consequent to the tragic, majoritarian understanding that equality would have to coincide with sameness. The thrill of the first and the horror of the second proceed however from a shared understanding: true moral comportment would require the recognition of each and every other's humanity and moral capacity beyond inherited understandings of where virtue or vice may lie – be it threads, caps or books. Ramtanu's school fell very short of the promise. But Mosharraf's autobiography tells us that a promise that disappoints is still a promise. I hope my dissertation has recovered something of that horizon of aspiration.

[11] "Vernacular Literature – Notices: Ratnavatí by Meer Mosharuf Hosain" in *Calcutta Review,* Vol. 50 (No.99), 235.
[12] Mir Mosarraph Hossain "Basantakumārī nāṭaka" in Mir Mosarraph Hossain, *Mīr Maśārraph Hosen Racanāsaṃgraha,* (Kolkata: Kamalā Sāhitya Bhaban, 1957), 304. But see especially the discussion in Anisujjaman, *Muslim mānasa o Bāṃlā Sahitya* (Dhaka: Matāhār Hosen), 162.

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