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Methodology of Symposium and Workshop in Caraka Samhitā

Pulak Kanti Kar, Supriyo Chaudhuri and Abichal Chattopadhyay

Abstract

The accelerated knowledge of Āyurveda is imparted through the process of interaction amongst the scholars with quality personalities on the subject. This applied knowledge is procured through the processes of seminar, workshop or conference with valid introspective outcomes. This methodology was clear to the ancient Indian educationalists and it is regarded as *Tadvidyā Sambhāṣā*. In this article, the methodology of seminar, workshop, symposium, conference, group discussion mentioned in *Caraka Samhitā* has been discussed in a nutshell on the basis of strategy of teaching.

Keywords: Āyurveda, Teaching Methodology, *Tadvidyā Sambhāṣā*, Seminar, Workshop, Symposium, Conference, Group Discussion.

Introduction

Āyurveda is the most ancient science which deals with every minute aspect of life related issues along with their social impacts. It consists of both clinical and non clinical forms of medical science and also covers the learning as well as teaching process of the written materials to understand the pure knowledge into applied one. In this approach, many compendiums were written, out of which *Caraka Samhitā* is the most comprehensive one which deals with almost all aspects of such ailments. It consists of eight sections in which Physiology, Anatomy, Pathology, Pharmacology, Medicine, Environmental Science and Pharmaceutical Science have been incorporated. The basic proposition of teaching in *Caraka Samhitā* is to propagate knowledge through interaction so that the learners get

involved in the process. Majority of the chapters are taught in question-answer style, and a few in narrative style. The practical knowledge was transmitted through workshop pattern. The controversial and apparently serious topics are delivered in seminar, symposium, and conference style. It is also found that in each of the section mentioned earlier, at least one seminar or conference or group discussion is arranged so that the learners can achieve the knowledge in minute details and can learn how to raise objection and nullify others' inappropriate or partly correct conceptions on a particular topic.

Method

Originally, the knowledge of *Āyurveda* was transmitted from Brahmā to Dakṣa Prajāpati followed by Aśvinikumāras, Indra and Bharadvāja through one to one perception. This 'one to one perception' methodology follows the workshop concept. After that, Bharadvāja explained the in-depth intact knowledge to the disciples like Ātreya Punarvasu etc. without any deviation.² Ātreya, punarvasu, imparted the onward knowledge of *Āyurveda* to Agniveśa, Bhela, Jatukarṇa, Kṣārapāṇi, Parāśara and Hārīt in an interactive way.³ It resembles different types of teaching methodology for propagation of knowledge. Afterwards, the said six disciples documented this knowledge in their own way. Out of those *Agniveśa Tantra* was the foremost one. *Agniveśa Tantra* is nowadays known as *Caraka Saṁhitā* after redaction. In the first chapter of *Sūtrasthāna* in *Caraka Saṁhitā*, the prime thought of symposium is encapsulated in such a way that, organising the symposium in the way of the transmission of knowledge is categorically validated. Subsequently *Maharṣi Caraka* has again categorised the methodology of teaching as well as learning in separate *sthāna*⁴ which is nothing but the reflection of ancient Indian educational modules.

In ancient India, different kinds of teaching modules were adopted to teach the disciples in the most comprehensive manner out of which '*Tadvidyā sambhāṣā*⁵', was most popular and effective. *Tadvidyā sambhāṣā* is nothing but open discussion among the learned participants and

the well-versed speakers on a particular topic in a particular area under the guidance of a superlative authority so that an unbiased pure knowledge can be transmitted to the ordinary learners through those participants. As a clinical subject, sometimes Āyurveda requires some regular workshops so that skill can be developed along with the power of adaptation to imply most pure form of knowledge into applied one. All of those techniques come under '*Tadvidyā sambhāṣā*' which are nothing but identical to the modern terminologies of seminar, conference, group discussion, symposium and workshop.

The terms like seminar, conference, group discussion, symposium and workshop are most often synonymously used but sometimes they are misleading when used haphazardly owing to lack of knowledge about their subtle differences.

The main difference between a conference and a symposium lies in the scope and size of the event. In conference, the scope is vast; multiple topics or agenda may be discussed, whereas symposium focuses on a particular topic.

The main difference between a conference and seminar lies in their time span. Seminar is usually shorter meeting focused on educating participants on a specific topic. A group of experts deliver their views on a particular topic there. In conference, longer time is required to ascertain descriptive analysis of the topic. Usually participants are given scope to their opinion and realise the conclusion.

In a workshop, practical demonstration of a theoretical matter is carried out by an experienced personality so that the participants can acquire practical knowledge and can perform those in the field independently.

In group discussion, different views of stalwart personalities on a particular agenda are discussed to bring about a final conclusion.

In ancient period, '*Tadvidyā sambhāṣā*' was conducted in two forms, 1) *Sandhāya sambhāṣā* (discussion conducted in friendly manner), and 2) *Vigṛhya sambhāṣā* (discussion conducted in hostile manner)⁷. In each type of discussion, there are some certain criteria to be fulfilled regarding the topic, venue, participants, speaker and Chairperson

etc. All of those should possess specific qualities or otherwise the goal of this methodology would not be achieved.

Seminar

The seminar method is the most advanced and scientific method of teaching. A seminar is an advanced group technique which is usually used in higher education. It is an instructional technique which involves generating a situation for a group to have a guided interaction among themselves on a theme. It refers to a structured group discussion which usually follows formal lectures or lectures often in the form of an essay or a paper presentation on a theme.

In context to the absolute therapy of *Caraka Samhitā*, the seminar methodology has been followed in *Phalamātrā siddhi*⁸. This chapter deals with the determination of appropriateness of medicaments to achieve success, but in this chapter the mode of teaching resembles the seminar methodology of the modern era. The seminar is based on posology. The seminar style has been incorporated in this chapter understanding the importance of *vāyu*. Dose of drugs is advised to be determined on the basis of body weight and the nature of the animals which proves the existence of animal experimentation at that time. It is also indicative of experimental research. Moreover, this seminar also covers the Pañcakarma practice in veterinary section of Medical Science.

The stalwart personalities like Bhṛgu, Kauśika, Kāpya, Śaunaka, Pulasta and Asita Gautama etc. were the participants and Lord Ātreya was the chairman of the seminar.⁹ In this seminar, the relative merits of different ingredients for *basti* therapy were described in order to prove the authenticity.¹⁰ Śaunaka, Vāmaka, Gautama, Baḍīśa, Kāpya, Bhadra Śaunaka were the speakers as resource persons.¹¹ The speakers among the participants opined their views one after another. Finally Ātreya concluded the session with his remarks.¹² The papers were open for discussion where the other participants put their queries and ultimately Ātreya concluded with remarks.¹³ Different sages were the participants; out of them six were the stalwarts of the topics, six sages presented their papers with arguments and one person was

selected as the Chairman of the seminar.¹⁴ After the presentation of the papers in the appropriate manner, interactions were allowed and the final statement was made by the Chairman himself.¹⁵ The technique of the seminar depicted in this chapter reveals the resemblance of the modern methods of seminar presentation. Even though they were of the same field, but the seminar was arranged in a debate format.¹⁶

The basic knowledge of embryology in context to Anatomy was analysed in *Khuḍḍikāgarbhavakrāntīśarīram* in seminar style.¹⁷ The evolution of *garbha* was discussed here by Ātreya Punarvasu. Different stalwarts of this field were present there; out of whom Bharadvāja took initiation as a representative of the house and raised different queries. Considering all the concepts Ātreya Punarvasu concluded the agenda with justification. Different genetic factors were discussed here like *mātrja*, *pitrja*, *sātmaja*, *satvaja*, *ātmaja* and *rasaja bhāvas*¹⁸ out of which only *mātrja*, *pitrja bhāvas* are highly accepted and documented in this modern scenario. The rest of the factors are to be documented likewise to procure utmost knowledge in this matter.

Conference

In a conference, the specific queries on selected topics are interacted with reasoning and if the reply does not satisfy other participants, then that is to be overruled by others again with another justification and finally the expert on the topic has to conclude with an acceptable remarks.¹⁹

In *Bastivyāpada siddhi*, numbers of different types of questions were asked by the group of disciples in an exceptional way where not only Agniveśa approached with his queries to Ātreya²⁰ which is the normal custom seen throughout the text, but others also took part. This is implied for conference where different queries were solved by the Chairman of the session. In *Kalpanā Siddhi* and *Bastisūtriya Siddhi*, Agniveśa placed his contextual queries to Ātreya Punarvasu and the queries were sequenced and accordingly the reply was made. The consequences of the placing of queries focus the relevancy of conference, symposium etc.²¹ where discussion is performed in a panel or a group of panel respectively.²²

In *Ātreyaabhadrakāpyīyamadhyaya*, a conference was conducted in context to number of *rasa* on the basis of the types and qualities of *rasa* drugs used for *Pañcakarma* to eliminate specific *doṣa*²³. The basic pharmacology has well been here discussed with a comprehensive concept of *Rasa*, *Guṇa*, *Vīrya*, *Vipāka*, *Prabhāva*; but primarily the classification of *rasa* has been documented to draw the conclusion about the number of *rasa*. In the second part of the chapter, a number of different pharmaceutical preparations, as the question raised by Agniveśa, was answered by Ātreya Punarvasu with proper justification.

Symposium

In *Vātakalākalīyamadhyaya*, the lesson has been taught in Symposium style.²⁴ After a common conception of symposium like activity, in *Vātakalākalīyamadhyaya*, the question related to qualities and disqualities of *vāta* was explained to justify the physiology and pathological concept of the body. *Vāyu* is regarded as the chief *doṣa* or physio biochemical component of body in normal condition. Therefore by emphasising the term *vāyu*, the normal and abnormal functions of it were discussed in a symposium style.

Different questions were asked to each other related to *vāta doṣa*, about the quality of *vāyu*, the reasons for which *vāyu* gets aggravated, the methods to pacify *vāyu*, the mode of action of the *dravya* to pacify *vāyu*, the normal and abnormal functions of *vāyu*, the function of normal and abnormal *vāyu*.²⁵ These questions were answered by different sages one after another in specific way. The reply of a particular question by the specific participants was granted by Ātreya, the Chair person of that symposium.²⁶ The specific queries were replied by the specific speakers in sequences. The normal and abnormal functions of *pitta* and *kapha* were also discussed in this symposium.

Group Discussion

Group discussion is nothing but an inter-action of knowledge amongst the scholars with qualitative personality having profound knowledge in the specific subject. It may be conducted to discuss the ideas of similar interest or to solve a certain problem. Conclusion may

be drawn by them or by a renowned personality having sound knowledge on that particular field. The difference between group discussion and other forms of seminars is that group discussion is conducted in a small scale. All the participants have to act as speakers on that topic. In *Phalamātrāsiddhi*²⁷, *Ātreyaabhadrakāpyīyamadhyaya*²⁸, *Vātakalākalīyamadhyaya*²⁹, the style of discussion was like group discussion, if considered in small volume.

Workshop

In Workshop, the practical demonstration is made to expertise the concerned person. It is also an essential method to accelerate the potentiality of the effective knowledge. True thoughts are definitely reflected through the basic workshop and is regarded more effective in clinical subject. Workshop is the process where clinical or practical demonstration is performed with the support of sound theoretical knowledge. In *Upakalpanīyamadhyāya*, the extensive views on practical demonstration are categorically explained and basically the purificatory measures in terms of *Pañcakarma* are clarified.³⁰ The primary workshop is held among a few highly intellectuals. Afterwards this is explained in a large group and all the aspects of the specific topics are demonstrated to have the profoundness of knowledge. The queries of Agniveśa were clarified by Punarvasu during practical demonstration.³¹ Apart from this, the workshops on *basti* and *nasya* are mentioned in the 3rd chapter (*Bastisūtrīyā siddhi*) and 9th chapter (*Trimarmīyā siddhi*) of *siddhi sthāna*.

Quality of Chairperson

The Chairman of the seminar should possess *dhī* (wisdom), *dhairya* (fortitude), *audārya* (magnanimity), *gāmbhīrya* (profundity), *kṣamā* (forgiveness), *dama* (self control), *tapas* (penance),³² *udāra sativa* (liberal mind), *dhī-śruti-vijñāna samṛddha* (excellence in intelligence-memory and wisdom), *pratyakṣa dharma* (clinical eyed),³³ *kṛtakṣaṇa* (who obeys daily rituals),³⁴ *tantra vidāha* (well-versed), *bhiṣag bariṣtha* (best doctor).³⁵ The person having these qualities is regarded as a stalwart because of the possessed excellent qualities. 'Dhī' is the quality by which one can

distinguish the exact states. In this condition the comparative qualities can be differentiated and this is the foremost and prime quality of the Chairman by which the proper decision and conclusion on the topics can be made with appropriate judgment.³⁶ Absolute patience and attentive listening in the approach of the speakers on the topics without interference is another quality. The profoundness and indepth knowledge makes the individual visualise and analyse the insight of the speeches without any prejudice. It makes the person impartial. The Chairman should maintain his dignity without any loose talk so that the gravity of the seminar would be maintained. *Kṣamā* is the highest quality for which the Chairperson will not be vindictive to any person, even after commencing misdeed so that there would be no violence in the seminar. *Dama* is the quality by which the highest authority will remain silent and will not pass any adverse comments till the end of the speech. *Tapa* is that by which one can achieve the highest authenticity of the subject and freedom from any type of dilemma or confusion. *Smṛti* is the quality by which one can sum up and analyse all the speeches of the seminar because of the excellent memory of the Chairperson. The person should be well qualified to make the conclusion after observation, re-observation, experimentation, hypothesis, re-experimentation and well acquainted with the subject both theoretically and practically. He should possess sound knowledge of the text, observe different therapeutic measures; he should be expert, mentally sound, well equipped, both physically and mentally fit; he should assess the constitution of the apparently healthy volunteers, successfully complete the therapeutics, and be well acquainted with therapeutic measures. All these qualities are also considered as the qualities of the Chairman specifically in the seminar related to Āyurveda as the practical orientation is mandatory to apply these measures. Out of all the physicians, the stalwarts of the subject having profoundness should be selected as the Chairperson of the seminar so that the seminar could be concluded with fruitful results. In all '*Tadvidyā sambhāṣā.*' mentioned in Caraka Saṁhitā, Ācārya Ātreya Punarvasu was selected as the Chairperson because he possessed all

of these qualities. *Aiśvarya*, *Vīrya*, *Yaśa*, *Śreya*, *Jñāna* and *Bairāgya* are the six *aṅgas* of *bhaga* and these qualities were possessed by Ācārya Punarvasu and therefore he was named as *Bhagavāna* Punarvasu.³⁷

Topics

The topics of the seminar should be relevant and chosen from the most burning problems³⁸, specific without any abrupt dimension.³⁹ The content of the topics should be understandable from the title itself. The clarity of the topics should be maintained in an accessible way. Topics will be of such a type that there will be no scope for any controversy. In the specific seminar, on the topics enlightening the title, the categorical presentation is necessary. In any system, all the topics do not require to be intensified in a seminar. In *Caraka Saṁhitā* also, there are so many topics dealt, but only few chapters have been taught in *saṁbhāṣā* style. As for example, *Bastivyāpadsiddhi*, where the complication arises due to the administration of abandoned *basti* and its therapeutic measures have been presented without any dilemma.⁴⁰ Likewise it is seen in *Phalamātrā siddhi*, *Kalpanā siddhi* and *Bastisūtriya siddhi*.

Prior to conducting a seminar, the title of the topics justified for the extensive need is to be fixed and it should be significant by which the willing participants will be well versed, but the exploration of the entity will be successfully achieved through the interaction in the seminar. Without deviation from a series of seminars on a particular topic in every aspect, the conclusion will be made by the Chairperson and the stalwart personalities with a common view.⁴¹ In *Caraka Saṁhitā*, in context to *Pañcakarma* a series of seminars especially on *basti* was organised, though the seminar topics were *Kalpanā siddhi*, *Bastisūtriyasiddhi*, *Bastivyāpadsiddhi* and lastly *Phalamātrā siddhi*. Primarily the seminar topic entitled *kalpanā siddhi* clarifies the procedure for successful administration of *Pañcakarma*.⁴² The topic entitled *Bastisūtriya* and *Bastivyāpat siddhi* signify the achievement of perfection in the treatment through the principles of *basti* and successful treatment of complications arising out of the administration

of *basti* therapy respectively.⁴³ In *Phalamātrā siddhi*, determination of the appropriateness of medicaments for *basti* is signified.⁴⁴ The overall concept of *Pañcakarma* and in the succeeding seminars the success of *basti* therapy, complication of *basti* therapy and the efficacious drug for *basti* therapy denote that these types of seminar in relation to the rest of *Pañcakarma* may be conducted to grasp the other therapies in a sequence. These types of entitled topics are also implied for *vamana*, *virecana*, *nasya* and *rakta mokṣaṇa*. New genesis of the topics is replicated through the open discussion without any prejudice after deliberation of the speaker and without any abandoned attitude.⁴⁵ The quality of the topics on Āyurveda highlights the castled workshop, seminar, symposium or conference in a varied perception. Therefore the topics of the seminar were very specific in *siddhi sthāna* of *Caraka Saṁhitā*.

Venue

The venue for seminar to be held should be in a pleasant, favourable, cool, cheerful healthy place⁴⁶ where all the modern facilities are available. In *Bastisūtrīyasiddhi*, the symposium was held in a place that was surrounded by 'a host of great sages'⁴⁷. In the present era also the venue of the seminar is fixed in a banquet hall or a conference or seminar room of academic institutions where the facilities for sitting and presentations are adequate, so that the seminar can run smoothly. It provides the excellent atmosphere, fresh air, easy convenience, extra ordinary infrastructure and healthy states of living.

Quality of speakers

After the determination of proposed topics of the seminar, the matter should be distributed to all the stalwarts of the said topics so that the participants are benefitted from the interaction with the well-versed speakers. The speakers prior to deliberation should be well acquainted with the topics and should have an experienced practical knowledge so that no confusion or dilemma can be raised during his deliberation and even in the open discussion he can distinctly and boldly face the queries with his expertise.⁴⁸ In the seminar related to

Āyurveda, the speakers mentioned above possessed the higher quality to magnify the topics.⁴⁹ The best physicians having the sound pure knowledge like Bāhlika, Kāmkāyana, Dhamāgarva etc. were selected to deliver their speech.⁵⁰ The speaker or paper presenter is the person who prepares an article for paper or sub theme of the seminar to read and discuss in the seminar concerned. He should prepare his paper with right and updated information and with sufficient knowledge about the subject; also he may distribute the copies of his paper to the participants. This makes the observers and participants ready for warm participation in a good discussion forum. He has to reply to the group or questioner without ambiguity. He should be tolerant when the Chairperson gives his comment on his paper.

Participants

The participants should have knowledge about the theme of the seminar.⁵¹ They must appreciate or criticise the speaker's ideas and concepts in positive way.⁵² The participants may express their own experience and knowledge to interrogate the speaker's view but it must be relevant to the discussion held in the seminar.⁵³ They should not be negative in their attitude.⁵⁴ The interaction with the speaker must be carried out with the permission of the Chairperson of the technical session of the seminar. The eminent persons and honourable guests invited to attend or to participate in the seminar are known as observers. They have to observe the discussion and other events occurred in the seminar and deliberate their own views regarding those with the permission of the chairperson of the technical session. Their views and impressions play a remarkable role in the discussion and finalization of the concept described in the seminar theme. However they should avoid negative and inappropriate views against the seminar theme or speakers.⁵⁵

In the seminars mentioned in *Caraka Samhitā*, all the stalwarts who participated, were of different merits in accordance with their degree like, post doctoral, doctoral and graduate named as *Maharṣi*, *Devarṣi*, *Ṛṣipūtra* and *Ṛṣikā* respectively.⁵⁶ They had the intention to participate in the seminar to have an interaction or to learn the stipulated topics

in their highest capacities. Among them *Maharṣis* were the supreme⁵⁷, they never reacted in the seminar but passed their valuable comments to justify the merit of the seminar without any criticism or negative attitude towards the speakers. *Devṛṣaya* were the speakers. *Ṛṣikā* and *Ṛṣipūtra* were present as the audience.

**List of Participants present in different Seminars mentioned in
*Caraka Saṁhitā***

Āyurveda has the foremost measures to encounter the root of the disease and therefore it is seen in the very first chapter of *Caraka Saṁhitā* that a group of enthusiastic and qualified participants were assembled to learn the Āyurveda from the greatest experts. It is also interesting that they were also present in all the seminars or conferences. The assembled participants were Amgirā, Jamadagni, Baṣiṣṭha, Kaśyapa, Bhṛgu, Ātreya, Gautama, Sāṁkhya, Pulastya, Nārada, Asita, Agastya, Vāmadeva, Mārkaṇḍya, Āśvalāyana, Parikṣi, Bhikṣu Ātreya, Bharadvāja, Kapiñjala, Viśvāmitra, Aśmarathya, Bhārgava, Cyavana, Abhijit, Gārgya, Śāndilya, Kaunḍilya, Barkṣi, Devala, Gālava, Sāṁkrtyāyana etc. and the other sages who were having self control and were acquainted with rules of conduct and having the absolute knowledge.⁵⁸ More or less their intellect was almost same and knowledge was transmigrated from Indra to Bharadvāja and Bharadvāja to the others through interaction.⁵⁹ This interaction to achieve the clarity of the knowledge of the subject is implied for symposium. The qualitative knowledge of the Āyurveda was again transmitted through Ātreya Punarvasu to his six disciples like Agniveśa, Jātukarṇa, Parāśara, Bhela, Kṣārāpāṇi and Hārīta.⁶⁰ The transmission of knowledge was spread in the absolute form in a confined way through the conference.

In *Phalamātrā siddhi*,⁶¹ where seminar methodology was adopted, the stalwart personalities like Bhṛgu, Kauśika, Kāpya, Śaunaka, Pulastya and Asita Gautama etc. were the participants and Lord Ātreya was the Chairman of the seminar.⁶² In this seminar, Śaunaka, Vāmaka, Gautama, Baḍīśa, Kāpya, Bhadra Śaunaka were the speakers or resource persons.⁶³

In *Vātakalākalīyamadhyāya*, the lesson has been taught in Symposium style.⁶⁴ Different questions were raised and these questions were answered by different sages one after another in specific way. Ātreya was the Chairperson. In this symposium, Kuśa Sāṃkrtyāyana, Kumārśirā Bharadvāja, Bāhlikabhiṣaga, Kāmkāyana, Baḍīśa Dhāmārgava, Vāyorvida Rājarṣi were the participants. The ultimate conclusion was made by Ātreya Punarvasu when controversy arose in context to the foremost importance of the three humors where Rājarṣi Vāyorvida, Mārica and Ācarya Kāpya presented their views.⁶⁵

In *Ātreyaḥbhadrakāpyīyamadhyāya*, a conference was conducted on the theme of *rasa* and its number on the basis of the types and qualities and on *rasa* drugs used for *Pañcakarma* to eliminate specific *doṣa*.⁶⁶ In this conference, Ātreya, Bhadrakāpya Śākunteya, Pūrṇākṣa, Maudgalya, Hiranyākṣa Kauśika, Kumārśirā Bharadvāja, Śrīmān Rājarṣi Vāyorvida, Nimi, Rājā Videha, Mahāmati Baḍīśa, Bātikabhiṣaga Kāmkāyana, Jitātmāna maharṣaya participated.⁶⁷ But of these, Bhadrakāpya, Śākunteya, Brāmhana, Pūrṇākṣa Maudgalya, Hiranyākṣa Kauśika, Kumārśirā Bharadvāja, Rājarṣi Vāyorvida, Nimi, Vaḍīśa Dhamāgarva, Bāhlikabhiṣaga Kāmkāyana delivered their views.⁶⁸ But in this regard, the Chairman of the conference discarded all their views with justification specifying the types of six *rasa* namely *madhura*, *amla*, *lavaṇa*, *kaṭu*, *tikta* and *kaṣāya*.⁶⁹

Discussion and Conclusion

The positive conditional reflex of thoughts is nothing but the fruit of an interaction on the subject in a methodical manner which is cultivated in different ways of learning process. The technical concepts are inculcated in symposia, workshops and conferences in a qualitative magnum to illustrate the matter in a realistic approach. The instinct of knowledge is experienced through the clinical application for the better understanding of the scholars of different merits. The medical knowledge turns profound with the interaction, deliberation and documentation of the specialists on the concerned subject. The outcome of this multi-dimensional approach of teaching ensures the justification of knowledge in an analytical way.

So it may be concluded that the method of transmission of medical knowledge performed through a synchronised interaction amongst the stalwarts of the ancient Indian medical system is still very much relevant today. Even in the present day, simple or complex topics are considered to be discussed in a seminar or symposium so that the way to impart knowledge remains attractive, effective and innovative.

Notes

- ¹ Vd. Jādavaji Trikamji Ācārya, ed. Agniveśa, Caraka, Dṛḍhabala, *Caraka Saṁhitā, Sūtra sthāna, Arthedaśamahāmūliyamadhyāya*, 30 Reprint edition; New Delhi, Rastriya Sanskrit Samsthān, 2006; 190.
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- ¹⁸ Vd. Jādavaji Trikāmji Ācārya, ed. Agniveśa, Caraka, Dṛḍhabala, *Caraka Samhitā, Siddhi sthāna, Khuddikāgarbhāvākṛāntimādhyāya*, 3/1, Reprint edition; New Delhi, Rastriya Sanskrit Samsthān, 2006; 313.
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- ²⁴ Vd. Jādavaji Trikāmji Ācārya, ed. Agniveśa, Caraka, Dṛḍhabala, *Caraka Samhitā, Sūtra sthāna, Vātakalākalīyamādhyāya*, 12/4-13, Reprint edition; New Delhi, Rastriya Sanskrit Samsthān, 2006; 79-81.
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Delhi, Rastriya Sanskrit Samsthān, 2006; 79-81.

³⁰ Vd. Jādavaji Trikāṃji Ācārya, ed. Agniveśa, Caraka, Dṛḍhabala, *Caraka Saṃhitā, Sūtra sthāna, Upakalpanīyamadhyāya*, 15, Reprint edition; New Delhi, Rastriya Sanskrit Samsthān, 2006; 92-93.

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³² Vd. Jādavaji Trikāṃji Ācārya, ed. Agniveśa, Caraka, Dṛḍhabala, *Caraka Saṃhitā, Siddhi sthāna, Bastivyāpatsiddhi*, 7/3, Reprint edition; New Delhi, Rastriya Sanskrit Samsthān, 2006; 709.

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⁴⁰ Vd. Jādavaji Trikāṃji Ācārya, ed. Agniveśa, Caraka, Dṛḍhabala, *Caraka Saṃhitā, Siddhi sthāna, Bastivyāpatsiddhi*, 7, Reprint edition; New Delhi, Rastriya Sanskrit Samsthān, 2006; 709-715.

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- ⁴⁷ Vd. Jādavaji Trikāṃji Ācārya, ed. Agniveśa, Caraka, *Caraka Saṃhitā, Siddhi sthāna, Bastivṛyāpatsiddhi*, 3/3, Reprint edition; New Delhi, Rastriya Sanskrit Samsthān, 2006; 691-698.
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⁶² Ibid.

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⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

A Comparative Study of Swami Vivekananda's Bhakti Yoga and Nārada Bhakti Sūtra

Dhriti Rani Saha and Paromita Roy

Abstract

This paper discusses the theme of Divine Love based on two immortal treatises on this subject, namely, *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras* and the masterly exposition by Swami Vivekananda's *Bhakti Yoga*. In the midst of the mad chase of the 'will o' the wisp' of pomp and luxury of material life, the parched soul of humanity is craving for a sip of that immortal nectar of pure divine love which alone can quench its thirst forever. It is the only sure antidote to overpower and conquer the negative emotions of animosity and acrimony arising from egotism. We end by quoting Swami Vivekananda's powerful exhortation: "Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like thunderbolt."

Keywords: Vivekananda, *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, Bhakti Yoga, Parā Bhakti, Bhāva.

Introduction

The paper attempts to discuss Swami Vivekananda's (hereafter referred to as Vivekananda) Bhakti Yoga along with the ancient Bhakti text known as the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*. Notwithstanding the pomp and grandeur of our modern life, the hollowness and emptiness of life arising from excessive material affluence prompts us to search for the true meaning of life. Amidst the vast stretch of life lying barren and wretched, the human soul desperately searches for an oasis wherein the real meaning of life and existence could be found. This is the oasis of faith and dependence on some Higher Power to which we can relate through love. This paper gives some insights into the merit of

treading the path of Bhakti as the surest and most natural path in the modern age as the path of Bhakti has certain valuable aspects: one, it is one of the easiest paths as love is the natural instinct in all beings, human and non-human; two, it is considered to be higher than the other paths of yoga in view of its naturalness and spontaneity; three, 'practice of the presence of God' popularised by Brother Lawrence, the famous Christian mystic, is a powerful practice open to all requiring no prior qualification except sincerely looking up to God and feeling His Divine Love to us, His children; four, devotional singing, chanting, etc., elevate the soul for everyone, and the collective participation of the community leads to harmony as was demonstrated in the lives of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and innumerable saints in the Bhakti tradition; finally, the importance of Bhakti in the modern age is paramount because with knowledge explosion and mind-boggling data outburst, particularly the Artificial Intelligence and the latest Chat GPT, human life has become horribly mechanical and the human heart craves for higher expression through love. It is therefore indeed appropriate that the path of Bhakti is not only easier but even higher than the other paths of yoga. Turning towards God as the only Refuge and Saviour in moments of helplessness that come to everyone, constantly contemplating upon Him and His Divine Glories with one-pointed devotion connects the individual to God naturally and makes Him easy (*sulabhah*) of attainment. This is the point that Śrī Kṛṣṇa vouches in the *Bhāgavad Gītā*:

अनन्यचेताः सततं यो मां स्मरति नित्यशः

तस्याहं सुलभः पार्थ नित्ययुक्तस्य योगिनः॥गीता ८/१४

ananyacetāḥ satataṁ yo mām smarati nityaśaḥ |

tasyāhaṁ sulabhaḥ pārtha nityayuktasya yoginaḥ || *Gītā* 8/14

O son of Pṛthā, to that yogī of constant concentration and single-minded attention, who remembers Me uninterruptedly and for long, I am easy of attainment. (Gambhirananda 2018, 283)

Another significant characteristic of the path of Bhakti is that it does not demand any particular qualification on the part of the devotee. Everyone can be a Bhakta as love is a natural emotion of all beings. Bhakti is therefore extremely catholic in outlook and is open to all

men irrespective of one's position or status in life, intellectual ability or any other qualification. This is prominent from the example of Ajāmila, in the *Bhāgavad Gītā*, who even though not possessed of high moral character became great and attained God by Bhakti (*Bhāgavata*, Canto 6). Even in the recent times, we have the example of Girish Chandra Ghosh, a bohemian disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who was metamorphosed by the golden touch of Sri Ramakrishna through Bhakti, unbounded faith and self-surrender. Hence, it is unflinching devotion, faith and self-surrender that counts the most in the path of Bhakti Yoga. This is clearly expressed in the following verses of the *Bhāgavad Gītā*:

अपि चेत् सुदुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभाक्।
साधुरेव स मन्तव्यः सम्यग्यवसितो हि सः ॥ गीता ९/३०

api cet sudurācāro bhajate māmananyabhāk।
sādhureva sa mantavyaḥ samyagvyavasito hi saḥ॥ *Gītā* 9/30

Even if a man of very bad conduct worships Me with one-pointed devotion, he is to be considered verily good; for he has resolved rightly. (Gambhirananda 2018, 315)

क्षिप्रं भवति धर्मात्मा शश्वच्छन्तिं निगच्छति।
कौन्तेय प्रतिजानीहि न मे भक्तः प्रणश्यति॥ गीता ९/३१

kṣipram bhavati dharmātmā śaśvacchantim nigacchati।
kaunteya pratijānīhi na me bhaktaḥ praṇasyati॥ *Gītā* 9/31

He soon becomes possessed of a virtuous mind; he attains everlasting peace. Do you proclaim boldly, O son of Kuntī, that My devotee does not get ruined. (Gambhirananda 2018, 315)

Interestingly, even a *Jñānī* is termed a one-pointed Bhakta in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (refer verse 7.17). The famous commentator and the paragon of *Vedantins* and *Jñānīs*, Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, in his commentary on this verse (*Gītā* 7.17) says that a *Jñānī* is *eka-bhaktiḥ* (one-pointedly devoted) because he does not see anything except God worthy of worshipful pursuit. This shows that Jñāna and Bhakti are not mutually exclusive. One-pointed devotion to God, pursuing Him alone devotedly also infuses the spirit of renunciation in a Bhakta, which comes

naturally to the Bhakta unlike in the path of Jñāna where it is attained through dry struggle against the allurements of the senses. The Bhakta being God-intoxicated sees the whole world as reflection of the Divine. This will be more evident when we discuss *Parā Bhakti* later in this paper. Hence the ideas of “selfishness, narrowness, and littleness”¹ about which Vivekananda talks in a different context, are wiped off from the mind of a Bhakta for whom God is the be-all and end-all of life. This one-pointed devotion to God and intense love for God engenders the attitude of renunciation in a Bhakta most naturally. Bhakti Yoga gives hope to a devotee that renunciation is easier in Bhakti because a Bhakta can sacrifice everything for the sake of God. Renouncing everything for God is a spontaneous expression of a true Bhakta. With such an attitude comes gradually a radical transformation in his outlook towards the world. This is what Vivekananda (2018, 1:86-87) emphasises when he talks of *self-abnegation* which is the abandonment of the individual ego. He in fact equates it, this utter *self-abnegation*, with attainment of God. To quote Vivekananda:

The worshipper, by keeping constantly before him the idea of God and a surrounding of good, comes to the same point at last and says, “Thy will be done,” and keeps nothing to himself. That is self-abnegation. The philosopher, with his knowledge, sees that the seeming self is a delusion and easily gives it up. It is self-abnegation. So Karma, Bhakti, and Jñāna all meet here; and this is what was meant by all the great preachers of ancient times, when they taught that God is not the world. There is one thing which is the world and another which is God; and this distinction is very true. What they mean by world is selfishness. Unselfishness is God.

The plan of this paper is as follows. In the First Section we discuss the greatness of Bhakti over Karma and Jñāna in the light of Nārada *Bhakti Sūtras* and Vivekananda’s exposition in the Bhakti Yoga. We then pass on to a discussion, in the Second Section, about the stages of Bhakti according to Nārada leading from the inferior *Gauṇī Bhakti* to the highest (supreme) *Parā Bhakti*. Vivekananda’s unique concept of ‘The Triangle of Love’ is also discussed in some detail. In the Third Section, the uniqueness of the naturalness of Bhakti Yoga is discussed—how *Vairāgya* or renunciation (Tyāga) comes naturally to a Bhakta.

We conclude by highlighting Sri Ramakrishna's statement, "*kalite nārādīya bhakti*" meaning "Devotion as described by *Nārada* is suited to the Kaliyuga" (Gupta 1958, 2:680), that in the modern world of selfishness and materialism, Bhakti or divine love is surely the antidote to the negative emotions of hatred, animosity and enmity which are built on the edifice of selfish ideas of "me and mine".

I

Greatness of Bhakti over Karma and Jñāna

According to Vivekananda (2018, 3:33), "Bhakti-Yoga is a real, genuine, search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing and ending in love." Bhakti does not depend on Jñāna and Karma or anything else. Bhakti is self-contained, self-sufficient. That is why Bhakti is considered greater than Jñāna and Karma. In the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras* it is proclaimed:

सा तु कर्म-ज्ञान-योगेभ्योऽप्यधिकतरा॥ (*Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 25)

sā tu karma-jñāna-yogebhyo'pyadhikatarā || (*Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 25)

That devotion is superior to the paths of action, knowledge and yoga. (Bhuteshananda 1999, 92)

Vivekananda also states in similar tone the importance of Bhakti above Karma and Jñāna in the following lines:

Bhakti is greater than Karma. (Vivekananda 2018, 3:34)

The one great advantage of Bhakti is that it is the easiest and most natural way to reach the great divine end in view. (Vivekananda 2018, 3:34)

...Bhakti is more easily attained than Jñāna. (Vivekananda 2018, 3:371-372)

The reason for the greatness of Bhakti is illustrated in the following verse:

फलरूपत्वात् ॥ (*Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 26)

phalarūpatvāt || (*Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 26)

Because, it is by itself of the nature of effect (goal). (Bhuteshananda 1999, 92)

This is an important insight into Bhakti that it is both the path and the goal. A Bhakta starts with Bhakti and eventually emerges in Bhakti. This is the beauty of Bhakti Yoga.

Sri Ramakrishna even exhorts that in the present materialistic age (Kaliyuga) Bhakti is the right path to attain God: The path of Karma is not the right one for the Kaliyuga. Bhakti Yoga is the right path. (Gupta 1958, 2:585)

Sri Ramakrishna explains the simplicity of the path of Bhakti due to the following reasons:

The path of knowledge is very difficult. One cannot obtain Knowledge unless one gets rid of the feeling that one is the body. In the Kaliyuga the life of man is centred on food. He cannot get rid of the feeling that he is the body and the ego. Therefore the path of devotion is prescribed for this cycle. This is an easy path. (Gupta 1958, 1:170-171)

Bhakti Yoga is even easier than Rāja Yoga as expressed by Vivekananda:

Yoga cannot be properly practised unless a man is physically very healthy and free from all worldly attachments. But Bhakti can be more easily practised by persons in every condition of life. (Vivekananda 2018, 3:372) Bhakti is greater than Karma, greater than Yoga, because these are intended for an object in view, while Bhakti is its own fruition, its own means and its own end. (Vivekananda 2018, 3:34)

The simple yet an exalted state of living in Bhakti is clearly expressed by Vivekananda with reference to the definition of Bhakti provided by *Nārada*:

“Bhakti”, says Nārada in his explanation of the Bhakti-aphorisms, “is intense love to God”; “when a man gets it, he loves all, hates none; he becomes satisfied forever”; “This love cannot be reduced to any earthly benefit”, because so long as worldly desires last, that kind of love does not come. (Vivekananda 2018, 3:33-34)

The reason why Bhakti cannot be reduced to earthly benefit is that there is no self-interest involved in it. There are no worldly expectations in Bhakti. The only thing that a Bhakta wants is to realise God. Bhakta loves Him not for anything else, not even for happiness but for Him alone. A Bhakta does not desire name, fame, wealth, or anything else.

Even feelings of pleasure or displeasure do not matter for such a devotee. Unhappiness is also acceptable to a devotee if that be God's Divine Will. Happiness, peace though coming spontaneously through Divine Love, is not the concern of a Bhakta as he does not have any desire for these by-products but focuses only on his Beloved God to whom he pours his heart's love. A Bhakta does not even think about salvation, birth, or death. When there is deep devotion, the idea of liberation also loses meaning for a devotee. In fact, when *Parā Bhakti* (supreme devotion) is attained, the Bhakta does not love God even in the hope that God will love him in return. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's poignant verse in his famous hymn śikṣāṣṭakam depicts this tellingly:

आशिलष्य वा पादरतां पिनष्टु मामदर्शनान्-मर्महतां करोतु वा।

यथा तथा वा विदधातु लम्पटो मत्प्राणनाथस्-तु स एव नापरः ॥शिक्षाष्टकम्८
āśliṣya vā pādaratāṁ pinasṭu māmadarśanān-marmahatāṁ karotu vā |
yathā tathā vā vidadhātu lampaṭo matprāṇanāthas-tu sa eva
nāparaḥ ॥ Śikṣāṣṭakam 8

Prostrate at Thy feet let me be, in unwavering devotion,
Neither imploring the embrace of Thine arms
Nor bewailing the withdrawal of Thy presence
Though it tears my soul asunder.

O Thou, who stealest the hearts of Thy devotees,
Do with me what Thou wilt-

For Thou art my heart's beloved, Thou- and Thou alone.
(Prabhavananda and Isherwood)

There is no longing in the Bhakta to get pleasure through his act of giving up all to his Beloved God. God Himself rates such unconditioned love superior to even liberation. This is called *Śuddha Bhakti* or "pure love". Through such pure love, a devotee may attain the state beyond the three *guṇas* and attain Brahma-Jñāna as is explained by Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhāgavad Gītā*:

मां च योऽव्यभिचारेण भक्तियोगेन सेवते।

स गुणान्समतीत्यैतान् ब्रह्मभूयाय कल्पते॥ गीता १४/२६

mām ca yo'vyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena sevate |

sa guṇānsamatītyaitān brahmabhūyāya kalpate ॥ *Gītā* 14/26

And he who serves Me through the unswerving Yoga of Devotion, he, having gone beyond these qualities, qualifies for becoming Brahman. (Gambhirananda 2018, 460)

Sri Ramakrishna was fond of a song that sings the glory of such Śuddha Bhakti (pure love):

Though I am never loath to grant salvation,
I hesitate indeed to grant pure love.
Whoever wins pure love surpasses all;
He is adored by men;
He triumphs over the three worlds it should be. ... (Gupta 1958, 1:183)

Expectations of immortality and liberation from bondage are but lower levels of devotion called *Gauṇī Bhakti*. But there is no place for such desires in case of pure devotion. This pure devotion is the *Parā Bhakti* where there is not the slightest expectation of any return. Vivekananda (2018, 2:52) explains such temperament as:

I do not want wealth, nor even health; I do not want beauty, I do not want intellect: let me be born again and again, amid all the evils that are in the world; I will not complain, but let me love Thee, and that for love's sake.

This is also the prayer of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the śikṣāṣṭakam hymn:

न धनं न जनं न सुन्दरीं कवितां वा जगदीश कामये।
मम जन्मनि जन्मनि ईश्वरे भवताद् भक्तिरहेतुकी त्वयि॥ शिक्षाष्टकम् ४
na dhanam na janam na sundarim
kavitam va jagadisa kামये।
mama janmani janmani isvare
bhavatad bhaktirahaituki tvayi || Śikṣāṣṭakam 4

O Lord and Soul of the universe, Mine is no prayer for wealth or retinue,

The playthings of lust or the toys of fame,
As many times as I may be reborn,

Grant me, O Lord, a steadfast love for thee. (Prabhavananda and Isherwood)

Caitanya-caritāmṛta also talks about *Śuddha Bhakti*:

If one cherishes pure loving devotion to Me, thinking of Me as his son, his friend or his beloved, regarding himself as great and considering Me his equal or inferior, I become subordinate to him. (Prabhupada 1983, 241)

Swami Prabhupada (1983, 242) explaining the purport of the assertion of the Lord stated above says:

Those who are spontaneously devoted to the Lord and have no aims for material gain are called attracted devotees. They are spontaneously attracted to the service of the Lord, and they follow in the footsteps of self-realized souls. Their pure devotion (*Śuddha-bhakti*), manifested from pure love of Godhead, surpasses the regulative principles of the authoritative scriptures. Sometimes loving ecstasy transcends regulative principles; such ecstasy, however, is completely on the spiritual platform and cannot be imitated.

This is the greatness of Bhakti that without material affluence, pomp and grandeur, a person simply with the earnest longing for God in his heart can attain such exalted state of living. Such a state speaks of the importance of *Parā Bhakti*. The discussion so far in this section makes it clear that *Parā Bhakti* mentioned by Vivekananda and the *Śuddha Bhakti* asserted by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu or by Sri Ramakrishna are basically the same.

II

Stages of Bhakti according to Vivekananda and Nārada

The question arises as to how a Bhakta can attain such an exalted state of living which is over and above earthly benefits? This brings us to the discussion of the different stages of Bhakti. We have mentioned in the earlier section how Bhakti is easier to be attained. This gives everyone an opportunity to have an access to the abode of God. Since it is obvious that men differ in their various temperaments so also are there the different stages of Bhakti as laid down by different Bhakti Ācāryas. Vivekananda (2018 3:46) explaining the different stages says:

Bhakti-Yoga... is divided into the *Gauṇī* or the preparatory and the *Parā* or the supreme forms.

***Gauṇī Bhakti* or the Preparatory Stage**

Rituals, symbols, images, worship—all come under the *Gauṇī Bhakti*. It is not possible for everyone to grasp the finer spiritual theories unless having made a considerable progress in spiritual realm. The abstract ideas being difficult to grasp, the symbols, rituals come as an aid to the person. The stage known as the *Gauṇī Bhakti* provides concrete support to a devotee in the form of symbols, images so that he can concentrate his mind upon it. Symbols therefore are the special help in such a stage and we can never abandon the significance of imagining an object with the help of symbols (Vivekananda 2018, 1:72). Vivekananda (2018, 3:46) in the context of *Gauṇī Bhakti* asserts:

We shall find, as we go on, how in the preparatory stage we unavoidably stand in need of many concrete helps to enable us to get on; and indeed the mythological and symbological parts of all religions are natural growths which early environ the aspiring soul and help it Godward. It is also a significant fact that spiritual giants have been produced only in those systems of religion where there is an exuberant growth of rich mythology and ritualism.

These symbols are important in the sense that they have played a significant role in the development of our mythologies and the entire religious atmosphere. The *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* talks about three categories in *Gauṇī Bhakti*:

गौणी त्रिधा, गुणभेदाद् आर्तादिभेदाद् वा॥ *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 56

gauṇī tridhā, guṇabhedād ārtādibhedād vā | | *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 56

The beginner's devotion falls into three categories: because of the prevalence of the three qualities (guṇas), or of the nature of the aspirant seeking freedom from distress, etc. (Bhuteshananda 1999, 147)

उत्तरस्मादुत्तरस्मात्पूर्वपूर्वा श्रेयाय भवति॥ *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 57

uttarasmāduttarasmātpūrvapūrvā śreyāya bhavati || *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 57

Of these, the preceding categories are superior to the succeeding ones. (Bhuteshananda 1999, 147)

Among these, *Sāttvikā* devotion is complete self-surrender to God.² In this devotion, the Bhakta has no prayer for himself. That is why it

is called *Sāttvikī Bhakti*. In the *Rājasikī Bhakti*, a sense of reciprocation is noticeable.³ In *Tāmasikī Bhakti*, there is no surge of love. The *Tāmasika Bhakta* is anxious for his own happiness and joy. He has more thought of himself than the object of his love. On account of this very selfish feeling, it is called *Tāmasikī Bhakti* (Bhuteshananda, 148).

These divisions in the stages of Bhakti are due to the preponderance of a *guṇa* in a person over the other *guṇas*. Bhakti even in its preparatory stage offers varied opportunities to men of different temperaments to tread the path of Bhakti. This is indeed a catholic outlook implicit in the Bhakti Yoga. Sri Ramakrishna also explains three categories of Bhakta:

As worldly people are endowed with *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, so also is bhakti characterized by the three *guṇas*. (Gupta 1958, 1:146)

Explaining the nature of these three categories of Bhakti, Sri Ramakrishna says:

His *sāttvik bhakta's* love for the body goes only as far as appeasing his hunger, and that only by means of rice and simple greens. There is no elaborate arrangement about his meals, no luxury in clothes, and no display of furniture. Besides, such a devotee never flatters anybody for money. (Gupta 1958, 1:146)

An aspirant possessed of *rājasik bhakti* puts a tilak on his forehead and a necklace of holy *rudrāksha* beads, interspersed with gold ones, around his neck. (*All laugh.*) At worship he wears silk cloth. (Gupta 1958, 1:147) (emphasis in the original)

A man endowed with *tāmasik bhakti* has burning faith. Such a devotee literally extorts boons from God, even as a robber falls upon a man and plunders his money, 'Bind! Beat! Kill!' That is his way, the way of the dacoits. (Gupta 1958, 1:147)

Nārada further divides *Gauṇī Bhakti* into three categories which are *Ārta*, *Jijñāsu* and *Arthārthī* (the afflicted one, the inquirer, the seeker of worldly things). Of the three types of Bhakta, *Ārta* is higher than *Jijñāsu* and *Arthārthī*. He prays to God to get rid of anguish. For Nārada "an *ārta* means one who wants to seek God because he is helpless. He is suffering on account of the misery of the world, and so he is praying to God. This path of entering the devotional highway is better than that of *jijñāsu* who wants to know about things" (Bhuteshananda 1999, 149). On the other hand, he is *Jijñāsu Bhakta*,

whose only desire is to know about the things. There is no longing for God in him. Arthārthī is a lower-level Bhakta because he wants to satisfy his own desires. He does not need God. So basically we find that these steps are also as varied as those in the initial stages of Bhakti. Our ancient Ācāryas have not only suggested different stages of Bhakti suitable to different temperaments; they have also given their words of caution. In many a case it happens that by loving one's own ideal one tends to denounce the ideal of the other. Such cases occur however for weak and undeveloped minds in the stages of *Gauṇī Bhakti*. This breeds the dangers of fanaticism. So it is needed that a Bhakta should be extremely cautious in the stages of *Gauṇī Bhakti* when there is the "unripe ego"⁴ as in the words of Sri Ramakrishna. But this fear of fanaticism is resolved in the higher stage of Bhakti. A Bhakta going through the stages of *Gauṇī Bhakti* gradually begins to realise that the ideal of Bhakti cannot be found in external object:

At last the aspirant begins to think that it is vain to try to realise the ideal in external objects, that all external objects are as nothing when compared with the ideal itself; and, in course of time, he acquires the power of realising the highest and the most generalised abstract ideal entirely as an abstraction that is to him quite alive and real. (Vivekananda 2018, 3:104-105)

When one reaches to this point, there remains no need for rituals. This is the stage of *Parā Bhakti* or Supreme Devotion where a Bhakta does not stand in need of any proof of God's existence. God on the contrary remains present to him as pure love.

***Parā Bhakti* or Supreme Devotion**

Whenever one can know that there is a life much higher than the way he is living, he searches for it like a mad man until he finds that bliss himself. He can know for sure that the senses cannot provide him lasting happiness. He realises that this limited inanimate body is nothing compared to the indestructible eternal immortal bliss of the Ātman or Spirit. When a person reaches such a condition, spiritual life begins. But it takes a long time. All the rituals, prayers, pilgrimage, and scriptures are but preparations for this condition. They are however not redundant at all because the mind is purified by all these external

aids and is spiritually attracted towards God. Vivekananda (2018, 2:46) explains how with the removal of the covering wickedness, sins in our minds, we move towards God:

Just as a piece of iron, which had been covered with the dust of centuries, might be lying near a magnet all the time, and yet not be attracted by it, but as soon as the dust is cleared away, the iron is drawn by the magnet; so, when the human soul, covered with the dust of ages, impurities, wickednesses, and sins, after many births, becomes purified enough by these forms and ceremonies, by doing good to others, loving other beings, its natural spiritual attraction comes, it wakes up and struggles towards God.

This is how love for God begins. Vivekananda in course of the explanation of the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras* says:

There have been many definitions of love, but Nārada gives these as the signs of love:

When all thoughts, all words, and all deeds are given up unto the Lord, and the least forgetfulness of God makes one intensely miserable, then *love has begun*. (Vivekananda 2018, 6:163) (emphasis in the original)

As an example of such Bhakta, Nārada mentions of the Gopīs saying:

यथा व्रजगोपिकानाम् *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 21

yathā vrajagopikānām || *Nārada bhakti Sūtra* 21

As the Gopīs had it. (Vivekananda 2018, 6:163)

Vivekananda's Concept of 'The Triangle of Love'

It is pertinent to discuss Vivekananda's explanation of the *Triangle of Love* in this context. According to him, love can be compared to a "triangle with three angles". The first angle of the triangle of love is that there is no question of profit or loss. It is not love when one loves another to get something. Such love in his words is just "shop-keeping."⁵ So, when someone prays to God for gaining something, it is not love at all. It is all bargaining. The second angle of love says that there is no fear in love. Vivekananda mentions "those that love God through fear are the lowest of human beings, quite undeveloped as men" because they love God out of the fear of punishment (Vivekananda 2018, 3:111). The third angle of love is that there is no place for rivalry in love because in it "it is always embodied the lover's

highest ideal" (Vivekananda 2018, 3:111). This is what Vivekananda refers to as the third angle of the triangle of love. These three angles of love (no question of profit or loss in love, no fear in love and no place for rivalry in love) form Vivekananda's *Triangle of Love*. The *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* in the following aphorism may be said to explain in a nutshell the true meaning of love where all criteria of the angles for explaining the *Triangle of Love* are fulfilled:

सा न कामयमाना, निरोधरूपत्वात्॥ (*Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 7)

sā na kāmaya mānā, nirodharūpatvāt ॥ (*Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 7)

It cannot be used to fill any desire, itself being the check to all desires. (Vivekananda 2018, 6:162)

Jñāna and Bhakti are not mutually exclusive

The lover considers God as his highest object of love. He does not love God out of choice but he has none else except God to whom he pours his heart's love in the fullest measure. God and only God is the highest ideal to a Bhakta (Vivekananda 2018, 3: 99-102). One-pointed devotion to God is where a *Jñāni* and a *Bhakta* meets. A remarkable verse from the *Bhāgavad Gītā* may be cited in this context:

तेषां ज्ञानी नित्ययुक्त एकभक्तिर्विशिष्यते।

प्रियो हि ज्ञानिनोऽत्यर्थमहं स च मम प्रियः (*Bhagavad Gītā* 7.17)

teṣāṃ jñānī nityayukta ekabhaktirviśiṣyate ।

priyo hi jñānino'tyarthamaham sa ca mama priyaḥ ॥ (*Gītā* 7.17).

Of them, the man of Knowledge, endowed with constant steadfastness and one-pointed devotion, excels. For I am very much dear to the man of Knowledge, and he too is dear to Me. (Gambhirananda 2018, 264)

In the commentary on the above verse of *Bhāgavad Gītā* as to why Śrī Kṛṣṇa calls a *Jñāni* (a man of knowledge) as *Ekabhakti* (endowed with one-pointed Bhakti or devotion), Śaṅkarācārya says that he is one-pointedly devoted to God as he does not see anything else worthy of his devotion:

अन्यस्य भजनीयस्य अदर्शनात् अतः स एकभक्तिः विशिष्टे। (गीता ७/१७, शाङ्करभाष्यम्)

anyasya bhajanīyasya adarśanāt atah sa ekabhaktiḥ viśiṣṭate | (Gītā 7/17, śāṅkarabhāṣyam)

...he also becomes *eka-bhaktiḥ*, endowed with one-pointed devotion, because he finds no one else whom he can adore. (Gambhirananda 2018, 264) (emphasis in the original)

This understanding breaks the barrier between Jñāna and Bhakti and they can no more be considered mutually exclusive in nature.

Various Forms of Divine Love

The *Ācāryas* of *Parā Bhakti* have shown various forms of Divine Love so that we can love God easily. *Nārada* mentions eleven forms of love for God. Here also we notice an open-mindedness helping a *Bhakta* choose the *Bhāva* suitable for his temperament.

गुणमाहात्म्यासक्ति-रूपासक्ति-पूजासक्ति-स्मरणासक्ति-दास्यासक्ति-सख्यासक्ति-
वात्सल्यासक्ति-कान्तासक्ति-आत्मनिवेदनासक्ति-तन्मयतासक्ति-परमविरहासक्ति-
रूपा एकधा अपि एकादशधा भवति। (Nārada Bhakti Sūtra-82)

guṇamāhātmyāsakti-rūpāsakti-pūjāsakti-smaraṇāsakti-dāsyāsakti-
sakhyaāsakti-vātsalyāsakti-kāntāsakti-ātmanivedanāsakti-
tanmayatāsakti-paramavirahāsakti-rūpā ekadhā api ekādaśadhā
bhavati | (Nārada Bhakti Sūtra 82)

Though itself only one, Bhakti manifests itself in eleven forms: love of the glorification of the Lord's blessed qualities, love of His enchanting beauty, love of worship, love of constant remembrance, love of service, love of God as a friend, love of God as a son, love of God as the husband, love of self-surrender to Him, love of complete absorption in Him, and love of the pain of separation from Him. (Bhuteshananda 1999, 191-192)

Vivekananda also talks about *Śānta Bhāva*, *Dāsyā Bhāva*, *Sakhya Bhāva*, *Vātsalya Bhāva*, *Madhura Bhāva* (Vivekananda 2018, 3:107-110). According to Vivekananda (2018, 3:107), when the fire of love has not been kindled in the heart of a person, a little better than the ceremonial symbolism, in which there is no madness of intense love at all then that thought is called *Śānta Bhāva*. Vivekananda (2018, 3:107) considers the *Śānta Bhāva* as the lowest form of *Parā Bhakti*:

The lowest form in which this love is apprehended is what they call the peaceful—the *Śānta*.

Next higher to the *Śānta Bhāva* is *Dāsyā Bhāva*. In this state, man thinks of himself as a servant of God. Vivekananda (2018, 3:108) says:

The next higher type is that of *Dāsyā*, i.e. servanthship; it comes when a man thinks he is the servant of the Lord. The attachment of the faithful servant unto the master is his ideal.

Then comes *Sakhya Bhāva*. In this form of love, God is like a friend. There is here no fear. There is also the feeling of equality and familiarity. There are some Hindus who worship God as friend and playmate. (Vivekananda 2018, 8:214-215)

Śrī Rāmakrishna in the context of *Dāsyā Bhāva* asserts:

As long as a man thinks that it is he who is doing his duties, it is very good for him to feel that God is the Master and he God's servant. When one is conscious of doing work, one should establish with God the relationship of servant and Master. (Gupta 1958, 1:280)

The next is the *Vātsalya Bhāva*.⁶ In this form the Bhakta loves God as his own child. Parents do not fear their child nor do they have devotion for him. The child has nothing to pray for. The parents are ready to leave the body hundreds of times for the love of the child. They are ready to sacrifice a thousand lives for one of their children. In the *Vātsalya Bhāva*, God's glory and majesty are all forgotten in the feeling that God is one's Divine Child, the Darling of the parent's heart.

The highest ideal of love is revealed in *Madhura Bhāva*. According to Vivekananda, it is the best of all kinds. It is based on the highest love manifested in this world and it is the highest and strongest of all the types of love in the human experience.

There is one more human representation of the divine ideal of love. It is known as *Madhura*, sweet, and is the highest of all such representations. (Vivekananda 2018, 3:110)

God is the husband in *Madhura Bhāva*. All creatures are considered as feminine belonging to *Prakṛti* or Nature and the only *Puruṣa* is God who is the Divine Bridegroom of all beings. In Christian mysticism this *Bhāva* is called "bridal mysticism"⁷ where God is the Divine Bridegroom. In this context we can recall an incident of Mīrābāi which was told by Sri Ramakrishna:

In that state a devotee looks on himself as a woman. He does not regard himself as a man. Sanatana Goswami refused to see Mīrābāi because she was a woman. Mīrā informed him that at Vrindavan the only man was Kṛṣṇa and that all others were His handmaids. 'Was it right of Sānātana to think of himself as a man?' Mīrā inquired. (Gupta 1958, 1:377)

This is a great instance of pure devotion. If asked—wherefrom did Mārā's deep devotion for Śrī Kṛṣṇa originate? The answer is that this kind of pure devotion can be achieved by renunciation only, the complete abandonment of one's ego, one's individuality, one's separate existence. In fact, renunciation is necessary for all Yogas and not peculiar to Bhakti Yoga. Vivekananda (2018, 3:21) utters the importance of renunciation thus:

Vairāgya or renunciation is the turning point in all the various Yogas. The Karmi (worker) renounces the fruits of his work. The Bhakta (devotee) renounces all little loves for the almighty and omnipresent love. The Yogi renounces his experiences, because his philosophy is that the whole Nature, although it is for experience of the soul, at last brings him to know that he is not in Nature, but eternally separate from Nature. The Jñāni (philosopher) renounces everything, because his philosophy is that Nature never existed, neither in the past, nor present, nor will It in the future.

Since in Bhakti, selfless love for God emanates spontaneously from a Bhakta, renunciation becomes easier in Bhakti Yoga.

III

Renunciation is easier in Bhakti Yoga

In Bhakti Yoga, renunciation comes naturally through abandoning oneself through extreme love of the Beloved God. This giving up everything and loving the Highest is natural in the Bhakti Yoga :

Bhakti-Yoga does not say, 'Give up'; it only says, "Love; love the Highest!" and everything low naturally falls off from him, the object of whose love is the Highest. (Vivekananda 2018, 3:84)

Bhakta says:

Everything is His and He is my Lover; I love Him. (Vivekananda 2018, 3:93)

The result of such intense omnipresent love is complete self-sacrifice. In this state, it is firmly believed that nothing that happens in the world is harmful to us. Then the Bhakta can say, "Welcome pain" (Vivekananda 2018, 3:94); when misery comes, he can say "Welcome misery, you are also from the Beloved" (Vivekananda 2018, 3:94). When a snake comes, he can also greet the snake. When death comes, such devotees can embrace death with laughter. To a Bhakta, there is no distinction between happiness and sorrow in this state of complete resignation which arises from a deep love for God and all that is His. He no longer complains of grief (Vivekananda 2018, 3:94). In the course of explaining renunciation, Vivekananda (2018, 3:432) says:

Back from the senses, back! Do not go to the senses is the watchword of Vairāgya. This is the watchword of Vairāgya. This is the watchword of all morality, this is the watchword of all well-being; for you must remember that with us the universe begins in Tapasyā, in renunciation, and as you go back and back, all the forms are being manifested before you, and they are left aside one after the other until you remain what you really are. This is Moksha or liberation.

This idea of Vairāgya is found in the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* in a similar tone:

तत्तु विषयत्यागात्सङ्गत्यागाच्छ॥ (*Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 35)

tattu viṣayatyāgātsaṅgatyāgāccha | | (*Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*-35)

The attainment of devotion is through the renunciation of objects of enjoyment and attraction towards them. (Bhuteshananda 1999, 116)

स्त्री-धन-नास्तिक-(वैरि)-चरित्रं न श्रवणीयम् *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 63

strī-dhana-nāstika-(vairi)-caritraṁ na śravaṇīyam || *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 63

Conversation about lust, or doubt of God or about one's enemies must not be listened to. (Vivekananda 2018, 6:165)

अभिमान-दम्भादिकं त्याज्यम् *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 64

abhimāna-dambhādikaṁ tyājyam || *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 64

Egotism, pride, etc. must be given up. (Vivekananda 2018, 6:165)

तदर्पिताखिलाचारः सन्कामक्रोधाभिमानादिकं तस्मिन्नेव करणीयम्॥ Nārada
Bhakti Sūtra 65

tadarpitākhlācārah sankāmakrodhābhimānādikaṁ tasminneva
karaṇīyam ॥ *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* 65

If those passions cannot be controlled, place them upon God, and
place all your actions on Him. (Vivekananda 2018, 6:165)

To such a devotee everything gradually becomes sacred because
everything belongs to Him. All are His children, His limbs, His
manifestations. Then how can *Bhakta* hurt another? How can *Bhakta*
not be good to others? As soon as the love of God comes, its sure
result will be love for the whole universe. The more we move towards
God, the more we see all things within Him. He sees no difference
between his self and others. He sees the Lord in all beings and all the
beings in the Lord. The *Bhagavad Gītā* describes this in the following
remarkable verses:

सर्वभूतस्थमात्मानं सर्वभूतानि चात्मनि।

ईक्षते योगयुक्तात्मा सर्वत्र समदर्शनः॥ गीता ६/२९

sarvabhūtasthamātmānaṁ sarvabhūtāni cātmani |

īkṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ ॥ *Gītā* - 6/29

One who has his mind Self-absorbed through Yoga, and who has
the vision of sameness everywhere, sees his Self existing in
everything, and everything in his Self. (Gambhirananda 2018, 242).

यो मां पश्यति सर्वत्र सर्वं च मयि पश्यति।

तस्याहं न प्रणश्यामि स च मे न प्रणश्यति॥ गीता ९/३०

yo mām paśyati sarvatra sarvaṁ ca mayi paśyati |

tasyāhaṁ na praṇaśyāmi sa ca me na praṇaśyati ॥ *Gītā* -6/30

One who sees Me in everything, and sees all things in Me- I do not
go out of his vision, and he also is not lost to My vision.
(Gambhirananda 2018, 243)

सर्वभूतस्थितं यो मां भजत्येकत्वमास्थितः।

सर्वथा वर्तमानोऽपि स योगी मयि वर्तते ॥ गीता ६/३१

sarvabhūta-sthitam yo mām bhajatyekatvamāsthitaḥ
sarvathā vartamāno'pi sa yogī mayi vartate || *Gītā* -6/31

That yogī who, being established in unity, adores Me as existing in all things, he exists in Me in whatever condition he may be. (Gambhirananda 2018, 244)

आत्मौपम्येन सर्वत्र समं पश्यति योऽर्जुन।
सुखं वा यदि वा दुःखं स योगी परमो मतः॥ गीता ६/३२
ātmaupamyena sarvatra samam paśyati yo'rjuna |
sukham vā yadi vā dukham sa yogī paramo mataḥ || *Gītā* 6/32

O Arjuna, that yogī is considered the best who judges what is happiness and sorrow in all beings by the same standard as he would apply to himself. (Gambhirananda 2018, 244)

When the devotee is able to attain the stage of *Parā Bhakti* then he begins to see God in the universe. His heart then becomes a perennial spring of divine love. He begins to love the whole universe spontaneously in an outpouring of selfless love. When one reaches such highest level of love, the difference between all the substances in this world is completely removed. In this state, Vivekananda explains, “man is seen no more as man, but only as God; the animal is seen no more as animal, but as God; even the tiger is no more a tiger, but a manifestation of God” (Vivekananda 2018, 3:93). This intense state of Bhakti is where “worship is offered to everyone, to every life, and to every being” (Vivekananda 2018, 3:93).

एवं सर्वेषु भूतेषु भक्तिरव्यभिचारिणी।
कर्तव्या पण्डितैर्ज्ञात्वा सर्वभूतमयं हरिम्। (Viṣṇupurāṇa 1.19.9)
evam sarveṣu bhūteṣu bhaktiravyabhicārīṇī |
kartavyā paṇḍitairjñātvā sarvabhūtamayaṁ harim || (*Viṣṇupurāṇa* 1.19.9)

Knowing that Hari, the Lord, is in every being, the wise have thus to manifest unswerving love towards all beings. (Vivekananda 2018, 3:93)

Conclusion

Sri Ramakrishna often said “*kalite nārādīya bhakti*” which means “Devotion as described by Nārada is suited to the Kaliyuga” (Gupta 1958, 2:680). In the simultaneous discussion of Vivekananda's Bhakti Yoga and *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* we have tried to present the true meaning of Bhakti and love in this paper. In the present day where selfishness, aggressive competition and conflict are eating into the very vitals of mankind, human hearts seem to be converted into a desert, a cremation ground as it were, devoid of selfless love and fellow-feeling. With all the abundance of wealth and pleasure the human heart is empty and hollow, craving for a particle of selfless love. If we try to delve within to find the cause of this emptiness amidst all the pomp and grandeur of modern life we will see that it is the lack of genuine, pure and selfless love. The path of Bhakti tries to instill in us the faith that there is someone who will listen to the cries of our longing heart when no one seems to be by our side. It may not be possible to attain to the stage of *Parā Bhakti* for all at once but we may slowly and gradually move steadily and make our way to *Parā Bhakti* passing through the preparatory stages of *Gauṇī Bhakti*.

The different stages of Bhakti according to the different temperaments of men portray a catholic outlook giving opportunity to everyone to enter God's abode. The preparatory stages slowly making way to *Parā Bhakti* or Supreme Devotion has shown us how an extraordinary transformation, a metamorphosis, an unprecedented change in the heart of the devotee takes place as he feels united with the entire universe in a bond of selfless love and self-sacrifice. Hence, renunciation becomes easier for a *Bhakta*. He is the *ekabhakti* and therefore a *Jñānī* as we have discussed above in the light of Śaṅkarācārya's commentary on the *Bhāgavad Gītā* verse 7.17. May we end with the following lines from Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda:

Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like thunderbolt. (Vivekananda 2018, 7:479)

premaikabindum chira dagdhacitte
viṣṇucacittam kuru naḥ suśāntam (Swami Abhedananda's hymn on Śrī Śārāda Devī)

and casting even a drop of Thy love on our long-parched heart, render it cool and peaceful! (Tapasyananda 2013, 32)

Notes

- ¹ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 2018), 2:82
- ² "Sāttvikā devotion is absolutely unselfish, it is complete absorption in God. There will be no desire in the mind of the devotee for anything for himself. That is why it is called *sāttvikā*." Swami Bhuteshananda, *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1999), 147-148.
- ³ "...rājasikā devotion means there is a sort of give and take: 'I Love God, may God love me also.' That way it is a matter of give and take." Swami Bhuteshananda, *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1999), 148.
- ⁴ The 'unripe ego' makes one feel: "I am the doer. I am the son of a wealthy man. I am learned. I am rich. How dare anyone slight me?" Swami Nikhilananda, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (vol 2), (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1958), 860
- ⁵ "Wherever there is any seeking for something in return, there can be no real love; it becomes a mere matter of shop-keeping." *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 2018), 3:99.
- ⁶ "The next is what is known as Vātsalya, loving God not as our Father but as our Child." *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 2018), 3:109.
- ⁷ See Glenn E. Myers, *Everyone a bride of Christ* where "bridal mysticism" is described as a form of devotion which invites men and women into spiritual oneness with Christ. Available at: <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/everyone-a-bride-of-christ-ch127>.

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Historic Calcutta Water Works and Tallah Water Reservoir

Pronoy Roy Chowdhury

Abstract

The Calcutta Water Works which started its journey in the year 1865, conceived by the then Calcutta Municipality for supply of potable drinking water to the population of the city of Calcutta and provide relief from the prevalence of water borne disease among the citizens of the Calcutta metropolis. The Water Supply Plant at Palta, Barrackpore was designed by Mr. William Clark, the Municipal Engineer of Calcutta Municipality is still serving the greater Calcutta city with water supply. The unique feature of the Calcutta Water Works is the nine million gallon capacity elevated water reservoir called Tallah Water Tank, which is one of the largest capacity tank of the world. In this paper an effort has been made to study the historical water supply scheme of Calcutta along with the Tallah Water Reservoir in details both from historical and engineering points of view for better appreciation of this oldest water supply project which was first conceived to supply potable drinking water to the population and is a model for all modern water supply projects.

Keywords: Water Works, Tallah Raised Reservoir, Water Treatment Plant, Filtered Water supply, William Clark.

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the British established their firm hold at Calcutta. From contemporary reports of English authorities it may be found that there were only 17 water bodies, on which the native population of Calcutta was entirely dependent for its water supply, in addition to the water of Hooghly River (Ganga). However, the river Hooghly a tidal river as drains in

the Bay of Bengal, thus during high tide and the hot summer months, the raw water of Hooghly at the lower reaches is considerably saline.

There was scarcity of drinking water due to improper usage of these water bodies by the local residents. The water tanks were very much polluted and the relatively well educated British with the science of Europe were not ready to accept them as the hygienic source for quenching their thirst. Even before the Battle of Plassey, to ensure effective supply of water to the Garrison of the old Fort Williams and the local residents, Lal Dighi or the Great Tank of Dalhousie Square was renovated in 1709, it was one of the purest source of drinking water and catered the needs of the British people for more than 100 years.

Around 1820 a small steam engine was set up at Chandpal Ghat for drawing river water into open masonry aqueducts, which then supplied water through gravitation to the surrounding localities like Chowringhee, Park Street, parts of Lalbazar and Bowbazar etc. It was found that the quality of river water varied with season, while from October to March, the water was found to be good for drinking and cooking, but from April till the onset of south west monsoon the water was saline. In autumn, the local people used alum followed by muslin strainers to remove the turbidity of the river water as far as possible. It was also a common practice among the local population at that time to collect the river water in the month of February and stored in jars for drinking purpose until the rains came, when the salinity of raw water of Hooghly reduced.

The University of Calcutta was established on 24th January, 1857. In early 1860s Dr. Franz McNamara MD, a Professor of Chemistry and Medical Jurisprudence of Fever Hospital of Calcutta, (present day Calcutta medical college, formed in 1835 during Governor General Lord William Bentinck) a member of Faculty of Medicine of the Senate of Calcutta University was engaged to assess the water quality of raw water of Hooghly River. Water sample was collected at three locations called Chitpur, Pulta and Chinsurah, from the centre of the river stream at a reasonable depth to obtain the true water quality. It was

found after analysing, the raw water of Hooghly river that water drawn at Chitpur was tainted with sewage and emitted disgusting ammoniacal smell on evaporating the raw water sample. However, the water sample was relatively pure at Pulta or Chinsurah. The selection of river intake at Pulta was guided by the fact that the location was practically beyond the influence of salinity of the Hooghly water brought in by the Bay of Bengal during high tide and summer months.

Greater part of Calcutta today draws its supply from the old Calcutta Water Works located at Pulta, some two miles distance (about 3.22 Km) from Barrackpore located at North Twenty Four Parganas district, where filtration of raw water of river Hooghly is done to render water pure and wholesome. Water supply for Calcutta with river intake in the River Hooghly near Pulta using slow sand filtration, conceived by the then Municipal Engineer William Clark, was sanctioned by the Justice of the Peace of Calcutta Municipality and subsequently by the then Government of Bengal as early as 1865.

Inception of Calcutta Water Works

Initially the system of Water Works, comprised of an intake at Pulta with sand filter beds, settling tanks, from where the filtered water was received at the underground reservoir at Tallah and then it was pumped to three pumping stations one at Halliday street (named after first Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Frederick James Halliday, now renamed as Chittaranjan Avenue), other at Wellington Square (renamed as Raja Subodh Mallick Square, Dharmatalla) and third towards the southern part of the city near Bhowanipur, within the Calcutta city. The water was received at Tallah, via a 42 inch (about 1.07 m) cast iron main pipe which was further pumped from the ground level reservoir of Tallah to the Wellington Square pumping station for distribution to the population. Water supply was done to all the pucca houses (brick masonry building), at the streets, stand post was provided at the street side to provide water supply to the general population. The entire system operated through direct pumping and there was no sufficient provision of storage which was a major weakness of the water supply system.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the population of Calcutta touched the million mark as it was then the capital city of British India. To satisfy the water demand of increasing number of residents of the city including the expatriate British residents, the local population etc., the existing Wellington Square underground reservoir seemed to be insufficient. Need of something larger storage was felt. Hence, the plan to set up an elevated water tank came into being.

The concept of construction of elevated water reservoir for the water supply of Calcutta was embodied in a paper entitled "The Calcutta Waterworks" authored by A. Peirce who was then Assistant Engineer of the Calcutta Waterworks in the year 1901, published in the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers, UK, June 1902¹, has made the following important observations:

"The nature and habits of the population, and the tropical climate, in Calcutta, together with the dense population in portions of the town, render ample supply of pure water a necessity, if the ravages of disease common under such conditions are to be successfully combated. A supply of 24.1 gallons of filtered water per head per day must, however, be considered an ample allowance for domestic purposes, as in addition to the filtered supply there is a copious supply of unfiltered water for use in road-watering and sewer-privy flushing. The existing intermittent supply of filtered water is unsatisfactory and its distribution is defective. The lavish use of the water, and the careless habits of the population, taps being constantly left open in all parts of the town, lead to considerable waste. Much of this waste is doubtless due to the fact that the supply is an intermittent one; the pressure being maintained for a few hours only during the day, the consumers leave the taps to open fill various receptacles. Another cause of waste is the state of some of the older mains and services laid in the town, which are believed to be unsound, but as an easy escape is provided by old sewers and drains, it is difficult to localize the leaks. As a remedy the Author has proposed, to erect raised tanks in the town, through which the distribution would be effected, and which would act as

reservoirs during the hours in which the engines were not at work. The Tallah pumping station only would be retained to pump the water in the raised tanks, the remaining pumping-stations being closed.”

In the above mentioned paper therefore the then Assistant Engineer to the Calcutta Municipality suggested the use of elevated reservoir to obtain a practically constant need for supply of water.

The Calcutta Municipal Act (Bengal Act III of 1899)² came into effect in the year 1899. The Act created a political controversy as it provided for the reduction in the number of elected representatives and increased the number of nominated officials. The native people (Indians) felt that they were deprived of the opportunity of self – governance. All the 28 elected members resigned in protest and the corporation was virtually converted into a Government department with English and Anglo-Indian majority. However as per chapter 20 clause no. 241 of the Act it was indicated “*The Corporation shall gradually convert the existing intermittent system of supplying filtered water into a continuous system.*” It was indicated that such a system shall be implemented within a period of 5 years from the commencement of the Act. Again, as per provision of cl no. 242 of the Act it was indicated that the areas where the continuous filtered water supply is in force, the pressure of the supply shall not be less than forty feet. Further, as per clause no. 243 of the Act, the Chairman of the Calcutta Municipality shall arrange to test the purity of the filtered water supply once every week and place before the General Committee of the Corporation.

The Tallah Tank

The land on which ‘Tallah Tank’ is presently situated, was the property of Babu Khelat Chandra Ghosh, a well-known philanthropist of the then Calcutta. Born in 1827, the son of Babu Deb Narayan Ghosh was a man with a lot of dignity. Apart from being the Honorary District Magistrate, he was also a social reformer and close to the British. The land for the reservoir was donated by him. To mark his generous contribution the adjoining lane was later renamed Khelat Babu Lane. Tallah Tank was no less than a feat for civil engineering and metallurgy. Designed by the Chief Engineer of the then Calcutta



Fig 1 (a) William Bernard McCabe, M.I.C.E
The then Chief Engineer,
Calcutta Municipal Corporation.



Fig 1 (b). The Tallah Elevated Water Reservoir

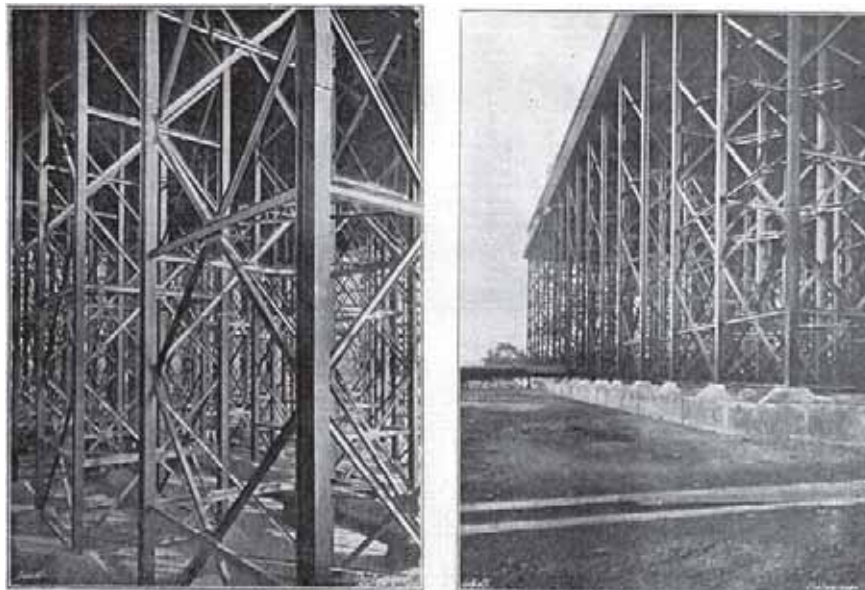
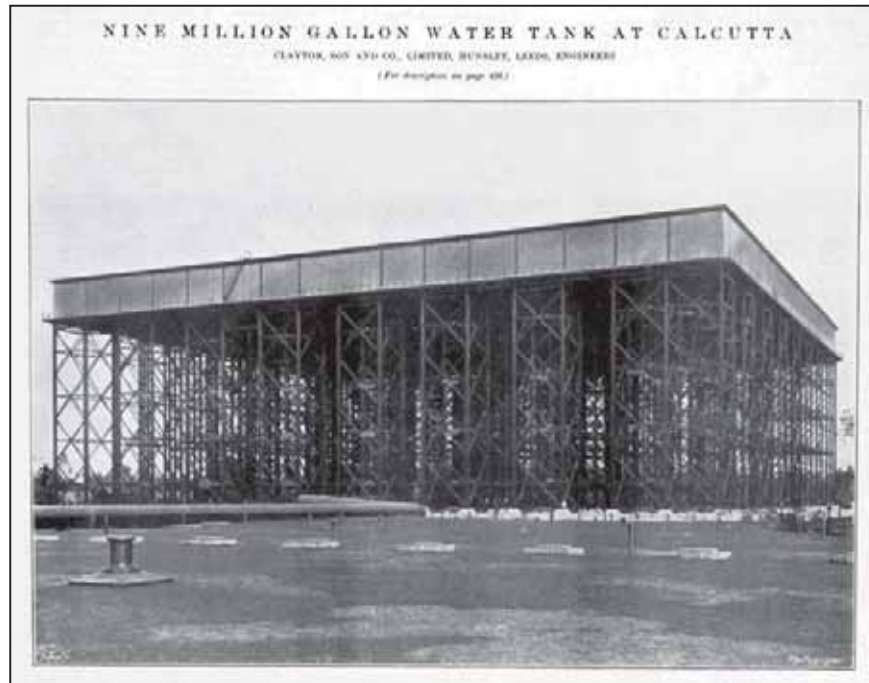


Fig 2 (a), (b) Photographs of Tallah water reservoir, and supporting frame structure adopted from the "Engineer" Magazine, April 28, 1911

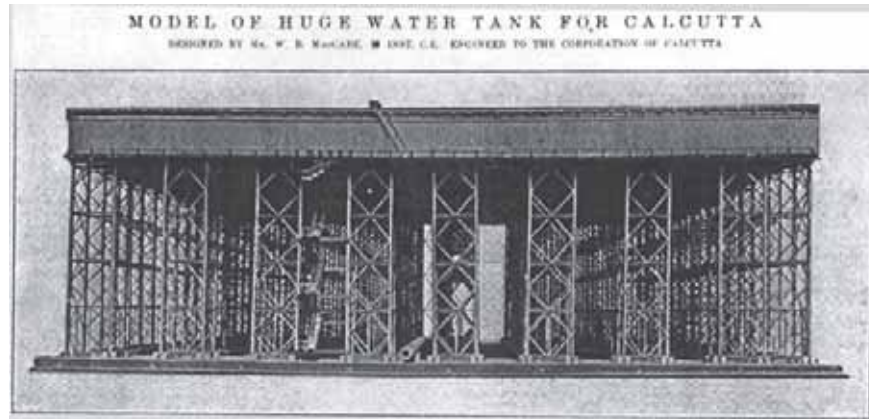


Fig 3 (a). Photograph of the model of proposed Tallah Water tank prepared by Mr. W.B MacCabe, MICE, Chief Engineer to Calcutta Corporation, adopted from "Engineer" magazine, 9th July, 1909.

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Fig 3 (b). Advertisement of Clayton Son and Co. Ltd. Moore End Works, Hunslet Leeds, UK, adopted from Graces Guides, UK.

Corporation, William Bernard MacCabe, it is world's largest overhead water reservoir, tank so far.

The execution of the elevated water tank was done through floating tenders. The work was divided partly to various contracting firms. The initial business venture of Rajendranath Mookerjee in the name and style *T. C. Mukherjee & Co.* was entrusted with the work of piling, (Later, after being knighted) *Sir R. N. Mookerjee's* firm *Martin & Co.* did the reinforced concrete foundation, the roof job undertaken by *Arracon & Co.* and *Babu Kali Sunkar Mitter* while the tank was itself fabricated by *Clayton, Son & Co.* from Leeds. The materials including the anti-corrosion plates were brought from England. The construction work of this iron & steel marvel began on 18th November, 1909, in the presence of the then Lt. Governor of Bengal Sir Edward Baker. It was commissioned on 16th May, 1911 though the work was completed by January 12th. Standing at a height of 110 feet, it is 16 ft. deep.

Detailed technical specifications of the Tank as obtained from the *The Engineer* UK Magazine of July 9, 1909 edition³ is faithfully reproduced below in tabular form:

- 1) Tank Capacity - 9000000 Gallons, divided in four equal compartments with cross frames.
- 2) Size – 321 X 321 Sq ft, Height- 16ft deep.
- 3) Height of steel staging- 110ft from top of tank to ground level
- 4) Weight of water contained in tank- 40200 tons.
- 5) Weight of steel work — 7000 tons.
- 6) No. of supporting steel trestle — eighty one.
- 7) Trestle details-Each trestle is fabricated of four rolled steel stanchions, braced together at intervals by smaller beams.
- 8) Provision of expansion and contraction of the tank is kept for making the tank bottom flexible.
- 9) A 60 inch pipe acts as inlet and outlet.
- 10) To protect the water from contamination and keeping it cool, the tank has a flat terrace with 25/8 inch of concrete carried on slates and laid between steel rafters.

- 11) The rafters are carried on steel joists supported on steel columns from the bottom of the tank.
- 12) To make the roof water tight a sheet of callender's bitumen is laid over the whole area between slates and concrete.
- 13) To prevent the birds entering the tank, the ventilation space is closed with brass wire netting.
- 14) Maximum load on each vertical member of the sub-structure is 200 tons. Thus load for each set of four based vertical trestle is 800 tons.
- 15) Under each member there is a shoe for distribution of load on the surface of concrete to 6 tons per square foot.
- 16) The foundation work is on steel grillage reinforced concrete system. It consists of bed of concrete 2 ft 6 inch thick, reinforced at the base with a system of flat ties crossing each other at right angles beneath the supporting columns.

The detailed specification of the foundation work of the Tallah water tank is given in this paper for ready reference:

"The site contained several old tanks; these were first dewatered, then piled with salbullah piles 20 to 25 feet long, and filled with jhamakhoa well rammed, a retaining wall of pilling and concrete being constructed to prevent any lateral displacement of soil beneath the foundations. The whole area was then consolidated by heavy steam-rollers, after which 9-inch khoa bed was laid, consisting of a bed of cement concrete 2 feet 6 inches in thickness, reinforced near its base by flat steel joists, upon which the bases of the main column rest. The water contained in the tank weighs some 40,000 tons and the structure about 8500 tons, including the ferro-concrete foundation. A large margin of safety was kept considering the treacherous Calcutta soil."⁴

After the construction of the tank was completed the tank was tested for water tightness by the Chief Engineer of the Works W.B. MacCabe, he issued the certificate of water tightness of the tank. The Tallah water reservoir was basically a balancing reservoir, which was used for balancing the fluctuation of water demand in the distribution

system. That is when the supply is more than the demand the excess water was stored in the reservoir, and when the demand was more than the supply water was supplied from the reservoir into the distribution system. There is only one single pipe rising to the tank, and such a reservoir is called a reservoir floating on the system.

The Repair Work

The reservoir has continuously supplied for 104 years without any significant repair and renovation, it had only sustained some 14 major leakage. However after 104 years of service it was found that the reservoir can no longer bear the burden of age and its performance was severely affected by 2015, and it was decided to go for major renovation of the water reservoir. The main problem was that the steel structure was badly affected by corrosion, and the steel sections within the tank body was heavily corroded, causing leakage from the tank, the supporting structural system was also weakened due to corrosion of the structural steel members, so necessity was felt for thorough repair and renovation of the tank structure. A technical team of experts from Jadavpur University, Calcutta with other consultant Engineers studied the structure and performed a thorough repair of the tank, removed the heavily corroded members and restored the tank to its previous glory. Constructed in 1911 this heritage water tank constructed in steel with British technology on Indian soil, has faced many challenges in its life time. In 1934 the severe Bihar-Nepal earthquake devastated a large part of Northern Bihar and Nepal. The earthquake was felt in Calcutta too. Several of the standing buildings were damaged, including the bell tower of the famous Saint Paul's Cathedral which collapsed⁵. But the Tallah Water Tank kept standing firmly. During the Second World War, the Tallah Water Tank was under the threat from Japanese "Zero" fighter planes which bombed the City of Calcutta at Kidderpore Docks. The Water Tank was covered with a mat of grass, so that the elevated Tank appeared to be a field filled up with grass from the aircraft. The Tallah Water Tank is an iconic structure of Calcutta. It is an excellent example of Civil &

Metallurgical Engineering, which was executed at a time when there were no standard code of practice for execution of steel water tank at such mammoth scale. The only available code of practice at that point of time was the London County Council Code which gave some insight in structural construction in steel structure. The steel sections which were used for construction of the tank were all manufactured in Europe, as because at that point of time steel manufacturing in colonial India at such huge quantity and with such structural properties was unavailable. Thus, the sustainability of the structure for more than 104 years clearly reflects the superiority of the steel manufacturing process which was used at Sheffield for manufacturing steel and fabrication of the structure. Erection of the steel tank also required sophisticated technology such as use of cranes etc. The use of cranes with steam power was also a significant development in the field of mechanical engineering which enabled to achieve such a feat of engineering structure which would serve the humanity for 104 years.

Conclusion

The Tallah Water Tank is a functional heritage structure, worthy to be studied in details as a landmark of civil engineering executed in British technology in colonial Bengal and restored by indigenous effort for the posterity, it is a part and parcel of the living history of Calcutta.

Notes

- ¹ A. Peirce, "The Calcutta Waterworks", *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers*, UK, 1902, pp. 326-339.
- ² D.E. Cranenburgh, *The Calcutta Municipal Act 1899, (Bengal Act-III of 1899)*, Law Publishing Press, 1899, p. 110.
- ³ *The Engineer* (UK Magazine), Mark Allen Group, UK, April 28th, 1911, p.436-438.
- ⁴ S.W. Goode, "Municipal Calcutta, Its Institutions in Their Origin and Growth", *The Corporation of Calcutta*, T. and A. Constable, Edinburgh, UK, 1916, p. 200.
- ⁵ S.C. Roy, "The Bihar-Nepal Earthquake of 1934 the Geological Survey of India", *Memoirs of Geological Survey of India*, Vol-73, Geological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1939, p. 230.

Mental Illness as Liminality or Social Deviance? Gleanings from Ancient Indian Literary Texts

Dipsikha Acharya and Sriya Sarkar

उन्मादं पुनर्मनोबुद्धिसंज्ञाज्ञानस्मृतिभक्तिशीलचेष्टाचारविभ्रमं विद्यात् ॥५॥
(*Caraka Saṁhitā*. 2.7.5)

Insanity is defined as wandering about of mind, intellect, consciousness, knowledge, memory, inclination, manners, activities and conduct.

The mind, body and soul are said to be intimately connected. Among these the mind and its functionalities have received considerable attention in recent times. Mental Health essentially refers to our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO) states, "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity".¹ In order to understand mental health, one needs to primarily decode mental illness. Mental illness, also called mental health disorders is an umbrella term for a wide range of mental health conditions affecting one's mood, thinking abilities and behavioural patterns. Madness was an incessant and familiar condition to human societies throughout history. The present paper attempts to unfold various intricacies associated with mental illness in ancient India based on literary sources. Since the profundity of such issues is hardly acknowledged in ancient societies, its reflection is also quite blurred in historical sources. Even a thorough study of literary sources can give us somewhat partial understanding of the nature of mental illness, persisted in ancient India and its recognition in the contemporary society/ies.

Prologue: Mental Illness in the Domain of Psychiatry

German physician, physiologist, anatomist, and psychiatrist Johann Christian Reil (1759 – 1813)² coined the term ‘psychiatry’: *psychiatrie* in German, in 1808. Initially, a supernatural and demonic connotation was attached to the phenomenon of abnormal behaviour which was called madness. Benjamin Rush, the ‘father of American psychiatry’, was the first to believe that mental illness is a disease of the mind and not a ‘possession of demons’. Published in 1812, Benjamin’s classic work, *Medical Inquiries and Observations, upon the Diseases of the Mind*, was the first psychiatric textbook printed in the United States.³ In the early days taking care of the mad was a family affair, while from the Middle Ages we observe the advent of asylums. As Edward Shorter puts it, “....the history of psychiatry began as the history of the custodial asylum, institutions to confine raging individuals who were dangerous to themselves and a nuisance to others”.⁴ The portrayal and use of restraint and violence implying to an inhuman treatment of mentally sick patients has been prevalent since the early ages. What came as a breakthrough in this field was the little humane approach to psychiatry associated with Philippe Pinel (1755 – 1826). In 1798, he removed chains from his insane patients in the Bicetre Hospital of Paris and replaced them with strait-jackets.⁵ This new method to treat the insane was further explored as the non-restraint method, whose protagonist was John Conolly (1794 – 1860).⁶ The unsound minds were no more treated as delusive rather they displayed a purposeless extreme rage, deep despair, and shamelessness. A new construct became imperative to explain these newly found evidences and hence, the concept of moral insanity was formulated by James Cowles Pritchard in his *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind*, published in 1835.⁷ Meanwhile, a continual conflict of opinions persisted among various psychiatrists on the causes of mental disorders, ranging from moral, brain lesions to somaticism. The dominant somaticism failed to provide a satisfactory explanation of most mental diseases; thus, it could not offer effective treatment

methods. Against this background of an intellectual predicament psychoanalysis acquired a modern psychiatry position through Sigmund Freud's (1856 – 1939)⁸ doctrine and his followers. An Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, Freud developed the psychoanalytic theory of personality development. He propounded a theory known as Freud's structural theory of personality, where he argued that personality is shaped through conflicts among three fundamental human mind structures: the *id*, *ego*, and *superego*.⁹

Mental illness or psychiatry in the East is perceived and understood at variance with the West. Therefore, the history of psychiatry and its evolution and approaches developed distinctly in the Orient than in the Occident. The history of mental illness in the East will lead us to a light walk through several thousand years of history initiating from madness found in the vedic sources to its transition during the historical period which essentially witnessed the genesis of Āyurveda.

Madness in the Vedic Sources: A “Magico-Religious” Epistemology

The vedic sources embody a very thin line between medicine and religion, vedic medicine was entwined with vedic religious practices. This clearly had its implications on how ailments like mental disorders were treated. Of the four vedas, the *Atharvaveda* contains most of the hymns concerning healing or therapeutics though the metaphysics underpinning the treatments is established in the *Rgveda*, which is mostly religious in nature; both of these scriptures were preserved by means of an ‘extraordinarily accurate’ oral tradition until they were written down much later.¹⁰

vidmā śarasya pitaraṁ sūryaṁ śatavṛṣṇyam

Tenā te tanve'sāṁ karaṁ pṛthivyāṁ te niṣecanaṁ

bahiṣṭe astu bāliti. (AV, 1.3)

We know the progenitor of Shara, nature's energy of health and vigour, Parjanya, the abundant cloud of a hundredfold vigour and vitality. Thereby I bring health of body and equanimity of mind to you. Let there be the infusion of energy, protection of health and cleansing of the body system without delay here on earth.

Hence, the vedic approach to medicine can be termed as ‘magico-religious’. Vedic medicine understood disease in non-somatic terms, the body was seen as a carrier of the disease and remained unchanged in the process. As a result, remedies to heal such diseases led to the birth of an entire science of demonic possession and subsequent treatment from the combination of metaphysics and ritual practices. We can refer to it as Bhūtavidyā, or the knowledge of spirits. The healing process would essentially involve rituals in which religious incantations and charms would be uttered by the healers to drive out the demonic entity from the body. The examination of a hymn from the *Atharva Samhitā* (Śaunakīya recension) 6.111¹¹ which is a charm against insanity shows that Sāyaṇa refers its use “for the quieting of pain from the Gandharvas, from the Rākṣas-demons, from the Apsarases or from bhūtagraha (‘demonic seizure’?), etc”.¹² It clearly indicates that the healing process constituted of rituals, words and sounds i.e., the spelling of charms accompanied with herbal medicines.

O Agni, for me, release this man who, bound [and] well-restrained, utters nonsense. Hence, he shall make an offering to you when he becomes sane. 6.111.1

If your mind is agitated, let Agni quieten [it] down for you. [For] I, being skilled, prepare the medicine, so that you may become sane. 6.111.2

I, being skilled, prepare the medicine so that he, insane because of a curse of the gods and demented because of the rakṣas-demons, may become sane. 6.111.3.

Let the Apsarases return you; let Indra [and] Bhaga re [turn you; in fact,] let all the gods return you so that you may become sane. 6.111.4.

However, what seems apparent is though the healing potentials of herbal medication were accepted yet the mechanism by which it worked effectively had to essentially involve ritual practices which symbolically added to the efficacy of the medicine. Moreover, gods and demons played a major part in such vedic ritualised medical treatment.

The Social Class of Healers, Transition to Āyurveda and Madness as Social Deviance

Vedic society was divided into three important classes according to Georg Dumézil's characterisation of ancient Indo-European society.¹³ The learned medical healers formed part of the third, agrarian-oriented order and thus passed their folk knowledge and literature orally. Many of the healing hymns brought together knowledge from the first-order sacrificial priests, who acted as an intermediary between the gods and the humans. The healers in this sequence of events, were positioned to engage religious incantations as well as their herbal knowledge, and most significantly these healers were not bound by the norms of purity unlike the first order sacrificial priests. As a consequence, they could freely serve "the needs of all people regardless of social standing".¹⁴ Originally, or so it is thought, the healers occupied a role that was on a similar level as that of the sacrificial priests, in time the medical healers became considered contaminated from interactions with ritually 'impure' segments of society and were subsequently 'excluded from the higher, more sacred circles of the sacrificial cults'.¹⁵ This limitation acted as a liberation for these healing priests who could interact with communities on the margins of mainstream vedic society without much concern for maintaining ritual purity. The gradual result of this interaction with heterodox ascetics and renunciants contributed to a vast store house of medical knowledge through practical experiences which developed among these wandering physicians. This led to a shift from archaic medicine to rational therapeutics. Another feature of ancient Indian medicine that was disfavoured by the priestly authorities was the dissection of corpse without which as Suśruta claims, the knowledge of anatomy is incomplete. Subsequently, the physician's rejection of scriptural declaration went against the ideology of the priestly authorities. Eventually, the medical segment of society separated itself both from and due to the authority of the religious priests. This allowed the healers to develop their own authority, free from the strictures of purity, leading to the Āyurvedic system.

In this journey, with gradual complexities of society, the recognition of its deviance was also becoming well-defined. Social Deviance refers to actions or behaviours that violate social norms. Deviance and mental illness go hand in hand. While not all social deviants are considered mentally ill, almost all mentally ill persons are considered deviants. Hyne-Sutherland asks in her dissertation why societies define madness, and she describes how “[t]he very act of defining madness is a means of effecting control over the uncontrollable”.¹⁶ Any behaviour which threatens and strains the relationship of a person with his community members, is labelled as abnormal or socially deviant even if, it does not necessarily indicate an internal condition or frightful experience. The restraint is evidence of the society’s attempt to control what appears to be uncontrollable and threatening behaviour. Madness has been viewed under varied lights. Here an alternate view on madness becomes imperative for a better understanding of the social implications of the very illness. According to Michel Foucault, the exclusion and confinement of the mentally ill is essentially an exercise of power by social institutions to silence those with incompatible world versions. The repression of the mad “...operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, and an affirmation of non-existence...”.¹⁷ Foucault sees madness as a social construct rather than an objective truth that exists to uphold the construction of rationality. Rationality requires the designation of the mad as non-rational. This othering of the mentally ill as non-rational then delineates sane society as rational. Ergo, a pivotal question arises from the above discussion, whether madness is something a person has or something a person is? It appears that on one level based on *Atharvaveda* charms insanity was not identical with the person so far, the treatment was concerned, the patient acted as a covering or means of expression for the supernatural being who possessed it. Whereas on the other hand, the madman’s sole identity revolves around his madness, and he is being a threat to the normal functioning of the society. Clearly, both perspectives are at play here, suggesting they are not mutually exclusive.

Empirico-Somatic Vs. Magico-Somatic: The Advent of Āyurveda

Āyurveda as a medical system comprises a huge body of literature whose topics blend medicine with religious medicine, astrology, and yoga. Among these the *Compendia* of Suśruta and Caraka are of fundamental value. It is argued that these texts claim descent from the Veda, and allegiance to it. However, if a scrutiny of the medical practices and ideas of the early vedic religious literature is undertaken, it is found for the most part they do not form an obvious precursor to the system of classical Āyurveda. In effect, these medical practices discussed in the early vedic religious literatures were known more for their differences from classical Āyurveda than for their similarities. “The fact that āyurvedic texts claim to ‘derive from’ the Veda is not evidence for medical history, but rather evidence of a bid by medical authors for social acceptance and religious sanction”.¹⁸ Claiming a common foundation for both the religious literature and medical literature would strengthen the social legitimacy of the latter and in turn would broaden its acceptance by a wider audience and strengthen the position of medical authors in the Brāhmaṇical society.

Despite the advent of Āyurveda which is based primarily on the somatic doctrine of the three humors, namely *vāta* (wind), *pitta* (choler), and *kapha* (phlegm) so central to Āyurveda, it is important to note that psychiatry in Āyurveda is discussed in the section on Bhūtavidyā, which “indicates that, originally, this branch was concerned with disorders thought to be caused by possession by non-human spiritual beings”.¹⁹ In line with the overall trend moving from vedic to classical, in which many diseases began to be reinterpreted as having natural causes in a ‘process of demystification’, insanity started to be comprehended as caused by an imbalance of the humours.²⁰ Caraka defined insanity (*unmādaṁ*) not only as a resultant effect of demonic possession rather stated that “[i]nsanity is of five types such as – those caused by *vāta*, *pitta*, *kapha*, *sannipāta* [combination of all three] and exogenous” (CS 2.7.3).²¹ The three forms of insanity caused by humoral imbalance previously discussed were considered ‘curable’,

and an Āyurvedic physician presumably knew the proper prescription of 'unction, fomentation, purgation...snuffing, smoking...inhalation of herbal juice...[and] bath' to cure the patient (CS 2.7.8).²² The other remedy to treat this category of patients involved as Caraka mentions '[a] friend should console him [the lunatic] with religious and purposeful words' (CS 6.9.79)²³, here again the modern reference to talk therapy previously mentioned continues through this period too. Albeit insanity was brought into the realm of the 'empirico-somatic' (versus the 'magico-somatic' in the vedic period), it was understood to have other, moral dimensions as well. So, there were non-somatic methods of treatments as well, such as 'frightening, inducing surprise and forgetting, desaturation and bloodletting...' (CS 2.7.8).²⁴ The latter healing technique indicated that the Āyurvedic physicians not only relied on somatic but also moral treatments for their insane patients, which clearly suggests the presence of a component of each in the causes of madness.

The two incurable categories of insanity namely, *sānnipātika* insanity, caused by a 'combination of three *doṣas*', and some forms of *āgantuka*, or exogenous insanity presents a comparatively complex picture. Unlike the former there was uncertainty in regard to the causes of the latter. Exogenous insanity came in three forms, violence, pleasure, and worship (CS 2.7.15).²⁵ This is striking for the continuation of the magico-religious elements from the vedic healing system. In general terms, Caraka-Saṁhitā bespeaks the treatment of 'insanity caused by gods, sage, fore-fathers or *gandharvas*' (CS. 6.9.88).²⁶ Here a limitation on the abilities of medicine and physicians can be recognised since there were causes of insanity that could not be readily explained in empirico-somatic terms, such as possession by gods, *gandharvas* (celestial musicians), and forefathers. The insanity caused by each *graha*, or 'grabber' (possessor in this case), led to the development of a behavioural pattern ascribing to the characteristics of each, including symptoms that may not appear to indicate anything wrong or undesirable.

Perhaps the most remarkable shift which came with the arrival of Āyurveda was the medicalisation of madness and other diseases into obviously somatic terms. The Āyurvedic practitioners adopted an empirical approach to studying the body, which resulted in the complex understanding of channels in the body that transported various substances, including the mind and the humors, rightly gaining the name 'empirico-somatic'. On the other end, this largely is in contrast with vedic healing. The key to understanding *unmāda*, madness, in Āyurveda is examining deviance from established norms, both social and personal, rather than conditions of derangement or painfulness. This is essentially because, while the category of exogenous insanity may sound more serious and graver than, for instance *Paittika*²⁷ insanity, this was not the case in reality. Certain symptoms of possession insanity, like a fondness for music and dance could be pleasant as an experience for the patient and also less threatening for the society.

Bhūtavidyā: The Medicalisation of Possession

The sections on *unmāda* (insanity) and *apasmāra* (seizures) in the Compendium of Caraka and Suśruta along with Vāgbhaṭa's Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya which are the foundational ayurvedic medical texts of the classical period holds discussions on disease-producing spirit possession at length. However, the beginnings of such categories of insanity caused by possession can be found in the *Atharvaveda*. The Śaunaka Saṃhitā of the *Atharvaveda* contains a hymn AVŚ (6.111)²⁸ to be used as a palliative treatment for *unmāda*. Kenneth G. Zysk analysed two types of insanity namely, *unmadita* which implies the demented state brought on by the patient himself as a result of his infringement of certain divine mores or taboos; and *unmatta* which suggests an abnormal mental state caused by possession by demons, such as *rākṣasas*. The usage of two different terms for specifying two types of insanity is indicative of the fact that a distinction between pathological madness and madness caused by possession was recognised at an early stage. Drawing from the initiation of the term Bhūtavidyā, it

first appeared in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (ChU 7.1.2)²⁹, a text of the seventh century BCE or perhaps a century or two later, where it is listed along with other *vidyās* including the Vedas, Purāṇas, divine knowledge (*devavidyā*), and understanding of brahmā (*brahmavidyā*).³⁰ At the beginning this term indicated any type of being animate or inanimate, visible or invisible and they were to be given offerings of water as a part of domestic ritual. But, with the passage of time the connotation of this term changed and by the mid- first millennium BCE the word *bhūta* applied to all types of ontological entities, including 'spirits'. It was associated with exogenous (*āgantuka*) causes of insanity, beyond the scope of identifiable medical or social pathology. As a method of healing, Bhūtavidyā evolved and created an environment of spirit healing that was characterised by a great variation in pharmacological, ritual, and social modalities. Bhūtavidyā consists, formally at least, of two divisions (*graha* or *bhūta*). A *bhūta* is any existent ontological entity, while a *graha* is an entity further delineated by its ability to 'grasp' or 'hold' (*grh*). In the most basic sense *graha* is commonly known as the planets which are nine in number, the days of the week seven in number, and the two nodes of the moon, Rāhu and Ketu responsible for eclipses. The later Āyurvedic canonical texts classified *grahas* into *bālagrahas* who were mostly female possessors of pregnant women and children, whereas, *bhūtas* as almost entirely male *grahas* that were known by their specified characteristics. *Bhūtas* may be regarded as subspecies under which no further taxonomic breakdown was required. Thus, the category *bālagraha* may include sixteen, eighteen, or more varieties, while *grahas* as subcategories of *bhūta* may be *gandharvas*, *yakṣas*, *pitṛs*, *niṣādas*, and so on, without further subspecies.³¹ What is noteworthy here, is that *bālagrahas* existed outside the realm of Sanskrit culture and discourse until they were incorporated into the fold, Sanskritised, gaps filled in, and systematised.³² The *grahas* which belonged to the Sanskrit discourse and were brahmanically inclined were taken from a variety of vedic texts, then redefined and presented in an orderly discourse.

An early interaction between the folk and the classical can be gleaned from the introduction of *grahas* who were believed to be from outside the Sanskritic culture, into the canon of *bhūtas* suggesting that over a passing period of time the list of *bhūtas* expanded incorporating the ever-increasing non-Sanskritic names of *grahas* the term *niṣādas* also needs further clarifications, as such term must have been derived from that of the well-known tribe of ancient India *grahas*.³³

Possession or Disorders by Birth and Somatisation of Emotion?

A passage from Caraka's Śārīrasthāna (CaŚa 4.36– 40) describing embryology elaborates further on *sattvas* (states of being) as 'essences', or to be more precise 'personality types'. This lays the foundation to present a *de facto* argument for *bhūtas* associating with personality attributes. Caraka subsequently subdivides the category of *sattvas* just like he did in the case of *grahas*, into seven *śuddha* types, six *rājasa* types, and three *tāmasa* types. The *śuddha* types portrays an inclination towards divinity which has close resemblance with the category of deity possession. Interestingly enough, the six *rājasa* and three *tāmasa* personality types are closer to the accounts of *grahas* given in the text. Significantly, the *tāmasa* personality suggests patterns as both products of birth and forms of instability of mind.

Among the three *tāmasa sattvas* (the *pāśava*, the *mātsya*, and the *vanaspati*), there are references to a certain personality type which shows instability as inherent in the concerned psyche. For example, in the verse, 4.38.2, we find the term *anavasthit* implying unstable character. Again, the verse 4.38.3. has the term *sarvabuddhaṅgaḥīnaṅg*, indicating a personality 'devoid of entire intelligence'. In fact, the verse 4.39 categorically mentions that all the personalities of *tāmasa* have ignorance in common.³⁴

Exogenous madness appears as an exception since in it sudden change is observed in the characteristic behaviour of that person. Otherwise, in both cases, i.e., 'exogenous madness' and the features observed in inherent *sattvas* especially the *tāmasa sattva*, the characteristic behaviour must be manifested as habitual, spontaneous,

and nonritual. There is certain similarity in the list of personalities, as said to be possessed by *grahas* and inherent in behaviours as *sattvas*.³⁵ The identification of various personalities as inherent *sattvas* and as 'exogenously materialised *grahas*' appears to have inspired in the authors of the Āyurvedic texts a greater need to describe them graphically. This further leads to a cultural designation and a systematic stigmatisation of certain personality types as possessed who suffer from social aggravations, such as disrespect for *brāhmins*. As critically examined by Smith, the Indian medical texts, like Āyurveda refers to deep emotional symptomatology in their discussions on Bhūtavidyā. In more vivid terms, *grahas* especially, as 'exogenous madness' are the sudden manifestations of various personalities, could be identified as an outcome of unexpressed emotion. The identifiable pathology of possession by a *graha* is the intensity and the spontaneity of the experience. There are however trigger points beyond which the condition signalled danger and which in extreme forms were regarded as pathological. Here, the problem is in embedded form, the manifestation of suppressed emotions resulting in socially deviating behaviour takes the form of possession by *grahas* in the texts which for that matter continues up to the later time frames as well. This certainly raises questions about how emotions are perceived, embodied, and recognised from culture to culture and most significantly to what manner and degree emotions are somatised.

Prolonged Grief, Pain, Anguish: A Reflection of Depression?

Emotions, an umbrella term for a variety of psychological states, when in extremes give rise to serious mental health disorders. One such manifestation of intense and prolonged emotion is depression. We often go through bad days and times leading to mood swings and a feeling of lowness. These are usually temporary phases of life which pass by with time. What distinguishes depression from our usual sadness is its longevity and the cause conceived by a particular individual as acute and critical. Often depression arises from a permanent damage in life like the demise of a loved one, an

irreplaceable loss. At other times, it comes embedded with certain events in life. The earliest medical use of the word 'depression' in English dates back to the seventeenth century³⁶, deriving from the Latin root *de primere* (to press down). It is the concept of Melancholia, derived from Latin and originally from Greek, that had its existence from time immemorial, though received particular attention from the sixteenth century onward.³⁷ Depressive reaction formerly known as reactive depression is marked by a prominent feeling of sadness, pessimism, lassitude, and inadequacy.³⁸ It is commonly associated with 'anxiety and is precipitated by some loss, such as loss of some loved person, physical health, beauty or social position'.³⁹

The ancient Indian literary texts can be referred to as Pandora's box, in the sphere of exploring emotions. The miscellaneous works of early India like dramas, poems and stories are largely based on Indian aesthetic theory of *Rasa* which embodies principal human feelings or emotions. Bharata Muni, the father of Indian Rasa Theory enlisted nine forms of *rasas* or basic human emotions namely, *rati* (love), *hāsyā* (laughter), *śoka* (grief), *krodha* (anger), *utsāha* (enthusiasm), *bhaya* (fear), *jugupsā* (disgust), *vismaya* (astonishment) and *nirveda* (indifference/renunciation). The traces of depression, though generally an acknowledged concept of the present day, can be correlated with certain feelings manifested in the early Indian literatures namely, *khinna* (depressed), *nirveda* (despair), *viṣāda* (remorse), *glāni* (lassitude), *dainya* (inferiority feelings), *moha* (inability to perceive the reality). In such a scenario an attempt towards discerning concepts and terms of such health discourse in ancient Indian textual archives becomes imperative.

The first text taken into consideration in this regard is Śūdraka's canonical Sanskrit drama, *Mṛcchakaṭika* (The Little Clay Cart) composed between the second century BCE and the fifth century CE. In the following lines Śūdraka exhibits remarkable characteristics of depression.

The horse would gladly hasten here and there, but his legs fail him, for his breath departs.

So men's vain wishes wander everywhere, Then, weary grown, return into their hearts.⁴⁰ (Mṛik. Act. V, Slo. 8).

Thus, an individual, who has become depressed (*khinna*) cannot materialise his resolutions. His wishes are like daydreams. He has the tendency to brood, and his facial features indicate manifest sadness (*udāsī*)...

"Such an individual is prone to anxiety, feels rejected, humiliated and hated by his friends. He often finds himself hostile to his own relatives and feels much repentance due to his hostile reactions. Sometimes he contemplates to renounce the world and to take recourse to hermitage. His inner anguish (*śokāgni*) is always burning". (Mṛcch. Act 1 Slo. 15)

A vivid description of present-day depression and its symptoms has a stark resemblance with the above-mentioned account by Śūdraka. A tendency towards self-hate arising from anxiety and the eventual withdrawal from society is prevalent in clinical depression.

Kālidāsa the greatest poet and playwright of the fourth-fifth century CE is well known for his portrayal of human emotions in his plays and *kāvya*s in an exquisite style. One of his most acknowledged works is *Abhijñāna Śakuntalam* which makes for an apposite specimen of depression caused by rejection by a loved one. Kālidāsa's take on exploring grief is unique, on one layer as 'loss of mind' which we could name as madness or a feeling of deep despair, on the other as a form of philosophical rumination on fate and other causes of tragedy. Both find expression in his celebrated female character Śakuntalā. Much praised of her beauty and the character sketch of Śakuntalā has been etched from varied angles and has been studied on multiple lines. However, the subject of concern here being the manifestation of depression makes Śakuntalā an ideal character to display. Act V of the play *Abhijñāna Śakuntalam*, named 'Śakuntalā's Rejection', portrays Śakuntalā's grief, despair (*sabiṣāda*) and the eventual anger after not being recognised by King Duṣyanta, her husband, who has allegedly forgotten her as his wife due to the workings of a curse at play.

Śakuntalā (to herself). Oh, oh, oh! He even casts doubt on our marriage. The vine of my hope climbed high, but it is broken now. (Act V, Conversation 18)⁴¹

Śankuntalā (angrily). Wretch! You judge all this by your own false heart. Would any other man do what you have done? To hide behind virtue, like a yawning well covered over with grass!

Śankuntalā. Well, well I had my way. I trusted a king, and put myself in his hands. He had a honey face and a heart of stone. (*She covers her face with her dress and weeps.*) (Act V, Conversation 24)⁴²

The tensions are clearly discernible from the above lines expressing grief, despair, hopelessness, and anger. Śakuntalā after the cruel rejection by the king is stunned, filled with shame and sorrow, followed by anger. She in great despair tells Duṣyanta:

“O great king, even though you do recognise me, why do you say: ‘I do not know you’? You speak thus carelessly as another, a low-born villain might speak”.

The magnitude of her grief is so intense that it leads her to almost lose her mind and further warn her beloved king Duṣyanta by saying the following:

“If you will not follow my advice O Duṣhyanta, you will reap the results of your present actions a hundred times”.

The ending of Kālidāsa’s play bears further testimony of how deep a dejection Śakuntalā is left with since she breaks down and, in her anger, and distress to sacrifice her life call for her mother earth to give her space in her bosom.

The *Mahābhārata*, one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India with its various layers and complex characters elucidates multiple emotions in an unparalleled way. Of all the characters, the eldest prince of the Pāṇḍavas, Yudhiṣṭhira is always projected as a person who followed the tenets of Dharma and is held in great reverence. The Śānti Parva, which is the twelfth of eighteen books of the Epic *Mahābhārata* is set in a tragic post-war background, with most of the warriors from both ends being dead and the Kauravas vanquished the

pyrrhic victory has pushed Yudhiṣṭhira into a state of great agitation and his 'mind entirely confounded with grief' (*śokavyākulacetana*). The tragic manslaughter accompanied by the death of his own brother Karna as a result of Kuntī keeping his identity a secret has brought so much pain to him that victory appears to him 'like defeat' (*ajayākāro*).

tena me dūyate 'tīva hrdayam bhrātrghātinaḥ |

Because of this [understanding that Karna was his brother], my heart fiercely burns, for I murdered my brother. (ŚP 1.38.)

A physical description of Yudhiṣṭhira drenched in grief further confirms the bodily attributes of being depressed.

dīnamanasam vīram adhovadanam āturam | niḥśvasantaṁ yathā nāgam paryaśrunayanam tathā ||

'the hero depressed, bowed down, pained, his breathing is like a snake's, and his eyes shedding tears' (ŚP 6.2)

Yudhiṣṭhira's guilt and remorse are brought to a climax by the concluding verses of the chapter and a reference to his mind being sick is found in the following lines:

sa rājā putrapautrāṇām sambandhisuhrdām tathā |

smarann udvignahrdayo babhūvāsvasthacetanaḥ ||

tataḥ śokaparītātmā sadhūma iva pāvakaḥ |

nirvedam akarod dhīmān rājā samtāpapiḍitaḥ ||

Remembering his sons, grandsons, relatives and friends, the king's heart shuddered, his mind sick. His body overtaken by grief like fire enveloped in smoke and oppressed by burning distress, that reflective king then became utterly despondent. (ŚP 6.11-12)

Yet another line explains in detail how grief and anguish has overpowered Yudhiṣṭhira:

His 'mind confounded with grief' (*śokavyākulacetana*), 'burning with sadness' (*duḥkhasamtaptaḥ*) he grieved (*śuśoca*) for Karna, then, 'engrossed in his sadness and grief' (*āviṣṭo duḥkhaśokābhyām*), 'was with grief' (*śokakarśitaḥ*), he laments to Arjuna (ŚP 7.3-7).

Yudhiṣṭhira in a dejected mind state surrounded by gloomy thoughts makes a telling reversion of the situation they find themselves

in which can be called *āpad*. Etymologically, derived from the idea of 'falling down', underlining that he considers their current situation a decline.⁴³ His disgust is so fervent that he finds no recompense and hence, decides to renounce worldly life and take refuge in the forest. His duties towards his subjects (*rājadharmā*) become irrelevant in comparison to the destruction already been caused. The connotation of dharma itself changes for him from this dreadful experience.

Such life-changing events often leave deep scars in the minds of individuals from which rises a prolonged state of sorrow, gloom, hopelessness, guilt, and dejection, and this can be collectively called depression. The very meaning and perception of life undergo drastic changes and if left undetected and undiagnosed take a fatal shape. Outlining certain infamous early Indian literary works and much-celebrated characters provides a depiction of the modern-day depression in a variety of shades.

Suicide: Self Liberation or Outcome of Melancholic Suffering?

While exploring the aetiology of suicide, one may dwell largely on the propositions made by Émile Durkheim in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁴ Psychological and emotional factors, according to him, must be coupled with social ones to reach the root cause of suicide. He categorised anomic, altruistic, egoistic, and fatalistic suicide while reflecting upon the then transiency in society. However, it is undeniable that suicide is not restricted to a certain societal system rather inherent in every culture from time immemorial. It is the acceptance by the social norms alike to mental depression that suicide comes into writings and discourses. In ancient India, literary sources are replete with instances of self-destruction though fused with a religious tone. The concept of individualism in both oriental and occidental societies gave a somewhat liberty to suicide till a certain period of time. Ancient Indian literary sources acclaimed those with religious tone as capable of acquiring special merit who committed it. In this context one may refer to RV X: CXXI: 2 (Giver of vital breath of power and vigour, he whose commandments all the Gods acknowledge; The Lord of death,

whose 'shade is life immortal. What Good shall we adore with our oblation?')⁴⁵, which suggests Hiraṇyagarbha, the Lord of the Creatures, is called *ātmada* (giver of self). However, it definitely does not suggest the act of self-immolation. The sacrificial act got definite legitimation in various later vedic texts, the instances of which can be multiplied. In early Jaina texts, such self-immolation was considered as a path of self-liberation. For example, Tattvārtha Sūtra suggests that, "One who has observed all the vows to shed the karmas, takes the vow of *sallekhanā* at the end of his life" (7: 22 *māraṇāntikiṃ sallekhanāṃ joṣitā*). *Sallekhanā* refers to the voluntary termination of life by fasting. In Buddhist Jātaka stories, act of self-immolation is well-accepted while serving broader purpose, and, in this context, we may refer to the story of a bodhisattva who throws himself from a cliff to offer himself as food for a hungry tigress indulged to eat her own cubs.⁴⁶ Notwithstanding, a kind of contrasting attitude is reflected in texts like the Araṇavibhaṅga-sutta from the *Majjhima-Nikāya*, in which asceticism is rebuked as a misguided process. This practice only brings forth pain, hurt, anxiety, and anguish. Therefore, it is said to be a 'wrong practice' (*micchā-paṭipadā*) and avoiding it is the 'right practice' (*sammā-paṭipadā*) (MN. III, p. 231). On contrary, a Mahāyana text, *Saddharmapuṇḍarikā* contains a very interesting reference to sacrifice of the body of the Bodhisattva Bhaishagyaṛāga (verse 22.1), which says:

*ayaṃ mamā caṃkramu rājaśreṣṭha yasmin mayā sthitva samādhi
labdhaḥ |
vīryaṃ dṛḍhaṃ ārabhitaṃ mahāvratāṃ parityajitvā
priyamātmabhāvam ||1||*

This, O exalted king, is the walk in which I have acquired meditation; I have achieved a heroic feat, fulfilled a great vote by sacrificing my own dear body.⁴⁷

However, the Nichiren Daishonin, a thirteenth-century Japanese priest urged to explain it with a deeper meaning: "it is at once an act of ultimate non-attachment, placing the Dharma above one's bodily

life, but also a transaction, by which one surrenders the body of an ordinary worldling to acquire the adamant body of the Buddha".⁴⁸

Such dichotomy is seldom observed in Upaniṣads which gives a strong philosophical foundation to self, life, and death. The early Upaniṣads condemned self-immolation as an act of contemplating darkness. For example, in the Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad (3), it has been clearly mentioned that:

*asuryā nāma te lokā andhena tamasāvṛtaḥ |
tāṁste pretyābhigacchanti ye ke cātmahano janāḥ ||3||*

"Demonic" are those worlds called, wrapped in blind darkness, where those people go after death who kill the *ātman*.⁴⁹

However, there is a considerable doubt about whether *ātmahano janāḥ* in the above can be treated as self-destructive tendency of a person or not. Quite contrary to such usual criticisms of suicide, the later minor Upaniṣads, viz. *Kanṭhaśruti Upaniṣad* somewhat supports it by stating that: "The *sannyāsin*, who has acquired full insight, may enter upon the great journey, or choose death by voluntary starvation, by drowning, by fire, or by a hero's fate."⁵⁰

However, suicides in the complex culture of Indian subcontinent are conceived in various ways in the texts, especially religious in nature. Diverse terms, viz. *ātmahatyā* (self-murder), *ātmayāga* (self-sacrifice), *ātmāparityāga* (total self-sacrifice), *tanutyāga* (body-abandonment with the implication of bravery), *dehatyāga* (body-abandonment with the implication of a spiritual abandonment of the corporeal mass), *prāyopaveśa* (embracing starvation), *jalpraveśa* (entering water), or *agnipraveśa* (entering fire), etc. have therefore been appropriated while both supporting and refuting the act of suicide. Ascetism, self-abnegation, self-chosen death in honour of a deity, military offering, and their sculptural representation is not uncommon in the courses of Indian history. This coupled with mass sacrifice germinates the seeds of Sati and Jauhar (though such issues are beyond the purview of the present work) in the later cultures. Sacred spaces in all these cases played a vital role in offering one's self (*ātman*). It

was believed that a confluence of holy rivers, a temple complex, a battle ground, and even a funeral pyre of husband⁵¹ hold the essence of that sacredness in which offering one's life may not only immortalise his/her soul but will also legally sanction this self-destruction.⁵²

Leaving behind the textual sources of religious nature, those concerned with polity and administration viz. *Arthaśāstra* dealt self-destruction with severity. Mention may be made of the verses 4.7.25-26, which mentions: "if a person, under the influence of passion or anger, or a woman infatuated by sin, were to kill himself (or herself) (*ghāteytsvayamātmānam*) by means of a rope, a weapon or poison, he should cause them to be dragged with a rope on the royal highway by a *caṇḍāla*; there is to no cremation-rite for them nor obsequies by kinsmen".⁵³ Similar expression is also found in *Parāsara Smṛti*, the chapter IV, verses 1 and 2 of which clearly mention: Whether from excessive pride, excessive wrath, or from affection, or from fear, should a man or a woman hang one's self, — then this is the destiny that awaits him or her (1). He or she sinks into a region utterly dark, and filled to the brink with pus and blood; that torment is suffered for sixty thousand years (2). However, an indication of wrong deeds (*viprakāram*), as a major cause leading to one, committing suicide is evident from verse 4.7.16 of *Arthaśāstra*.⁵⁴

Thus, the available literature on suicide has either interpreted it as self-immolation having a religious tone or severely bashed those prompted by the factors of flesh and blood. In both the cases, suicide resulted from mental illness or even melancholic suffering, which were undermined as weaknesses of character or/and such factors are not well-defined apart from a few exceptions. In this context, one may refer to a verse of *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, in which, a mother, Gajjā is shown to throw herself into the funeral pyre of her son (Book VII, verse 1380). In the following verses (1381-82), her solemn appeal to the king for not sending her son to war clearly suggests that her act of self-immolation was necessarily urged by intense grief owing to losing her sole son.

Gajjā, his mother, ascended the pyre and [thereby] paid homage to her own noble character [as one] of those virtuous women who have borne sons worthy of praise for devotion to their lord's service. (1380)

When the king was ever sending her son into risky enterprises, she being overcome by maternal affection, had thus spoken to the ruler of the earth: (1381)

"O lord, do not employ this only son of [a mother] who has no other children, on every task which imperils life".⁵⁵ (1382)

It is hardly possible for one to not revert to Caraka-Samhitā, which contains one of the attributes of insanity (*unmāda*) is *rahaskāmata*, i.e., preference for loneliness.⁵⁶ The same text refers to violent reactions leading to suicidal tendencies (*hantyaātmānam*).⁵⁷

A Few Emerging Points

Though intrinsic to human, self-destruction or suicide resulting from intense grief or melancholic suffering never received humane attention and was rather embedded in various layers of social norms as gleaned from literary sources. In the recent studies, the domain of mental health has significantly addressed modernity, as a root cause for manifestation of depression as well as increased rate of suicide. However, the major argument of the present paper lies in the fact that, such melancholic suffering is not necessarily a 'modern' product rather was impregnated in every society tightly threaded with norms and traditions, though having an unlike expression.

It is quite interesting to note that, ancient Indian epigraphs (leaving aside the vast literary repertoire), while talking much about medical practitioners like, *vaidya* (physician), *vaidyakkāni* (medical men) *bhiṣaja* (healer), *hastivaidya* (elephant physicians) *ambasthā* (surgeon), etc. and medical institutions, viz. *ātulaśālāi* (dispensary), *ārogyaśālāi* (healing place), *ārogya-vihāra*, *āturaśālāi*, etc. have hardly touched upon the illness of mind.⁵⁸ This clearly reiterates the entire narrative on social construct of mental illness, persistent from time immemorial and is even continuing especially in the developing countries. Furthermore, it will be unjust to consider the establishment of mental asylums or

rather recognition of mental illness as entirely the product of the colonisers, prompted by the notion of 'white man's burden'. In this context, we may refer to the legends of Shah Daulah, born in the second half of the sixteenth century. He is said to have been engaged in various charitable works in Gujarat. It is said that 'Chuas' a shrine for children and adults, suffering from microcephaly, as documented in the nineteenth century had its genesis from the time of Shah Daulah.⁵⁹ Even in the preceding century, during the time of Mohammad Khalji, a few asylums were also said to have been constructed for sustaining mentally ill people.⁶⁰

While dealing with the vast database, both primary and secondary, the present authors observe a trend of the prominent presence of such research in the psychiatric discourses rather than in the historical ones. The paper though considering eternal presence of mental illness and human suffering across time and space, never undermines the question of 'modernity' or rather 'modern lifestyle' as making accelerating impact on mental disorders. At this crucial juncture of human history, or rather 'turning points in history' (turning points heightened the magnitude of things that were happening for years, and when the shift finally happens the world is no longer going to be the same again) when the planet earth is gradually recovering from pandemic, with its enormous economic and political thrust, the present paper implores the historians to take up the subject called mental illness and humanistic behaviour more diligently in order to 'rethink human history'.

Noes

¹ <https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution> Accessed on 27.02.2022

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³ Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations, upon the Diseases of the Mind*, Philadelphia: Kimber & Richardson, 1812.

⁴ Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac*, New York: John Wiley and Sons., 1997, p.7.

- ⁵ This incident has been mentioned in, Weiner, D. B., 'Philippe Pinel's "Memoir on Madness" of December 11, 1794: A Fundamental Text of Modern Psychiatry', *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 149 (6), 1992 (June), pp. 725-32.
- ⁶ John Conolly, *The Treatment of the Insane without Mechanical Restraints*, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1856.
- ⁷ James Cowles Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind*, London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1835.
- ⁸ Sigmund Freud, trans. by G. Stanley Hall, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920.
- ⁹ Sigmund Freud trans. by Joan Riviere, *The Ego and the Id*, London: Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, 1927.
- ¹⁰ Kenneth G. Zysk, *Religious Medicine: The History and Evolution of Indian Medicine: With a New Introduction by the Author*, London and New York: Routledge, 2017, p.5.
- ¹¹ Ibid, pp. 62-3.
- ¹² Ibid. p. 186.
- ¹³ Georges Dumézil, *Le Problème Des Centaures: Étude De Mythologie Comparée Indo-Européenne*, Paris: Librairie Orietaliste Paul Geuthner, 1929; see, Emily B. Lyle, 'Dumezil's Three Functions and Indo-European Cosmic Structure', *History of Religions*, vol. 22, no. 1, Aug 1982, pp. 25-44.
- ¹⁴ See, Zysk, *Religious Medicine: The History and Evolution of Indian Medicine*, p. xi.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Amy Louise Hyne-Sutherland, *Speaking of Madness: A Comparative Analysis of Discourses on Pathologized Deviance in Contemporary and Classical India*. Dissertation, Austin: The University of Texas, 2015, p.88.
- ¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol I: An Introduction*, Trans. from the French by Robert Hurley, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p. 4; Also see, Paul Rabinow ed. *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, p. 293.
- ¹⁸ Dominik Wujastyk, Selection, translations and introduction, *The Roots of Āyurveda: Selections from Sanskrit Medical Writings*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998, p. 17; also see, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Science and Society in Ancient India*, Calcutta: Research India Publications, 1977.
- ¹⁹ G. J. Meulenbeld, 'Aspects of Indian psychiatry, In *History of psychiatric diagnoses: proceedings of the 16th international symposium on the comparative history of medicine – East and West, September 1-8, 1991*, eds., Y. Kawakita, S. Sakai and Y. Otsuka, Tokyo: Susono-shi Shizuoka, Japan, 1997, p. 185 (pp. 183-237).
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 186; Also see, Eshan A. Dabak, 'Madness Then, Insanity Now: The Evolution of Madness and Medicine in India from Ancient to Modern Times', Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Austin: The University of Texas, 2018, p. 26.

- ²¹ P. V. Sharma, ed. and trans. *Caraka-Saṁhitā: Agniveśas treatise refined and annotated by Caraka and redacted by Dṛḍhabala*, vol. I (Sūtrasthāna to Indriyasthāna), Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1981, p. 287.
- ²² Ibid., p. 289.
- ²³ P. V. Sharma, ed. and trans. *Caraka-Saṁhitā*, vol. II (Cikitsāsthānam to Kalpasthānam), Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1998 (fourth edn.), p. 170.
- ²⁴ P. V. Sharma, ed. and trans. *Caraka-Saṁhitā*, vol. I, p. 289.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 291.
- ²⁶ P. V. Sharma, ed. and trans. *Caraka-Saṁhitā*, vol. II, p. 170.
- ²⁷ *Pittaja Unmāda* is one of the four types of endogenous insanity, it is caused by an aggravated *pitta*.
- ²⁸ Zysk, *Religious Medicine: The History and Evolution of Indian Medicine*. pp. 62-3
- ²⁹ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*: Translated with notes based on Śaṅkara's Commentary by Swami Lokeshwarananda, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2017.
- ³⁰ Cf. also *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (ChU) 7.1.4, 7.2.1, 7.7.1.
- ³¹ Frederick M. Smith, *Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilizations*, New York: Colombo University Press, 2006, p. 481.
- ³² See 'Vanaparvan' section of the *Mahābhārata* and paediatrics sections of the Āyurvedic texts.
- ³³ See the list of *grahas* belonging outside the Sanskrit culture in the texts 'Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati' and 'Madanamahāṇava'.
- ³⁴ P. V. Sharma, ed. & trans. *Caraka-Saṁhitā (Agniveśa's treatise refined and annotated by Caraka and redacted by Dṛḍhabala)*, (Text with English Translation), vol. I (Sātrasthāna to Indriyasthāna), Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 2014 (revised and enlarged), p. 438.
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- ³⁶ See, Sushrut Jadhav, 'The Cultural Origins of Western Depression', *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, vol. 42, no. 4, 1996, pp. 269–86.
- ³⁷ T. Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie*, London: Thomas Vautrollier.
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- ³⁹ A. M. Freedman and H.I. Kaplan eds. *Diagnosing Mental Illness: Evaluation in Psychiatry and Psychology*, New York: Atheneum, 1972, p. 164.
- ⁴⁰ A. W. Ryder, trans. *The Little Clay Cart (Mṛcchakaṭika): A Hindu Drama Attributed to King Shūdraka*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1905, p. 77.
- ⁴¹ A. W. Ryder, trans. *Kalidasa: Shakuntala*, Cambridge, Ontario: Parentheses Publications, 1999, p. 57.

- ⁴² A. W. Ryder, trans. *Kalidasa: Shakuntala*, Cambridge, Ontario: Parentheses Publications, 1999, p. 59.
- ⁴³ Also See, Adam Bowles, *Dharma, Disorder and Political in Ancient India: The Āpaddharmaparvan of the Mahābhārata*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007.
- ⁴⁴ Durkheim, Émile. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Trans. Spaulding, John A. New York: The Free Press, 1979 (1897).
- ⁴⁵ Ralph T.H. Griffith, trans. *Hymns of the Rigveda*, vol. II, Benares: E. J. Lazarus and Co., 1877 (2nd edn.), p. 566.
- ⁴⁶ J. S. Speyer, trans. *The Jātakamālā or Garland of Birth-Stories by Ārya Sūtra*, London: Henry Frowde on behalf of Oxford University Press Warehouse, 1895, pp. 2-8.
- ⁴⁷ See, H. Kern, trans. *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka or The Lotus of the True Law*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884, pp. 376-92; Also see, A. F. R. Hoernle, 'An Early Text of Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, April 1916, pp. 269-77.
- ⁴⁸ J. I. Stone, 'Giving One's Life for the Lotus Sutra in Nichiren's Thought', *Hokke Bunka Kenkyū (Journal of the Institute for the Comprehensive Study of the Lotus Sutra)*, vol. 33, 2007, p. 55 (pp. 51-70).
- ⁴⁹ Signe Cohen, ed. *The Upaniṣads: A Complete Guide*, London and New York: Routledge, 2018.
- ⁵⁰ See, Margo Kitts, ed. *Martyrdom, Self-Sacrifice, and Self-Immolation: Religious Perspectives on Suicide*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 144; F.O. Schrader, ed. *The Minor Upaniṣads, vol. I: Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads*, Madras: The Adyar Library, 1912, p. 39 (Kaṇṭhaśruti Upaniṣad 1.3).
- ⁵¹ Gayatri Spivak by referring to Dharmasastras, argues that, by offering to the funeral pyre of her husband, the 'widow's legal subjectivity' is displaced from her self and given to the sacred place of the funeral pyre. "In this sense, the law on sanctioned suicide requires that the widow abdicates legal responsibility for her life and thus denies her agency in the killing of her self" (Stephen Morton, *Gayatri Spivak: Ethics, Subalternity and the Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, p. 117).
- ⁵² In this context, one may also refer to the Khajuraho Stone Inscription of Dhaṅgadeva and renewed by Jayavarmadeva, the verse 55 of which suggests that, Dhaṅga liberated his life in the holy waters of Ganges and Yamunā. (see, F. Kielhorn ed. 'Inscriptions from Khajuraho; IV: Stone Inscription of Dhangadeva of the Year 1059; Renewed by Jayavarmadeva in the Year 1173', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. I, 1892, p. 146 (pp. 137-47).
- ⁵³ R. P. Kangle, trans. *The Kauṭīlya Arthaśāstra*, part II, Bombay: University of Bombay, 1963, pp. 316-7; also see, R. P. Kangle, ed. *The Kauṭīlya Arthaśāstra*, part I, Bombay: University of Bombay, 1960, p.140.
- ⁵⁴ R. P. Kangle, trans. *The Kauṭīlya Arthaśāstra*, part II, p. 316.

⁵⁵ M. A. Stein, trans. with an Introduction, Commentary and Appendices, *Kalhaṇa's Rājatarāṅgiṇī, a Chronicle of the Kings of Kāśmīr*, vol. I, Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, Ltd., 1900, .p. 377.

⁵⁶ CS 2.7.7.

⁵⁷ CS 2.7.15.

⁵⁸ See, S. Gurumurthy, 'Medical Science and Dispensaries in Ancient South India as Gleaned from Epigraphy', *Indian Journal of History of Science*, vol. 5, no.1, 1970, pp. 76-79.; Susmita Basu Majumder, 'Medical Practitioners and Medical Institutions: Gleanings from Epigraphs', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 69, 2008, pp. 198-210.

⁵⁹ See, M. Miles, 'Pakistan's microcephalic chuas of Shah Daulah: cursed, clamped or cherished?', *History of Psychiatry*, vol. 7, 1996, pp. 577-89.

⁶⁰ See, Shridhar Sharma and L.P. Varma, 'History of Mental Hospitals in Indian Sub-Continent', *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1984, pp. 295-300.

Transcendentally Dynamic/Dynamically Transcendent
The Ultimacy of Śakti in the Philosophical Doctrines of Bengal Kālīkula

Arghya Dipta Kar

Abstract

This article explores in detail the Tantras of Kālī with reference to the ontological and soteriological doctrines that feed into their theological core. Unfolding a nuanced dialogue with other systems including Tantric Buddhism, these texts weave out an exclusively gynocentric theology within an otherwise non-dualistic framework. Unfortunately, owing to the absence of any systematised textual canon, these doctrines, although tremendously rich, fail to build up an exclusive school of philosophy for the worshippers of Kālī.

Keywords: Kālī, Dakṣiṇākālī, Śakti, Śākta, Mahāvidyā, Bhairava, Śiva, Mahākala, Kālīkula, Tantra, Śava, heterodox, Krama, Kaula, Nirvāṇa, voidness, Śūnyatā, Puruṣa, Prakṛti, Śiva-Śakti, amā, Kāla, Alogical Whole, Kuṇḍalinī.

Introduction

The iconography of Kālī involves a complex matrix of cultural, mythical and symbolic contexts¹ when it comes to the visualisation of Dakṣiṇākālī² as standing on the supine body of Śiva. This also includes the philosophical doctrines pertaining to the school of Tantric Śāktism associated with the worship of Kālī, or what is technically called Kālīkula (as opposed to Śrīkula, which has Tripurasundarī as the central deity). In this article, I would like to exclusively focus on the ontological and soteriological doctrines constituting the philosophical core of Bengal Kālīkula, exploring the various dialogues that weave into its formation.

Technically falling within what is geographically categorised as the Viṣṇukrāntā³, Bengal's Śākta Tantric culture centres round the worship of goddesses such as Kālī, Tārā, Tripurasundarī, Chhinnamastā and others, together constituting the Mahāvidyā pantheon.⁴ Significantly, each Mahāvidyā has a Bhairava (form of Śiva) associated with herself as her consort. Keeping this in mind, my discussion on Kālī pivots on her relation with her Bhairava Mahākāla.

Kālīkula and the Problem of Philosophical Canon

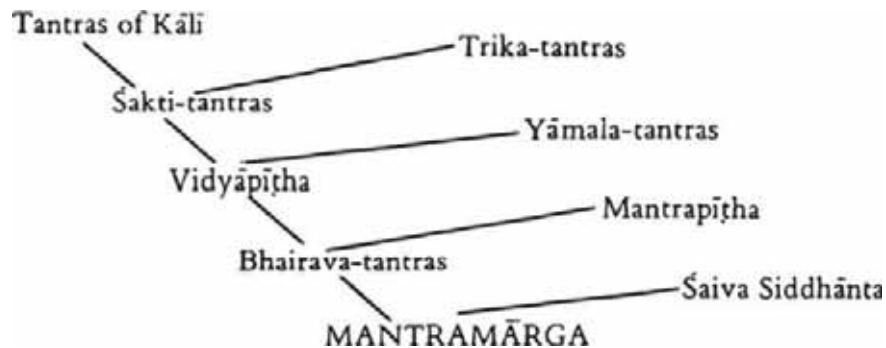
Although there is no ground to question the antiquity of Tantrism as an esoteric system of religious practices predominant in regions outside the Vedic and *smārta* fold, their codification into the textual canon designated as 'Tantra' was a later phenomenon resulting from their Sanskritisation owing to the intervention of Brahminical authorities, whereby the 'lesser' and regional traditions were integrated into the pan Indian 'great tradition'.⁵ Hence, textual documentations related to Kālī worship in Bengal hardly date beyond 13th-14th century CE.⁶ Unfortunately, although there is a rich corpus of ritual texts, the philosophical doctrines of Bengal Kālīkula have hardly any textual record, except for in bits and fragments, often naively composed by inept authors. These doctrines were codified in esoteric rituals and transmitted orally through Guru lineages within closed circles of initiates. As a result, the Tantras of Kālī seriously lack any concrete philosophical canon, unlike the comparatively well organised textual corpus of the Śrīvidyā school of Śāktism; founded on the theology and ontology of the Pratyabhijñā school of non-dualistic Śaivism.⁷ The latter has its philosophical doctrines well documented in texts such as the vast range of commentaries on the *Nityāṣoḍaśikāṛṇava*⁸ including '*Setubandha*' of Bhāskaraṛāya, '*Rjuvimarśinī*' of Śivānanda and '*Artharatnāvalī*' of Vidyānanda; the *Yoginīhṛdayam*⁹ with the commentary '*Dīpikā*' composed by Amṛtānanda; the *Kāmakalāvīlāsa*¹⁰ of Puṇyānanda Nātha with Naṭanānanda Nātha's commentary titled '*Cidvallī*'; purely philosophy-based texts such as the '*Jñānakhaṇḍa*' of Haritāyana's *Tripurārahasyam*¹¹; or commentaries on legendary hymns such as the *Saundaryalaharī*¹² and the *Lalitāsahasranāma*¹³.

As opposed to it, Kālīkula is rather poorly equipped to launch itself as an integral system founded on solid philosophical doctrines exclusive to itself. The primary reason is its being a heterodox religious current shrouded under profound secrecy, as its antinomian *vāmācāra* rituals involve the use of objects condemned as pollutant and impure by the dominant Brahminical ethics.¹⁴ Yet at the same time, the process of its Sanskritisation included a coarse attempt towards the documentation (although fragmented) of its fundamental philosophical core which now lies scattered in texts such as the *Nirvāṇa Tantra*¹⁵, *Niruttara Tantra*¹⁶, *Toḍala Tantra*¹⁷, *Muṇḍamālā Tantra*¹⁸, *Yoginī Tantra*¹⁹, *Kakārādi Kālīśahasranāma stotram*²⁰, *Śaktisaṅgama Tantra*²¹, *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*²² or compendiums like the *Sarvollāsa Tantra*²³.

Contextualising in terms of the Canon of the Bhairava Tantras

Despite the scarcity of evidences as to any possible historical connection between the Kālī Tantras of Bengal and the Krama system of Kashmir, it would be useful to refer to the latter while contextualising the cult of Kālī in terms of its dialogue with the larger canon of the Bhairava Tantras. As we shall later observe, it is not impossible to trace lines of continuity between the two traditions considering their understanding of the primacy of Śakti or the feminine principle above her male counterpart. As Alexis Sanderson observes in the context of Kashmir, the Tantras of Kālī mark the culmination of the goddess-centrism crystallising within the Mantramārga stream of Śaivism. While the earlier Atimārga stream centres on salvation alone the Mantramārga promises both salvation and the attainment of supernatural powers (*siddhis*) and the supernal pleasures in the worlds of one's choice. As the latter grew out of the former, a dichotomy emerged between the superior deities of the Mantramārga, associated with a band of protean and predominantly female spirits, and the solitary and celibate Rudra of the Atimārga. In the fully developed and diversified Mantramārga, this association is but one aspect of that with feminine power (*śakti*) conceived more universally. As opposed to it the Atimārga is *śakti*-less. Within the major divisions

of the Mantramārga, this association with the feminine assumes various dimensions. The Mantramārga scriptures fall into two groups. First, there is the relatively homogeneous canon of texts constituting the Tantras of the Śaiva Siddhānta. Here, although the feminine power of Śiva is accepted, the tendency is more towards metaphysical abstraction, treating it as the creative power of the male deity Sadāśiva, rather than personifying it as the Goddess or goddesses. Besides, the Śaiva Siddhānta conforms to the orthodox and puristic *smārta* norms and avoids any contact with all what is cast aside as 'impure'. The second division of the Mantramārga consists of the Tantras of Bhairava or the Kāpālīka form of Śaivism. Within these Tantras, there is a primary division between those of the Seat of Mantras (Mantrapīṭha) and those of the Seat of Vidyās (Vidyāpīṭha). Amongst the latter are the Union Tantras (*Yāmala-tantras*) and the Power Tantras (*śakti-tantras*). Within the latter there is the distinction between the Tantras of the Trika and the Tantras pertaining to the cult of Kālī. As one ascends through these levels, from the Mantrapīṭha to the *Yāmala-tantras*, therefrom to the Trika Tantras and then to the Tantras of Kālī, one finds the feminine rising gradually from subordination to complete autonomy.²⁴



This arrangement, visualised by Sanderson is hierarchical. Whatever is above and to the left sees whatever is below it and to the right as a lower revelation.²⁵ As Sanderson remarks in this context,

With the ascent to the Vidyāpīṭha the Śaiva entered a world of ritual in which these last restraints on *śakti* dissolved. He was consecrated in the cults of deities who presided in their *maṇḍalas* over predominantly female pantheons, and who passed as he ascended to the left from Bhairavas with consorts, to Goddesses above Bhairavas, to the terribly Solitary Heroines (*ekavīrā*) of the cults of Kālī.²⁶

This applies to Avyapadeśyā Kālī²⁷ in the *Jayadrathayāmala*, who as Śakti, is the origin of Bhairava; or to Kālī in the *Kramasadbhāva*²⁸ who stands upon seven deities: Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Īśvara, Sadāśiva, Mahādeva and Bhairava himself, turning them all into corpses (*pretas*) in the sense that they all have been transcended. Interestingly, earlier at the Mantramārga level, the iconography of Bhairava as Svachchanda Bhairava depicted him as standing upon the prostrate body of the Śaiva Siddhānta deity Sadāśiva; and now Bhairava himself is transcended by the Goddess. Finally, we refer to the anonymous *Mahānayaṇaprakāśa* from Trivundrum which proclaims,

(104-5b) Maheśvara's repose within himself is the highest state of self-awareness. But by the finest of distinctions there shines a state even higher than that. This is the Goddess-ground, in which even the Lord cannot see his way. (105c-106) Being and non-being are grounded in the light of all manifestation, and that is grounded in the ecstasy of consciousness void of all dependence, which in turn comes to rest spontaneously in the limit of the self-groundedness of that all-encompassing [light], where the impressions of the influences left in consciousness by awareness of degree and the like are completely absent. (107-109) What we mean by 'the Goddess' is that untranscendable ground that remains when it has devoured even the subtlest traces of the impressions of these influences, positive, negative and both, that persist even within the state of the self-groundedness of that all-encompassing light. This path of [meditating on the cycles of] the deities [of cognition] is precisely the path of the Goddess [so defined]. It derives from that abyss in which all imprints are obliterated. (110) The nature of the Supreme Lord [Śiva] is the self-groundedness that devours awareness [of degree and the like]. We define the nature of the Goddess to be the point in which that itself comes to rest. (111) Thus though the Supreme Lords, male and female, are [objectively] one and the same, a subtle experiential difference between them has been revealed in order to perfect the correct perception [of this fact].²⁹

As Sanderson explains, 'the Goddess of the Krama is that point at the core of Śiva's nature that he himself cannot objectivate'.³⁰ This understanding of the Goddess as transcending even the Supreme Śiva is to be traced also in Abhinavagupta's Krama-oriented reading of the Trika *tattva*-scheme in his *Tantroccaya*.

There, Paramaśiva or Bhairava, Who is the thirty-seventh principle consisting of three Powers (Parā, Parāparā and Aparā); must be transcended and transformed into a seat. Upon this seat is to be worshipped the Supreme Divine Consciousness-Force, known to be the thirty-eighth principle. This goddess is Caṇḍayogeśvarī, who sets in motion the wheel of devouring and creating the universe. She is to be worshipped, either with the twelve deities, who surround Her like rays, or alone with the universe in inseparable oneness with Her.³¹

As Śaivism negotiated with esoteric goddess cults from beyond its margins; from within its larger theological canon, the Kālī tradition emerged with its own understanding of the Goddess's supremacy with reference to her relation with Śiva as Bhairava.

Reconstructing the Ontological Doctrines of Bengal Kālīkula

One fundamental point that brings the Kālī tradition of Kashmir closer to that of Bengal is the inseparable convergence of the Krama and the Kaula schools to the extent that Mark Dyczkowski does not consider them to be two separate systems altogether.³² Adding to it, a detailed analysis of the philosophical doctrines of Bengal Kālīkula will hint towards more possibilities of historical and cultural continuity between itself and the Krama system of Kashmir.

Although scattered and fragmented, philosophical accounts from the Bengal texts display certain commonalities. First, there is a profound tendency to appropriate the Sāṃkhya doctrine of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* in order to secure a Vedic affiliation. The Sāṃkhya postulates *puruṣa* as the Self whose nature is that of pure consciousness. As opposed to it, *prakṛti* is the equilibrium of the three *guṇas* as the primordial matter. Although unconscious in its own nature, owing to the proximity of *puruṣa*, *prakṛti* behaves as if conscious and evolves into the scheme of categories that constitute all phenomenal experiences.³³ Besides, as

opposed to one *prakṛti*, there are multiple *puruṣas*. In the state of liberation, the *puruṣas* are dissociated from *prakṛti*. In other words, liberation here is the static repose of pure consciousness after transcending the world-producing principle of dynamism.

The Tantras, while appropriating the Sāṃkhya doctrine, dramatically break apart from its classical model. First, the dualism of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* is dissolved into a non-dualistic whole so that they become synonymous with Śiva and Śakti in monistic Śaivism.³⁴ Liberation therefore is not the separation of the two but the attainment of their non-dual union. Secondly, *prakṛti*, here personified as the goddess Kālī, ceases to be merely the unconscious principle of materiality. Despite its/her active nature, *prakṛti*(=Śakti), like *puruṣa* (=Śiva), is also pure consciousness, both transcendent and immanent. As stated in the *Muṇḍamālā Tantra*,

Mahāmāyā has two aspects, *saguṇā* and *nirguṇā*. When associated with *māyā* She is *saguṇā*; and when dissociated from it, She is *nirguṇā*. When the Goddess is *saguṇā*; I, Sadāśiva, too am *saguṇa*. When O Mahāmāyā, You are *nirguṇā*, I too am *nirguṇa*. There is no doubt regarding that. You are the *nirguṇā* Śakti and I too am *nirguṇa*.³⁵

With this non-dualisation of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, Kālī singularly refers to both. Quoting from the *Niruttara Tantra*,

Śiva-Śakti is twofold: *nirguṇā* and *saguṇā*. She Who is *nirguṇā* is of the form of clustered light and is the supreme-eternal Brahman (*param brahma sanatani*)...Dakṣiṇākālī, Who is of the form of light, brings forth the universe, Herself remaining away from it (i.e. transcending it). Kālī, Who engages in reverse copulation (with Mahākāla) is both *nirguṇā* and *saguṇā*... O Progenitrix of the gods, Her *saguṇā* aspect determines the existence of Mahākāla...Of all the *siddhavidyās*, Dakṣiṇākālī is both *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*.³⁶

Accepting the inseparable co-existence of both Śivahood and Śaktihood in the Absolute, these texts employ the metaphor of a gram (*caṇaka*) with its two inseparable halves forming a complete whole. However, this ultimate 'Whole' is none but Kālī with Śiva subsumed into herself. As explained in the *Nirvāṇa Tantra*,

In the Supreme Abode, resides She who is without forms and is of the nature of great light. Covering Herself with *māyā*, She exists in the form of a gram. Devoid of hands or feet, She is the Sun, the Moon and Fire combined. When casting off Her sheath of *māyā*, She splits Herself into two; with the division of Śiva and Śakti, rises the creative ideation.³⁷

This is followed by the creation of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, amongst whom the Goddess chooses Śiva to be her consort. With him, she unites as Bhuvaneśvari, who being Māyā or the world-producing power, is the immanent aspect of Kālī.³⁸

This well-pronounced supremacy of Śakti above Śiva overlaps with the second common motif in the ontological discourses of the Kālīkula Tantras. This motif is articulated in Kālī's iconography where she is depicted as standing upon the corpse-like supine body of Śiva. The *Toḍala Tantra* explains this symbolism,

That Primordial Goddess, o Lady Paramount, is Herself of the form of Kāla. She stands upon the lotus-like heart of Lord Śiva, by Whom the universe is destroyed. Hence, Mahākāla is known to be the destroyer of the universe. When Kālī as the Power of Dissolution, manifests Herself separately; then all of a sudden; O Goddess, Sadāśiva turns into a corpse. That moment, O one with swift arched glances, She appears in Her corpse-riding form.

The Goddess asked,

O Great Lord, Sadāśiva as a corpse is but dead. How can a dead body appear as playful?

Lord Śiva said,

When the Great Kālī manifests Herself, Sadāśiva is left bereft of power. Only when He is united with Śakti, He attains the form of Śiva. Even when in the state of a corpse without power, He does not quit his male form.³⁹

The *Toḍala Tantra* applies here the fundamental Śākta doctrine that without Śakti or the dynamic energy, Śiva is but an inert corpse; as the very letter 'i' in the term 'Śiva' represents Śakti, without which, 'Śiva' would be 'śava'⁴⁰. Besides, a significant number of texts contain a genesis myth that unfolds the relics of an exclusive philosophical doctrine that once might have been fundamental to the Tantras of Kālī. As given in the *Kakārādi Kālī Sahasranāma*,

With myriads of universes crushed under Her canine teeth, She stations Herself in the Void made into Her abode, and hence assumes the black colour. She is the great transcendental Absolute beyond speech, yet is the supreme digit. Playfully residing thus, She ideates Her form as that of the Void. In the beginning of creation, She perceives Her reflection. From that is born Her power of Will and by it is Kāla created.⁴¹

What lies at the core of this account is Kālī's identification with *śūnya* or Void. This motif repeatedly occurs in several other texts like the *Yoginī Tantra*,

The Great Lord Mahākāla is a vast ocean (of grace?). The Goddess, in the course of Her sport, ideates him out as Her consort having a form similar to that of Herself. That Goddess, Who is the Universal Mother is also of a form similar to that of Mahākāla. With half of Her energy, She supports Mahākāla. It is then that She turns black since She attains the state of Voidness as She immerses Herself in this upward channelising of Her (sexual) energy.⁴²

This seems to be a reference to the mystic experience of Voidness in the course of ritual sex. Here again, Kālī creates Mahākāla out of her own Void (*śūnya*) nature. In the *Śaktisaṅgama Tantra*, a later text (16th-17th Century A.D.); this motif of Kālī giving birth to her consort from her own reflection gets welded with the previously studied doctrine of Śiva-Śakti non-duality.

At the time of the great dissolution, She Who rules over millions of universes, exists with Her body combining Śiva and Śakti in oneness... O Pārvatī, She attains the state of Śiva-Śakti communion (*sāmarasya*) as everything is a form of Hers. As the all-pervading Consciousness, She assumes Her supreme form. At that time, She observes Her own reflection which transforms into *māyā* through Her mental ideation and becomes Śiva. For the sake of creation, She brings forth Her consort from Her imagination. From Her mind, She ideates out Her own consort, Who is the Primordial Guru. With Him She engages in reverse copulation and attains the state of the Great Void.⁴³

The text repeatedly establishes the status of Mahākāla as the 'vast shadow' of Kālī, created from her imagination.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, nothing

amongst the available textual accounts sufficiently explains the doctrine of creation effected through the ultimate Void's 'reflection' (*pratibimba*) on itself, lying at the core of this Kālī-centric cosmogony. Initially one might be tempted to compare it with the version of the doctrine of reflection that lies at the core of the Pratyabhijñā⁴⁵ system of Kashmir, on which is founded the ontology of the Śrīvidyā school of Śāktism⁴⁶. However, the Kālikula version seems to be interwrought with the Buddhist doctrine of Voidness, considering the parallel occurrences of this motif in Buddhist texts such as the eleventh-twelfth century 'Premapañcaka' from the *Advayavajrasaṃgraha*, that describes the union of Prajñā and Upāya.

The bride Śūnyatā is dead without the bridegroom who is her own reflection and the product of her own perception. Again, the handsome bridegroom is in a state of bondage when separated from the bride Śūnyatā whose form is exceedingly beautiful. Trembling with the fear of mutual separation, the couple comes to the Guru, and that Guru, owing to his profusion of benevolence, gives them a love which is *Sahaja*. Such is the true Guru's learning and skill, as He is of the form of wind; that they both attain the untranscendable and supportless state. They become perfected with all qualities and are freed from the four pronged notions (being, non being, both being and non being, and neither being nor non being). They become the essential nature of all objects, yet themselves without any essential nature, and attain the eternally stable state.⁴⁷

Like Mahākāla, the Bridegroom (*upāya*) here is a reflection of the Bride (*śūnyatā*). Although she transcends him in a way, the ultimate goal is their inseparable union established by the Guru. Kālī too engages in a reverse copulation (where the female is in the dominant position) with Mahākāla after creating him. Even in the primordial state before the creation of Mahākāla, she in her own non-dual and non-polarised nature, is in a state of communion (*sāmarasya*) of the male and the female poles of divinity. Besides, a striking parallel exists between the account of Kālī's being first the mother of Śiva and then his consort⁴⁸; and the cosmogony of the Prājñika sub-division of the Svābhāvika school of Buddhism where Buddha is first born from

Prajñā as her son and then he unites with her as her consort.⁴⁹ Again, although there is no evidence as to how much import from the Buddhist *Sahajayāna* is there in the sexual imagery of Kālī, one must refer to the occurrence of the term '*sahaja*' in the context of a similar mode of sexual union between Tripurasundarī and her consort Kāmeśvara in the *Gandharva Tantra*.

When the Supreme Śakti of her own accord evolves as the universe,
She puts the Puruṣa [Śiva] down and becomes desirous of sexual union.
Then becoming Herself active, She stands upon Bhairava and enhances
her own Bliss with the waves of natural (*sahaja*) pleasure.⁵⁰

Significantly, this explanation also applies in Kālī's case as this verse has been quoted by Swami Vimalananda in his legendary commentary on the *Karpūrādistotram*⁵¹.

Despite these similarities, the symbolism of Kālī and Mahākālā cannot be read along the same line as in the male-female pair of Prajñā and Upāya in Tantric Buddhism. Even if appropriated from Buddhism, the doctrine of Voidness has undergone significant modifications when translated into the ontological core of a Śākta theology. Even in the case of the Krama system of Kashmir, although the Buddhist doctrine of Voidness lies at its philosophical matrix⁵², it is not without significant ontological and theological modifications that it has been processed into concepts such as the *devīpañcaka* or *vyomapañcaka*.⁵³ In the *Śaktisaṅgama*, the Buddhist cosmogonic motif based on the doctrine of *śūnyatā* smoothly and unapologetically co-exists and overlaps with that of the Upaniṣadic Brahman, whose nature is interpreted to be Being-Consciousness-Bliss.

As Ādinātha (Mahākālā) proclaims, She alone is hailed as the Supreme Brahman. Since Her essential nature is Being and Consciousness, She is attributeless and is of the form of Brahman.⁵⁴

It also remains unanswered as to how this doctrine negotiates with the exclusively Śākta theory of *cit-pariṇāma-vāda*⁵⁵, or material evolution out of pure Consciousness; or whether at all the Tantras of

Kālī had their original ontological system based on *cit-pariṇāma-vāda*.

This opens up a wide range of questions as to the ontological status of Mahākāla. First, with Śiva as Mahākāla born from Kālī, how to explain the relation between the two as that of the Power and the Power-holder, since in Āgamic traditions the *śakti* and the *śaktimāna* are always one and inseparable? An answer to this might be drawn from the compendium *Sarvollāsa* by the sixteenth century legendary saint Śrī Sarvānandanātha.

Prakṛti and *Puruṣa* exist in a state of oneness like a gram. (Owing to their non-duality) some call It singularly *Prakṛti* and others singularly *Puruṣa*... She is known as Mahākālī and Sadāśiva is known to be Mahākāla. When merged into Mahākālī, He is called Mahākāla; and when merged into Mahākāla, She is called Mahākālī.⁵⁶

In other words, in their supreme non-polarised state, Mahākāla and Mahākālī are absolutely and synonymously identical. However, although these accounts do not contradict the doctrine of Śiva-Śakti nonduality, their Śākta spirit drives them to identify the absolute undivided state of Śiva-Śakti as singularly Śakti. Śiva or the *śaktimāna* is distinctly recognised only after this wholeness attains a state of duality. That is precisely the reason for Śiva's apparently derivative status. Hence, there is no self-contradiction when the same *Sarvollāsa*, from which the above verse has been quoted, says elsewhere,

The one Śakti becoming dual comes to be known as Puruṣa. Again after dissolution, She withdraws Her male form and the duality is reduced to oneness. When the one Self becomes dual as the eternal and the non-eternal, on this duality is grounded Puruṣahood. Again when the eternal and the non-eternal become one Self, then there is the One Brahman form.⁵⁷

The *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* visually renders this motif of Kālī's dissolving of Mahākāla Bhairava back into herself through the dramatic and violent imagery of devouring.

Mahākāla, the Destroyer of the Universe, is Your form. At the dissolution of things, it is Kāla Who devours all, and for this reason He is called Mahākāla. Since You devour Mahākāla Himself, You are the

Supreme Primordial Kālikā. Because You devour Kāla, You are Kālī, the origin of all things, and because You are the devourer (Kāla) and the Primordial Being, You are called Ādyā Kālī. Resuming after dissolution Your own form, dark and formless; You alone remain as the One beyond speech and mind.⁵⁸

Turning for a while to the Krama system of Kashmir, there too the core motif is Kālī's devouring of 'Time' or 'Mahākāla' at the various phases in the sequential unfolding of Consciousness. Although in the Krama system too, 'Mahākāla' is Bhairava himself⁵⁹, as in Śivānanda's reference to him as 'Kālarūpī Bhairava'⁶⁰, not all texts identify him directly with Śiva or Bhairava, particularly in his aspect as 'Time' or 'sequence' that is to be transcended. However, in the Bengal traditions, the 'Mahākāla' whom Kālī devours is invariably her Bhairava worshipped by her side in an anthropomorphic form.⁶¹

This motif of Kālī's devouring of Mahākāla has been furnished with deeper philosophical interpretations in the living traditions, many of which came to be textually recorded in the 19th-20th centuries. This was the time when owing to the rising nationalist movement and the urge to build a 'national' identity ironically in the ethical and cultural mould of the West, Tantra came under severe attacks as a bundle of 'irrational' mediaeval superstitions, 'barbaric' to the core. To defend the Tantric traditions in the face of both the colonial and the reformist camps, a handful of scholars came up with textually documented accounts of its rich philosophical discourses, compelled by the need to rationally explain all what lay hidden beneath the shroud of profound secrecy.⁶² These discursive articulations invariably involved the theology of Kālī codified in her iconography.

Turning to a few of them, we might have a look at Sri Bijoy Krishna Chattopadhyay's book titled *Rahasyavidyā*⁶³ (1950), which although an extensive explanation on the *Durgāsaptasatī*, goes deep into the philosophy of Kālī. In Sri Bijoy Krishna's understanding, Mahākāla is the *akṣarātman* or the 'determinate Self which never recoils' as opposed to Kālī who is the indeterminate principle of transcendental Bliss beyond this Self-awareness.

Her manifestation as the *akṣarātman* is none other than Her manifestation as Mahākāla. *Akṣara* is verily self-awareness. As regards Her indeterminate state, She is pure Selfhood and when it comes to Her manifestation and action, this very Śakti is Mahākāla...It is the 'ama' or 'amā' who makes Herself into the *akṣarātman* as the omniscient *tejas* and driven by the modes of Her relish (*rasa*) of Herself, functions as Mahākāla, or in other words awakens Herself in that way. That is why *amāśakti* is called Kālī for in reality *amā* is the progenitrix of Kāla, the destroyer of Kāla as well as the controller of Kāla, Herself being of the nature of self-illumination.⁶⁴

He also says elsewhere,

She has devoured the *ātmaliṅga*, which means that She has devoured the *liṅga* that is of the nature of self-awareness. Here I saw Her as 'kāmini', the one full of desire (of creation) and there as *śivagrāsini*, She who devours Śiva. She has made Śiva dead, has absorbed the Self and the existence of Selfhood into Herself, the experience (*bhoga*) thereof has been referred to as the blissful delight (*rati*) or simply as Bliss. Again, Śaktihood's position as the Controller, possessed of the glory of self-multiplication is called *amā*. Then, She in one aspect is the Indeterminate beyond self-awareness and is of the nature of Bliss; again it is She alone Who in another aspect manifests Bliss as self-awareness, gives birth to Śiva, and builds up Selfhood. Hence this Bliss is the *yoni* of all, the universal *yoni*.⁶⁵

The sexual imagery here is that of Nirvāṇa or transcendental Bliss in the persona of a femme fatale, whose embrace implies death for her submissive male lover, whose love finds its ultimate end in shedding his very individual existence as she devours him at the climax of their union.

Shivachandra Vidyarnava, a charismatic saint from 19th century Bengal, reads into the icon of Kālī, an almost similar motif of Nirvāṇa with however significant departures. Unlike as in the examples stated above, Śakti or Prakṛti does not totally dissolve Puruṣa or Mahākāla but involves him in a playful existence in non existence relation, as even after the attainment of Nirvāṇa, he is allowed to remain but in a subdued state. In his *Tantratattva* (1910), Shivachandra unhesitatingly declares Puruṣa to be an evolute (*vikṛti*) of Prakṛti.⁶⁶ As he explains,

Originally, Śakti alone is Prakṛti. Puruṣa and the Neuter Gender are merely Her evolutes. Her assuming of the male form for the sake of creation is only a mode of Her play. With the end of this play of the world-cycle, the Great Śakti will dissolve into Herself Her male emanation and will remain in Her true Self. This is the view of those who accept the doctrine of *ātyantika mahāpralaya* (the dissolution after which there is no further creation). However, the logical and scriptural supports behind this view are not strong enough. Hence, the Tantraśāstra's view is that the Puruṣa-aspect is the source of bondage or the world-flow consisting of *pravṛtti*, and the Śakti-aspect is the source of liberation which is of the nature of *nivṛtti* or the cessation of the world-flow. There is no reason to believe that the world-flow will come to an end permanently. Hence, of the eternally blissful Śakti, the play of creation-preservation-dissolution is eternal, bondage is eternal and so is liberation. In the eternal image of Hers Whose nature is eternal liberation, Puruṣa or the seed of creation too is eternal. However, in the state of the great liberation, the Puruṣa-śakti (the creative phenomenon) exists only for the sake of Her relish of the bliss of play, with no creative pulsation remaining in Him. Hence placing that (male) power below merely as a support for Her play, the Great Śakti Who grants liberation mounts upon Him; and intoxicated with the relish of the bliss of Brahman-hood, appears as a madwoman having dispelled all fiercehood (of bondage). With Puruṣa or the power of creation stupefied or rendered inert under Her feet, the dishevelled One announces the victory of liberation and with Her arms spread high, proclaims 'fear not, fear not', giving assurance to Her children traumatised by the fear of worldly bondage. That creative power in a male form is Mahākāla Himself. On His bosom, She who dispels the fear owing to Kāla and yet is the charmer of the heart of Kāla, enacts Her play of liberation. That is why the *Mahākāla Tantra* says,

Puruṣa is called *dakṣiṇa* (since He occupies the right side), and Śakti is *vāmā* (since She is the left side). As long as these Left and Right, Female and Male halves are established in equal-footing, there is bondage or the world flow. When owing to the powerful influence of *sādhana*, the *vāmā-śakti* is awakened, She conquers Puruṣa, the *dakṣiṇa-śakti*, and stands on Him intoxicated with the bliss of the *dakṣiṇa* half. Thus, when both the *dakṣiṇa* and the *vāmā* halves get filled with Her influence; then She Who is *kaivalya* incarnate, grants liberation to the *jīva*. That is why the Mother Who grants liberation to the triple world is called Dakṣiṇā Kālī.⁶⁷

Several points are to be noted here. First, Shivachandra counters the theory of Mahākāla's total dissolution in order to do justice to the goddess's iconography where even after his symbolic death, Mahākāla is separately depicted. Secondly, dismantling the conventional Śaiva-Śākta model, where Śiva's stasis embodies transcendence or liberation, and Śakti's dynamism implies immanence or the world-flow; Shivachandra relates Śiva to materiality or immanence and even to the 'bondage'-inducing *pravṛtti*, and Śakti to transcendence and the 'liberation'-causing *nivṛtti*. This seems to be a forced reconceptualisation of Śiva and Śakti along the lines of the Buddhist Prajñā and Upāya.⁶⁸ However, what stops one from reading Shivachandra's Kālī and Mahākāla as Prajñā and Upāya disguised under Śākta names, is his understanding of the nature of Śakti and that of liberation. Unlike *śūnyatā* in Buddhism, Kālī is not static; and despite her belonging to the pole of transcendence, she is dynamic par excellence. This is well pronounced in Shivachandra's rejection of the doctrine of *ātyantika mahāpralaya*. His notion of liberation follows a Śākta line where the phenomenal world is not negated or rejected but is accepted as a playful manifestation of Śakti who is eternally dynamic, so that even in the state of liberation, Śakti's play of creation continues. Besides, *kaivalya* or liberation has itself been called a mode of her play in the term *kaivalya-līlā*. Kālī as the Supreme Śakti is therefore transcendently dynamic or dynamically transcendent. It would not be irrelevant here to refer to a section from Navjivan Rastogi's observation on Krama where in a similar gesture; Kāla is associated with immanence and Kālī with transcendence.

Owing to Kāla's operation, I-ness (Ahaṁtā) evolves externally in a progressive order (Anuloma-krama); while its power, Kālī, remains responsible for internal involution (regressive order – Pratiloma-krama) of the time thus manifested. Thus Kāla-Saṁkarṣiṇī is the monistic entity, one without the second,...⁶⁹

Secondly, unlike in Tantric Buddhism, the ultimate end is not merely an equal union of the two poles of divinity (which rather has been treated as a state of bondage), but even within the non-duality of Śiva

and Śakti, a subtle distinction is maintained whereby Śakti finally transcends Śiva by subsuming him.

Known to be a disciple of Shivachandra⁷⁰, Sir John Woodroffe has interpreted the Kālī iconography on several occasions. I would specifically refer here to the one in *Mahāmāyā: The World as Power, Power as Consciousness*⁷¹ (1929), that features in course of his discussion on the nature of the ultimate Reality Whole. As he argues, Power implies not merely the 'Power to Become' or the Power to evolve as the phenomenal world, but also the 'Power to Be' or to remain persistent or 'exist' in the quintessential state of pure Being or pure Consciousness. Hence Śakti or the principle of dynamism implies not merely immanence, but also absolute transcendence.⁷² In total it is one single Power encompassing both Being and Becoming, which has been verily designated as the Alogical Whole. As Woodroffe says,

*Being-Consciousness-Bliss as both Power to Be and to Become or evolve is therefore the Reality Whole. Time, Space and Causality are born in its womb; that is, in itself It is Mahākālī, which means not only that Mahākāla or Infinite Time is the Power, but that She "stands upon" Mahākāla who, as the symbol depicts, is "at Her feet". She is the Mother as also the Consort of Mahākāla— a truth which is now understood. She produces Time, and having produced, plays with, and as, Time. Such play is Her play, Her love-joying. She is the Supreme Principle evolving as, and transcending, the 36 Tattvas or Stages of involution and evolution.*⁷³

This is to say that despite being transcendent, Kālī encompasses the entire range of creation, without however allowing it to affect her true nature. She does this by involving the principle of Time in a playful relation so that although active, it never overpowers her; but in turn is overpowered by her. This comes very close to the explanation offered by Shivachandra, as studied earlier.

However, turning to Swami Vimalananda's understanding of the Kālī-Mahākāla relation in his *Vimalānandadāyini Svarūpa-Vyākhyā* (1922), on the *Karpūrādistotra*⁷⁴, we find the conventional model of Śiva and Śakti existing in an inseparable relation as the Power and the Powerholder. Mahākāla here is neither merely the *akṣarātman*, nor is he

the subjugated world-phenomenon consisting of *pravṛtti*; but even as 'Time' he is nevertheless the ultimate principle identical with the Nirguṇa or Niṣkriya Brahman. Kālī as his Śakti is inseparably associated with him.⁷⁵ However later in course of the main text of the commentary, he gradually gets subsumed in the Goddess as Vimalananda adopts the general Śākta model of the Kālī Tantras. As he says,

There You are stationed on the breast of Śiva Who is inactive like a corpse. This means that remaining established in Your own state as the Brahman beyond attributes, You have divided Yourself into Śiva and Śakti, like the two halves of a gram by virtue of your *māyā* embodying the powers of Will, Action and Knowledge. You are engaged with Mahākāla in enjoying the vibrant bliss of sexual union which means that You are eternally united in reverse copulation with Paramaśiva who is Brahman with attributes.⁷⁶

Here, set against the absolute stasis of the corpse-like Śiva, attributed with the status of the inert Brahman⁷⁷ (who is Kālī herself in her transcendental state); Mahākāla or Paramaśiva is the relatively lower immanent form of Brahman, with Kālī encompassing both.⁷⁸

However, in a later hymn titled 'Kālikāṣṭakam' by Sri Kalikananda, hailing from Swami Vimalananda's lineage, we see the relation between Kālī and Mahākāla explained in terms of the Pratyabhijñā doctrine.

She Who is pure Consciousness vested with the power of Absolute Freedom, She who plays in the Consciousness of Mahākāla or Paramaśiva, Who evolves into the thirty six categories, Whose nature is that of Being-Consciousness-Bliss; of that all-auspicious Kālī, Who is in the form of Brahman, I adore the lotus-like feet.⁷⁹

Referring to Bengal Kālīkula's negotiations with the non-dualistic schools of Kashmir Śaivism like Trika or Pratyabhijñā, we would turn once again to the *Śaktisaṅgama* which is to be credited with building for Kālīkula a holistic canon of an encyclopedic range by incorporating *mantras* and ritual structures from diverse other sources. This significantly involves Śrīvidyā, or the system of Tantric Śāktism centred round the worship of Tripurasundarī, who is accommodated into

Kālīkula as the third member in the Māhāvidyā pantheon. Appropriating the core motif of Kāmākālā or the Triangle of Desire⁸⁰ from Śrīvidyā, a cosmic hierarchy is built up. The cosmogonic order of the *Śaktisaṅgama* as analysed by Sri Kalicharan Pant⁸¹ can be summarised in the following manner,

1. Kālī (the letter *aḥ*): The Highest Void, the purely transcendent Śakti beyond Śivahood.
2. Mahākālā (the letter *a*): Kālī's reflection on herself, a projection of her imagination, also 'Time'.
3. Tārā (the letter *ā*): A lower stage in Kālī's Voidness equated with 'Space'.
4. Kāmākālā (the letter *i*): The three *bindus*: the Sun, the Moon, and Fire.
5. Śrīvidyā or Tripurasundarī (the letter *i*): the full blooming of Supreme Consciousness and Bliss.
6. Kāmeśvara (the letter *u*): In a descending scale of creation, pure Śaktihood recedes giving way to the full emergence of Śivahood as the perfect 'I' (*aham*).

Interestingly, as the scheme is further elaborated, it incorporates all the thirty six *tattvas* of Trika Śaivism⁸², with which Sri Pant exhibits a considerable familiarity, which however is not there in the original text of the *Śaktisaṅgama*. Besides, through the equating of Kāmeśvara with the Śivatattva, the entire ontological scheme of Trika Śaivism is allocated to a lower rank in the hierarchical scale.

Finally, I would like to turn to my Gurudeva Kulavadhuta Srimat Shayamananda Tirthanatha's understanding of Kālī and her relation with Mahākālā,

Whatever power resides in Śiva, comes from Her. It is this Mahāśakti Who energises the corpse (*śavā*) and vests Śivahood into it, and at the end devours this Śivahood or re-absorbs it into Herself. In other words, Mahākālī devours Mahākālā, hence She is known to be the One Who transcends Kāla (*kālātītā*). Having thus absorbed Śiva's Śivahood, She alone exists, Herself combining both Śiva and Śakti. In this state She is the perfect eternal Absolute (*pūrṇabrahmasanātani*).⁸³

However, this primacy of Śakti does not contradict the doctrine of Śiva-Śakti non-duality, as in my Gurudeva's own terms,

If it is said that Mahākālī devours Mahākāla, then it also needs to be added that after devouring Him, She keeps Him absorbed in Herself. Śiva then remains in a state of oneness with Her... Śiva is eternally united with the Great Śakti and it is that Śiva, ever one with Herself, Whom She manifests externally and then withdraws back. 'Śiva' means the One vested with Śakti. Without Her, He would be merely a *śavā*. When She gives birth to Herself as Śiva, then She also manifests as His Power, ever united with Him. Hence, it is never possible to separate Śiva and Śakti. Śiva is Śakti and Śakti is Śiva.⁸⁴

Interestingly, while on the one hand, Kālī's turning of Śiva into a corpse by withdrawing the letter 'i' or Śakti from him implies a separation of the two; yet considering Śiva's inseparable merging into her through this symbolic death and withdrawal, there again is an implication of their union. This brings us to the distinction between Brahman and Parama Brahman, often maintained in the Tirthanātha⁸⁵ lineage. Technically it refers to that between the *saguṇa* Brahman and the *nirguṇa* Brahman, which however must not be read along the lines of Śaṅkara's monism. In monistic Vedānta, the highest state of Brahman which is *nirguṇa* is purely static and devoid of any association with Śakti. But in the Tantras, Brahman in both its *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* states is inseparably associated with Śakti, for the ultimate reality consists not merely of pure consciousness but also free agency or dynamism. In the absence of any one of these two, the Absolute would turn inert.⁸⁶ Considering this indispensability of Brahman's association with Śakti, the distinction between its *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* states or its designations as merely 'Brahman' and 'Parama Brahman' can be summed up in the words of Srimati Tapasi Devyamba, my Gurudeva's daughter and my Śikṣā Guru,

As long as the absolute oneness of Brahman and Śakti has not been realised; the former at times unites with the latter and attains Śivahood, and again at times bereft of Śakti, it turns into a *śavā*. It is then merely 'Brahman'. However, when Brahman and Śakti are absolutely one and the same, so that it is no longer possible to distinguish one from the

other, then Brahman is 'Parama Brahman'. Therefore Parama Brahman means the same thing as Paramā Śakti.⁸⁷

In this context, the icon of Kālī standing on Śiva's corpse illustrates Śiva's entire journey from 'Brahman'-hood to 'Parama Brahman'-hood.

In the unique iconography of Dakṣiṇākālī popular in Bengal,⁸⁸ Śiva is depicted in two forms. Below there is the supine figure of Śiva as a corpse, upon whom Mahākālā reclines with Kālī sitting on top of him and engaged in reverse sexual union or *viparītarati* (where the female is active and rides upon the passive male). Strictly contextualised in terms of the Āgamic traditions, this icon verily echoes the hierarchy established among the Siddhāntins, the Bhairava Tantras and the Śākta Tantras. Bhairava tramples down the Śaiva Siddhānta deity Sadāśiva, and is himself trampled down by the Goddess who in every way transcends him.⁸⁹ The motif of their sexual union of course implies the non-duality of Śiva and Śakti. However, this union is vertical and not horizontal as is seen in the *yāmala* icons where the Goddess sits on Bhairava's lap on an equal level.

It might be asked, how can this mode of Śakti's hierarchical union with Śiva be contextualised in terms of Kuṇḍalinī Yoga? Unfortunately, the Tantras of Dakṣiṇākālī hardly ever elaborate upon the significance of this symbolism in terms of Kālī as Kuṇḍalinī uniting with Śiva as Mahākālā in the *sahasrāra* lotus, having pierced through all the six energy-centres below. One reference might be drawn from the description of the state of *samādhi* in the poem 'Sādhaka Rañjana' by the eighteenth century Bengali poet Kamalākānta Bhaṭṭācārya.

The Primordial Lady, enjoys reverse copulation while residing in the chamber of bliss.⁹⁰

The text however is silent as to why this union has to be in the reverse mode only. Although there is the common understanding of *viparītarati* as a mode of sexual union whereby the downwardly flowing course of psycho-physical energy is given an upward surge through Yoga,⁹¹ this does not suffice to explain the case of Kālī where *viparītarati* also implies Śakti's transcendence above Śiva. For an esoteric reading

of this symbolism in the Yogic context, we might turn to Gopinath Kaviraj's expositions on the higher gradations of consciousness to which the Yogi needs to ascend after Kuṇḍalinī has united with Śiva in the *sahasrāra*. As Gopinath Kaviraj argues, in ordinary cases, the journey ends at the centre of the primordial triangle therein, where sit the Divine Couple. This however is but an extension of the *pañcadaśī* or the fifteenth digit, yet to transcend Time in its entirety. The higher stage of the *ṣoḍaśī* (and then the *saptadaśī*) is to be attained after crossing this state, as it involves a journey from duality to non-duality. In the *pañcadaśī*, Śakti is seated on Śiva's lap as his inherent energy. However, in course of her journey to the *ṣoḍaśī*, she leaves Śiva's lap and rises beyond leaving him behind as an unconscious corpse. Through a lotus that blooms out of Śiva's navel, she moves upward and manifests her absolute autonomy. With this, Śiva too attains the state of Parama Śiva. In course of this journey from the *pañcadaśī* to the *ṣoḍaśī*, there are four intermediary stages.

1. Prāsāda: Here the Supreme Male and the Supreme Female recline on a plank.
2. Mahāprāsāda: The initial stage of their union.
3. Parāprāsāda: Their normal union.
4. Prāsādaparā: Reverse sexual union.⁹²

However, this entire scheme belongs to an independent lineage in which Gopinath Kaviraj received his initiation and cannot be expected to be the same as the ones followed in the traditions of Kālī in Bengal. Yet it is noteworthy considering its understanding of higher stages above the usually understood version of Śiva-Śakti union.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, these fragmented discourses do not suffice to comprehend the complete philosophical system associated with Kālī. Besides, what also must be considered is the dynamic and evolving nature of living traditions. The process of canon building involves incorporation from other sources so that the core doctrines of a system are perpetually re-interpreted to accommodate newer ones. Particularly

in the case of Kālikula, where ritual elements are given prime importance, philosophical doctrines often undergo re-adjustments owing to newer negotiations. The authority of the *Śaktisaṅgama Tantra* can be asserted from its role in determining the structure of *mantra* initiation in the Tīrthanātha Paramparā, one of the still surviving lineages of Kālī worship in Bengal to which I myself belong. Although pivoting on the *mantras* of Kālī, the complete consecration (*pūrṇābhiṣeka*) of an initiate as a Kaula⁹³ also involves the imparting of the *mantra* of Brahman. In terms of philosophy, this results in a re-contextualisation Kālī and Mahākālā in terms of the Upaniṣadic doctrine of Brahman (re-formulated in the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*), rather than that of *sūnyatā* in Buddhism.

Notes

- ¹ Kar, Arghya Dipta, 2021. “Kālī’s Mount: Śiva/Śava: Śiva’s Position in the Bengal Iconography of Kālī”, *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Vol. LXIII, No.3, 119-121.
- ² One of the multiple forms of the goddess Kālī featuring in the Tantric tradition of eastern India. For a list the various forms of this goddess see Bhattacharya, Chakreshvar, 1930. *Śākta-darśanam* (in Sanskrit), Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, 203. For details on the Tantric understanding of the various forms of Kālī and the rituals associated with her, see Das, Upendra Kumar, 1391*baṅgābda*, *Śāstramūlaka Bhāratiya Śaktisādhana*, (vol 1) (in Bengali), Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, 463-491. For studies on Kālī, also see Khanna, Madhu, 2013. “Introduction” in *Śāktapramodaḥ of Deva Nandan Singh*, Tantra Foundation, Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan & D.K. Printworld Private Limited, New Delhi. 22-28; Satpathy, Sarveshvar 1992. *Śakti Iconography in Tāntric Mahāvidyās*, Calcutta, Punthi Pustak, 118-123.
- ³ The Āgamic traditions divide the entire Indian subcontinent into three zones or *krāntās*; Viṣṇukrāntā from the Vindhyas upto to Chattala (Chittagong), thus including Bengal; Rathakrāntā from the same place to Mahācīna, including Nepal; and Aśvakrāntā from the same mountain to the “great ocean”, apparently covering the rest of India — Avalon, Arthur. 1952 : “Introduction”, *Principles of Tantra*, Madras, Ganesh & Co., 87
- ⁴ The term *vidyā* in the Tantras refers to *mantras* of female deities. A cluster of such *vidyās* constitutes the Mahāvidyā pantheon. Although the standard number is ten: Kālī, Tārā, Tripurasundarī, Bhuvaneśvarī, Tripurabhairavī, Chinnamastā, Dhūmāvatī, Bagalā, Mātāṅgī and Kamalā; other enumerations include twelve (see *Niruttara Tantra*, ed., Pandit Sri Dinanath Tripathi, 1385

baṅgābda, Calcutta, Nababharat Publishers, *paṭala* 50, verses 42, 138.) or more such goddesses.

- ⁵ See, Chakrabarti, Kunal 2001. Delhi : *Religious Process*, Oxford University Press, 2001.
- ⁶ Notably, when Banerjee, S.C. 2004. makes a list of Tantric texts, he seldom mentions the dates except of a few. See “Tantra Śāstra” in *Sanskrit Culture of Bengal*, Delhi, Sharada Publishing House, 87-121. For Tantric texts of Bengal, see Bhattacharjee, Jatindra Mohan 1993. ed., *A Descriptive Catalogue of The Sanskrit Manuscripts*, Calcutta : The National Council of Education, Bengal, “Tantra” Chatterjee, Heramba 1993. *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts*, (vol. 1), Calcutta: 1984, Sanskrit Sahitya Parishad, 1984. Also see Banerji, S.C. 1992. *Tantra in Bengal: A Study in Its Origin, Development and Influence*, Delhi, Manohar, 76-135, 255-272, 277-290; Banerji, S.C. 1999. *A Companion to Tantra*, New Delhi, Abhinav Publication, 117-245 (though not exclusively, this list of Tantras largely covers texts from Bengal); *Sanskrit Culture of Bengal*, op.cit., pp 87-124. Considering the lists available, notably a great number of these texts are still unpublished. For texts available in print, see catalogues of Nababharat Publishers, Kolkata; Chowkhamba Publishers, Varanasi; and Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi.
- ⁷ See, Khanna, Madhu 1986. *The Concept and Liturgy of Śricakra based on Śivānanda’s Trilogy*, PhD Thesis, University of Oxford.
- ⁸ *Nityāṣoḍaśīkārṇavaḥ the śīkārṇavaḥ* (with commentary *Setubandha* by Bhāskararāya), 2005. Dr. Shitala Prasada Upadhyay, ed., Varanasi, Sampurnanand-Sanskrit University.
- ⁹ *Yoginīhrdayam* (with the commentary by Amṛtānanda), 1988. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- ¹⁰ *Kāma-Kalā Vilāsa* by Puṇyānanda-Nātha (with commentary by Naṭanānanda Nātha), 1961. ed. Arthur Avalon., Madras : Ganesh & Co. Private Limited.
- ¹¹ *Tripurārahasyam (Māhātmyakhaṇḍam)*, 2008. ed. Acharya Jagadishchandra Mishra, Varanasi: Chowkhamba Surabharati Prakashan.
- ¹² *Saundaryalaharī*, (with commentaries in Sanskrit), 2006. ed. A. Kuppuswami, Delhi : Nag Publishers, 2006.
- ¹³ *Lalitāsahasranāmastotram* (with *Saubhāgyabhāskara* by Bhāskararāya): *Bhāskara-Granthāvalī*, part I, 2003: ed. Acharya Batuknath Shastri Khiste, Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya.
- ¹⁴ Sanderson, Alexis 1985: “Purity and Power among the Brahmans of Kashmir”, in http://www.alexissanderson.com/uploads/6/2/7/6/6276908/sanderson_1985.pdf. Kolkata : accessed on 21.09.13.
- ¹⁵ *Nirvāṇa Tantra in Tantrasaṅgraha*, 1408 *baṅgābda*. ed. Saumananda Das, Kolkata: Nababharat Publishers.
- ¹⁶ *Niruttara Tantra*, Pandit Sri Dinanath Tripathi, ed., Nababharat Publishers, Calcutta, 1385 *baṅgābda*.
- ¹⁷ “Toḍala Tantra”, in *Tantrasaṅgraha*, 1408 *baṅgābda* ed., Saumananda Nath, ed., Nababharat Publishers.
- ¹⁸ *Muṇḍamālā Tantra*, 1387 *baṅgābda*, Panchanan Shastri, ed., Calcutta, Nababharat Publishers.

- ¹⁹ *Yoginītantram*, 1385 *baṅgābda* ed., Swami Sarveshvarananda Sarasvati, Calcutta, Nababharat Publishers.
- ²⁰ *Karpūrādistotra* (with *Vimalānandadāyini Svarūpa-Vyākhyā* of Vimalananda Swami) 2004. ed., Arthur Avalon, New Delhi: Cosmo Publications.
- ²¹ *Śakti-saṅgama-tantra (Kālī-khaṇḍa)*, *saṃvat* 2039. 'Kula-Bhushan' Pandit Ramadatta Shukla, Prayag: Kalyan Mandir Prakashan.
- ²² *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*, ed., 1929. Arthur Avalon, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- ²³ *Sarvollāsatāntram* of Śrīmat Sarvānandanātha, 2003. ed., S.N. Khaṇḍelvāla, Varanasi: Chowkhamba Surabharati Prakshana.
- ²⁴ Sanderson, Alexis. 1988. The World's Religions: "Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions", 664-669.
<https://www.google.com/amp/s/document.tips/amp/documents/alexis-sanderson-saivism-and-the-tantric-traditions.pdf.html>
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 669.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 670.
- ²⁷ See Serbaeva, Olga 2021. "Avyapadeśyā: Indefinable Kālī" to Michael Slouber, *A Garland of Forgotten Goddesses*, ed., California: University of California Press, 284.
- ²⁸ *Kramasadbhāva*, chapter 1, verse 3-4, <https://mahanaya.org/en/scriptures/kramasadbhava>
- ²⁹ *maheśasyātmaviśrāntiḥ parāhantāmika hi yā tasyā api parāvasthā (yā?bhā)ti sūkṣmaprahedataḥ/tad devīdhāma yatrāsan kāmīśīko vibhūr bhavat/bhāvābhāvau prakāśentaḥ pratiṣṭhām adhigacchataḥ/sa cāpi sakalāpekṣāsūnyāyām ciccamatkṛtau/tāratamyādikalanāvāsanāvedhadūrage/paraviśrāntiparyante sāpi viśrāmyati svataḥ/paraprakāśaviśrāntidaśāyām api ye sthitāḥ/vāsanāvedhasaṃskārā bhāvābhāvobhayātmakāḥ/atastāmasanīkṛtya yā viśrāntiranuttarā || sā devī kathiyate tasyā nayosau devatānayaḥ yatrāpate parikṣī(nā? no)' pi taṅko'sau nayastataḥ/yā kālagrāsaviśrāntistadrūpaṃ paramēśitūḥ/yā tu viśrāntiviśrāntis tad devīrūpamiṣyate || itthaṃ sū(kṣmi? kṣme) kṣitārūpo bhedo yat paramēśayoḥ ekye'pi darśitaṃ samya pratītipariśuddhaye — Mahānayaprakāśaḥ, 1937. ed., K. Sāmbaśiva Śāstrī, Trivundram Superintenden, Government Press, Trivundram, *ullāsa* 4, *verses* 104-111, 8-19. Translated by Alexis Sanderson in "The Saiva Exegesis of Kashmir" in *Tantric Studies in Memory of Hélène Brunner*, 2007. ed., Dominic Goodall and André Padoux,, Institut français d'Indologie, 309-310.*
- ³⁰ Alexis, Sanderson, *Ibid.*, p. 309.
- ³¹ *tatra śaktitrayātmā yo 'sau paramaśivaḥ saptatṛiṃśo bhairavastamapyullaṅghya tamāsanapakṣīkṛtyāṣṭā tṛiṃśattamī yāsau bhagavatī parasaṃviduktā saiva caṇḍayogīśvaryaṭmīkā viśvagrāsasṛṣṭicakravāhinī dvādaśābhīmarīcirū-pābhirdevatābhiḥ saha kevalā vā viśvāvibhedavṛtyā pūjyā.....Tantroccaya*, p. 177. *The Tantroccaya of Abhinavagupta* (R. Gnoli and R. Torella, eds.)<https://www.academia.edu/resource/work/4610993>
- ³² Dyczkowski, Mark S.G. *The Canon of the Śaivāgama and the Kubjikā Tantras of the Western Kaula Tradition*, 1988, State University of New York Press: Albany, 75-76.

- ³³ For the Sāṃkhya system, see Dasgupta, Surendranath 1975. *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol 1. Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 245-248.
- ³⁴ See A. Jacobsen, Knut 1996. "The Female Pole of the Godhead in Tantrism and the *Prakṛti* of Sāṃkhya", *Numen* 43: 56-81; also by the same author, 2002. *Prakṛti in Sāṃkhya-Yoga*, Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2002.
- ³⁵ *saguṇā nirguṇā ceti mahāmāyā dvidhā matā | saguṇā māyayā yuktā tayā hinā ca nirguṇā || saguṇā ca yadā devī saguṇohahaṃ sadāśīvaḥ | nirguṇā tvaṃ mahāmāye! nirguṇohahaṃ na saṃśayaḥ | | tvameva nirguṇā śaktirahameva ca nirguṇaḥ | Muṇḍamālā Tantra, op.cit., paṭala 1, verse 56-58, 42-43.*
- ³⁶ *śivaśaktirdvidhā devī nirguṇā saguṇāpi ca | | nirguṇā jyotiṣāṃ vṛndāṃ paraṃ brahma sanātānī | ...jyotiṣa dakṣiṇā kālī dūrasthā syāt prapañcasūlī | viparītaratā kālī nirguṇā saguṇāpi ca || ... saguṇā suragarbhe ca mahākālanirūpiṇī | ...siddhavidyāsu sarvāsu dakṣiṇā prakṛti pumān | avinābhāvasambandha-stayoreva paraspāram || Niruttara Tantra, op.cit., paṭala 2, verses 8-11, p. 10....*
- ³⁷ *satyaloke nirākārā mahājyotiḥ-svarūpiṇī/māyayācchhāditātmanāṃ caṇakākārārūpiṇī/hastapādādirahitā candrasūryāgnirūpiṇī/māyāvālkalasantaḥjyā dvidhā bhinnā yadonmukī/śivaśaktivibhāgena jāyate sṛṣṭīkalpanā/... Nirvāṇa Tantra, in Tantrasaṃgraha, op.cit., paṭala 1, verse 14-16: 2-3.*
- ³⁸ Ibid., verses 16-30: 3-4.
- ³⁹ *yācādyā parameśāni! svayaṃ kālasvarūpiṇī | śrīśivasya hṛdayambhoje sthitā saṃhārārūpiṇī | | ata eva mahākālo jagat-saṃhāra-kārakaḥ | saṃhāra-rūpiṇī kālī yadā vyakta-svarūpiṇī || tadaiva sahasā devī | śavarūpaḥ sadāśīvaḥ | tatksaṇāt cañcāpāṅgi! sā devī śavaṇāhanā || śrīdevīuvāca- śavarūpo mahādeva' || mṛtadehaḥ sadāśīvaḥ || mṛtadeho mahādeva salilo vā katham nahi | | śrīśiva uvāca—yasmin vyaktā mahākālī śaktihīnaḥ sadāśīvaḥ | śaktyā yukto yadā devī tadaiva śivarūpakaḥ | śaktihīne Śavaḥ puruṣatvaṃ na muñcati | | Toḍala Tantra, op.cit., paṭala 1, verses 20-24: 5-6.*
- ⁴⁰ Compare for instance,
United with Śakti, Śiva is endowed with the power to create the universe. Otherwise he is incapable even of movement.— *Saundaryalaharī*, op.cit., verse 1.
śivaśśaktyā yukto yadi bhavati śaktaḥ prabhavitum na cedevaṃ devo na khalu kuśalaḥ spanditumapi |
- ⁴¹ *śūnye brahmāṇḍagole ca pañcāśacchhūnyamādhyake || pañcśūnyasthitā tārā sarvānte kālīkā smṛtā | anantakoṭībrahmāṇḍarājadantāgrake śive || sthāpya śūnyālayaṃ kṛtvā kṛṣṇavarṇaṃ vidhāya ca | mahānirguṇarūpā ca vācātītā parā kalā || kṛdāyāṃ saṃsthitā devī śūnyarūpā prakalpayet | sṛṣṭerārambhakārye tu dṛṣṭā chhāyā tayā yadā || icchhāśaktistu sā jātā tayā kālo vinirmītaḥ |Śāktapramodaḥ of Deva Nandan Singh, 2013 (ed. New Delhi: Madhu Khanna), Tantra Foundation, Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan & D.K. Printworld Private limited, verses 13-19.*
- ⁴² *mahārṇavo bhaveddevī mahākālo maheśvaraḥ | tulyarūpaṃ hi kṛdārthaṃ bharttārāṃ paryakalpayet | | saiva kālī jaganmātā mahākālatulā tu sā | bhūttvārdhatejasirūpā mahākālāṇca vibhṛati || śūnyarūpā kṛṣṇavarṇā mattā syādūrdhatejasī || —Yogītantram, op.cit., paṭala 11, verses 49-51: 110*

- ⁴³ *mahā-pralayamāsādyā koṭi-brahmāṇḍa-nāyikā || śiva-śakti-mayaṁ dehamekīkṛtya sadā sthitā ||...sāmarasyaṁ samāsādyā sarva-rūpā hi pārvati | cid-vyāpaka-svarūpeṇa svayaṁ vibhṛatī parām | | etasminneva kāle tu sva-bimbaṁ paśyati śivā | tad-bimbaṁ tu bhavenmāyā tatra mānasikaṁ śivam | | sṛṣṭerutpādanārthaṁ tu bhartṛ-rūpaṁ prakalpayet | ādi-nāthaṁ tu manasā kalpātita-svarūpiṇam | | taṁ vilokya maheśāni! sṛṣṭyutpadana-kāraṇāt | ādi-nāthaṁ mānasikaṁ sva-bhartāraṁ prakalpayet | | viparīta-ratiṁ kṛtvā mahāśūnyaṁ vidhāya ca |*—Śakti-saṅgama-tantra (Kālī-khaṇḍa), op.cit., paṭala 1, verses 21-31: 2-3
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., paṭala 1, verse 95: 8.
- ⁴⁵ See for instance *Īśvarapratyabhijñā*, (with *vimarśinī* commentary by Abhinavagupta), Krishnananda Sagar, ed., published by editor, 1981; Mrinal Kaul, “Abhinavagupta on Reflection Pratibimba”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (2020) 48: 161-189. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-019-9414-0>
- ⁴⁶ *Kāma-kalā-vilāsa* by Puṇyānanda-Nātha (with commentary by Nāṭanānanda-Nātha), op.cit., verses 2-8 (in the main Sanskrit part), 9-16; *Tripurārahasyaṁ* (Jñāna khaṇḍa), op.cit., adhāya 1, verse 1 : 1.
- ⁴⁷ *pratibhāso varaḥ kāntaḥ prātityotpādamātmakaḥ | na syāt yadi mṛtaiva syāt śūnyatā kāmīni matā || śūnyatātivārā kāntā mūrtyā nirupamā tu yā | prthak yadi kadācit syāt baddhaḥ syāt kāntanāyakaḥ | | dampatī śaṅkitau tasmāt gurorūpasthitau puraḥ | nijaprītyā tayostena sāhajaṁ prema kāritam | | vāyusadgurupāṇḍityamahākauśalamīdṛśam | nijabedhanirāmbāvubhau jātāvanuttarau || sarvvalakṣaṇasampūrṇau caturdvayavivarjjitau | sarvabhāvāsvabhāvau ca niḥsvabhāvau sadoditau ||*—“Premapañcaka” in *Advayavajrasaṁgraha*, 1327 (ed. Baroda, Haraprasad Shastri), Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1927, verses 1-3, 58. I am thankful to my friend Abhradip Ghosh for helping me with this reference.
- ⁴⁸ See Dipta Kar, Arghya. 2021. Śiva’s Consort and Creatrix: Evolution of the Goddess Tradition with the Śākta Appropriation of Śaiva Myths, *II International Symposium on Mythology*, Proceeding Book, Ardahan University, : 31-41.
- ⁴⁹ See Shashibhushan, Dasgupta 1946. *Obscure Religious Cults As Background of Benagli literature*, Calcutta : University of Calcutta : 393.
- ⁵⁰ *yadā sā paramā śaktiḥ svecchayā viśvarūpiṇī | adhaḥkṛtvā tu puruṣaṁ (varṇa? rantu) icchābhavettadā || tadākramya svayaṁ devī bhairavopari saṁsthitā | saha jānandasandohairnījānandapravardhinī | ... Gandharva Tantra*, 2009 (ed.) Dr. Radheshyam Chaturvedi, Varanasi : Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 2009, paṭala 82, verses 73-75, 308.
- ⁵¹ Footnote 2 in *Vimalānandadāyini–Svarūpa-Vyākhyā*, op.cit., 27.
- ⁵² Rastogi, Navjivan 1979. *The Krama Tantrism of Kashmir*, Vol.1, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- ⁵³ The “Khapañcakakastotra, Hymn to the Five Spheres of Emptiness” (Introduction, Edition, Translation), 2018 (ed. Mark Dyczkowski, *Tantrapuṣpāñjali: Tantric Traditions and Philosophy of Kashmir*, Bettina Sharada and Hamsa Stainton, eds, New Delhi, Indira Gandhi National Centre of Arts, 67-131

- ⁵⁴ *sā eva ādināthoktaṁ parabrahmeti gīyate | saccidātmasvarūpeyaṁ brahmarūpā'ṭha nirguṇā |* |—Śaktisaṁgamatantram, Part II (Tārākhaṇḍaḥ), 1941 (ed. Benoytosh Bhattacharyya), Baroda, Oriental Institute, *paṭala* 5, verse 24, 22
- ⁵⁵ See, for instance, 'Her (Consciousness-Force's) evolutes (*pariṇāma*) is the universe. Hence, it too is of the nature of consciousness.' (*tatpariṇāma eva prapañcaḥ | ata eva ca cidrūpaḥ |*)*Setubandhana tikā* by Bhāskararāya on *Nityāṣoḍaśikāṇava*, op.cit., *viśrāma* 4, verse 5, 124.
- ⁵⁶ *mahākālī samākhya sā mahākālāḥ sadāśivaḥ | mahākālīpralīno'tra mahākālāḥ prakīrtitaḥ |* | *mahākālāpralīnātra mahākālī prakīrtitā |*—*Sarvollāsatatantram* of Sarvānandanātha, 2003. (ed. S.N. Khandelval, ed., Chowkhamba Surabharati Prakashan), *ullāsa* 3, verse 3-13, : 15.
- ⁵⁷ *ekā śaktirdividhā bhūtvā madhye puruṣabhāṣitam | punaḥ pralīnakāle'pi dvidhaikaṁ pumsagopitam |* | *nityānityādividhaikātmā dvidhābhāvāśritaḥ pumān |* | *nityānityaṁ yadāikātmā tadaikaṁ brahmavigrahaṁ |*— Ibid., *ullāsa* 6, verses 25, p 35.
- ⁵⁸ *tava rūpaṁ mahākālo jagatsaṁhārakārakaḥ | mahāsaṁhārasamaye kālaḥ sarvaṁ grasiṣyati |* | *kalanāt sarvabhūtānāṁ mahākālāḥ prakīrtitaḥ | mahākālasya kalanāt tvamādyā kālīkā parā || kālasaṁgrasanāt kālī sarveṣāṁ mādi-rūpiṇī | kālatvādādibhūtāt vādādyā kālīti gīyate || punaḥ svarūpamāsādyā tamorūpaṁ nirākṛtiḥ | vācātitaṁ manogamyāṁ tvamekaivā'vaśiṣyase ||*—*Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*, Arthur Avalon, ed., op.cit., *ullāsa* 4, verses 30-33, 61.
- ⁵⁹ See Navjivan Rastogi, *Metaphysics and Tantric Esotericism of Krama: An Analytical Exposition*, (unpublished) 507
[https://archive.org/details/MetaphysicsAndTantricEsoterismOfKramaAnAnalyticalExposition/MetaphysicsAndTantricEsotericismOfKramaAnAnalyticalExposition-Navjivan_rastogi_part1/\(20/11/24\)](https://archive.org/details/MetaphysicsAndTantricEsoterismOfKramaAnAnalyticalExposition/MetaphysicsAndTantricEsotericismOfKramaAnAnalyticalExposition-Navjivan_rastogi_part1/(20/11/24))
- ⁶⁰ *Kālikāstotram* of Jñānanetraḥ, verse 6, <https://mahanaya.org/en/scriptures/kalikastrotram> (7/1/2025)
- ⁶¹ "Dakṣiṇakālikāpūjā" in *Tantroktā Nityapūjā Paddhati* of Kulavadhūt Srimat Jaganmohan Tarkalankar, 1418 *baṅgābda*. Calcutta, Nababharat Publishers, 139.
- ⁶² See Kar, Arghya Dipta. 2016. *Śākta Discourses in Nineteenth-Twentieth Century Bengal: A Critical Narration*, unpublished PhD. Thesis, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.
- ⁶³ Chattopadhyay, Bijoy Krishna 1412 *baṅgābda*. *Rahasyavidyā* (in Bengali), (2 vols), Howrah, Upanishad Rahasya Karyalaya.
- ⁶⁴ *akṣara ātmārūpe prakāśha haowāi tñār mahākālarūpe prakāśha | akṣar nijabodhasvarūp | anirvacanīyatver dike tini mātra śuddha ātmasvarūpa evaṁ prakāśer dike, kriyār dike, tinii mahākālā |oi 'ama' vā amā-i niḥke akṣarātmārūpe, sarvajñārūpe tejomayā kare āpnii āpnār rasabhangimār tāḍaṇāy mahākālarūpe kriyāmay han vā āpnāke sambuddha karen | ei janya amāśaktikei bale kālī | kena nā, prakṛtapakṣe amāi kālaprasavinī, kālasaṁhārīṇī, svayamprakāśasvarūpiṇī kālānīyantraṇī |*—Ibid., 197.
- ⁶⁵ *tini ātmalinga grās karechhen, arthāt cetanār ātmabodhrūpa je linga, seṭike tini grasana karechhen | ekhāne dekhām tñāke 'kāminī', ār okhāne śivagrāsini | tini śivake madā karechhen- ātmā o ātmatver astitvake eksā ka're niyechhen, jār*

bhogaṭā dekhle bali ānandamaya rati' vā 'sukha' | ār śaktitver je niyantraṇatva, arthāt āpnāke āpni nānā karār je mahimā, tār nām amā | tā hale opiṭhe jini anirvacanīyā ātmabodhātītā ānandasvarūpiṇī, epiphe tini-i ātmabodharūpa ānanda phuṭān- śiva-ke ābār prasava karen-ātmatva gaḍen | sutarām ei ānanda-i sarvayoni- viśvayoni | — Ibid., 232

⁶⁶ prakṛte vikṛtiḥ pumān — Vidyarnava, Shivachandra. 1389 baṅgābda, Tantratattova, (in Bengali), Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 267.

⁶⁷ mūlataḥ śakti-i prakṛti, puruṣa vā napuṃsaka sei prakṛtir vikṛti mātra | sṛṣṭikāryya nirvāher nimitta śaktir puruṣmūrti-parigraha keval līlāvilāsa mātra, saṃsāralilābhaṅger saṅge saṅgei se mūrtti samvaraṇa kariyā mahāśakti sva-svarūpe avasthitā haiben | jñāhārā ātyantika, mahāpralaya (je parlay-er par ār sṛṣṭi-sambhāvanā nāi) svikār karen tñāhādiger mate ihāi siddhānta; kintu e mater jukti o pramāṇ baḍai durbbala | tajjanya tantrasāstr-er siddhānta ei je, puruṣa amśa-i saṃsāra-pravṛttimaya bandhaner kāraṇa evaṃ śakti amśai saṃsāranivṛttimay muktir kāraṇa | jagat-prabāher ātyantika mahāpralaya haibār kono kāraṇa nāi | ejanya nityānandamayir sṛṣṭi-sthiti-saṃhāro nitya, bandhano nitya, muktio nitya | sei nitya-muktimayir nityamūrttite sṛṣṭir bijarūpa puruṣo nitya, kintu sei mahānirvāṇa-rūpa muktisthale puruṣa-śakti (sṛṣṭi-prakriyā) kevala līlānanda anubhava janyai avasthita, tñāhāte ār kona sṛṣṭi-r taraṅga nāi | tajjanya se śaktike līlār upalakṣya svarūpa nimne rākhiyā muktidātrī mahāśakti tñāhār uparibhāge ārūḍā haiyā brahmānandarasollāse aghora unmādinī sājiyāchhen | niśceṣṭa puruṣa bā sṛṣṭi-śakti-ke padatale stambhita kariyā muktakeśi muktir vijaya-ghoṣaṇā karitechhen ār ūrdhvabhujā prasārīta kariyā bhavabhayaabhīta santānagaṇke mābhāiḥ mābhāiḥ rabe abhaya pradāna karitechhen | sei sṛṣṭiśakti puruṣa-rūpi svayaṃ mahākāla, tñāhār-i vakṣaṣṭhal-e ai kālabhaya-bhaṇjini kālā-hṛdīrājini kālamanomohinīr kaivalyalīlā | tāi mahākālatantr-e baliyāchhen-
puruṣo dakṣiṇaḥ prokto vāmā śaktirnigadyate |
vāmā sā dakṣiṇaṃ jītvā mahāmokṣa-pradāyini ||
ataḥ sā dakṣiṇā kālī triṣu lokeṣu gīyate ||

puruṣ-er nāma dakṣiṇa (dakṣiṇāṅga-svarūpa baliyā), śakti-r nāma vāmā (vāmāṅga-svarūpa baliyā) yatadin ei vāma o dakṣiṇa, strī o puruṣa samabal-e avasthita tatadin-i saṃsāra bandhana | sādhanā-r prakhara prabhāve vāmāśakti jāgaritā haile tini jakhan dakṣiṇa-śakti puruṣa-ke jaya kariyā tadupari svayaṃ dakṣiṇānande nimagnā hayen arthāt ki vāma, ki dakṣiṇa ubhay amśai jakhan tñāhār prabhāve pūrṇa haiyā jāy, takhani sei kevalānandarūpiṇī jīber mahāmokṣa pradān karen | tāi trailokyamokṣadā māyer nām- dakṣiṇā kālī | — Ibid., : 245.

⁶⁸ See Dasgupta, Shashibhushan op.cit., : 393.

⁶⁹ Rastogi, Navjivan. *Metaphysics and Tantric Esotericism of Krama: An Analytical Exposition*, op.cit., : 508.

⁷⁰ For the debate concerning Woodroffe's being an insider or an outsider to the Tantric tradition, see Taylor, Kathleen 2001. *Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra and Bengal 'An Indian Soul in a European Body?'* 2001. Surrey, Routledge, : 93-114.

- ⁷¹ Woodroffe, John and Pramatha Nath Mukhopadhyay 1961. *Mahāmāyā: The World As Power: Power As Consciousness*, Madras : Ganesh & Co.,
- ⁷² Ibid., pp. 80-81. For discussion on 'Power to Be' or *bhavana-śakti* in Kashmir Śaivism, see *Śivadr̥ṣṭi* of Somānanda (with Utpaladeva's *Vṛtti*), 1986 ed. Radheshyam Chaturvedi, ed., Varanasi: Varanaseya Sanskrit Sansthan, *āhnika* 3, verses 55-59, pp. 102-103; *Īśvarapratyabhijñā*, op.cit., 1.5.14, pp. 106-109.
- ⁷³ Woodroffe, op.cit., : 171-172.
- ⁷⁴ *Vimalānandadāyini–Svarūpa-Vyākhyā* of Swami Vimalananda in *Karpūrādistotra*, 2004 ed. New Delhi, Arthur Avalon, Cosmo Publications.
- ⁷⁵ "Introduction", Ibid., : 1-3
- ⁷⁶ *śavaśivahṛdi śavavat niṣkriyasya śivasya hṛdaye, svakīyanirguṇabrahmapade sthitā satī icchhā-kriyā-jñānayuktayā māyayā śivaśaktivibhāgena caṇakākāravat dvidhā bhūtvā ityārthaḥ | mahākālenoccairmmadanarasalāvaṇyanirātām saguṇabrahmaparamaśiveṇa saha viparītabhāveṇa niyatayuktām |* Vimalananda Swami, *Vimalānandadāyini–Svarūpa-Vyākhyā*, op.cit., verse 18, : 26-27.
- ⁷⁷ Compare, 'The term *śava*, refers to Brahman as a dead body' (*śava ityakṣare brahmavācakaḥ pretanirṇayaḥ |*)*Gāyatrītantram*, 2003 (with the 'Tattvadīpikā' Hindi Commentary by Pt. Śivadatta Miśra, Śāstrī), (ed. Pt. Tārakanātha Bhaṭṭācārya), Varanasi : Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, verse 153, : 22.
- ⁷⁸ Also see "*Śrī Śrī Kālikār Dhyāna O Rahasya*", that describes her as 'seated on the *śava* and Śiva (*śavaśivārūḍā*) to which Svami Bhairavananda (son of Svami Vimalananda) furnishes the following interpretation.
The *śava*-hood is *nirguṇa* and Śiva-hood is *saguṇa*. She is established in both these states. In reality, despite being *nirguṇā*, She displays Her unparallel play in Her *saguṇa* aspect.
.....'*Śrī Śrī Kālikār Dhyāna O Rahasya*' (in Bengali) 1349 *baṅgābda*., in *Śrī Śrī Devītatvāmṛtam*, Belur : Kalikashrama, op.cit., :13.
(*śavabhāva nirguṇa o śivabhāva saguṇa, ei dvividha bhābei virājamānā | tini vastutaḥ nirguṇā haileo saguṇabhāve svīya apūrvāvilānaipuṇya prakāśita karen |*)
- ⁷⁹ *cidrūpa yā svatantrā paramaśiva-mahākāla-samvid-vilāsā |ṣaṭtrimśattattva-rūpai-riha ca pariṇatā yā ca sarveśvari | saccitsaukhyātmikā yā sakalaśivamayī, kālikāyā hi tasyāḥ | pādābjaṁ brahmamūrte niravadhi vimalānandamayyāḥ prapadye ||* —" *Śrīśrīkālikāṣṭakam*" by Sri Kalikananda, in *Śrī Śrī Kālikākālpāmṛtam*, 1352 *baṅgābda*, Kalikasram, Belur: (no page number indicated).
- ⁸⁰ For details, see *Kāmakalāvīlāsa* commentary by Naṭanānanda), 1999, (ed. Upendrakumar Das), Santiniketan: Visvabharati Gaveshana Prakashan Vibhag.
- ⁸¹ Pant, Kalicharan, *samvat*. 2025. *Śākta Darśana*, Prayag: Kalyan Mandir: 21-52.
- ⁸² Ibid., 58-71.
- ⁸³ Orally communicated.
- ⁸⁴ Orally communicated.
- ⁸⁵ Associated with Sri Jaganmohan Tarkalamkara (1829-1900), a Renaissance figure of Bengal Tantra who systematised the canon in the nineteenth century.

- ⁸⁶ “Commentary” in *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*, 2009 (ed. Kulavadhutacharya Srimat Jaganmohan Tarkalankar), Calcutta Nababharat Publishers. 57-58, 115.
- ⁸⁷ Orally communicated
- ⁸⁸ For the complete *dhyāna* of Dakṣiṇakālīkā, see *Kālī Tantra*, 1409 *baṅgābda*, (ed. Srimat Paramatmanandanath Bhairava), Kolkata: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, *paṭala* I, verses 27-36, 4-5.
- ⁸⁹ For more details, see Kar, Arghya Dipta “Kālī’s Mount: Śiva/Śava: Śiva’s Position in the Bengal Iconography of Kālī”, op.cit., 119-121.
- ⁹⁰ *Sādhaka-rañjana* of Kamalākānta Bhaṭṭācārya, 1417 *baṅgābda*, (ed. Prasanta Sen, Kolkata: Pātābāhār, 1417 : 111.
- ⁹¹ See for instance, Sarasvati, Sacchidananda 1397 *baṅgābda*, *Pūjāpradīpa* (part 2), Saumyānanda Nātha, ed., Kolkata: Nababharat Publishers: 35-37.
- ⁹² Kaviraj, Gopinath 1963. *Tāntrika Vāṅmaya Mein Śākta Dṛṣṭi*, Patna: Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad : 205-206.
- ⁹³ The term ‘kaula’ derives from ‘kula’ The latter has been difined variously in the Tantras. For instance,
O beloved, *akula* is Śiva and *kula* means Śakti. Those who are adept in seeking *kula* and *akula* are designated as the *kaulikas*.... *Kulārṇava Tantra*, 1383 *baṅgābda*, (ed. Upendrakumar Das) Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, *ullāsa* 17, verse 27, : 436.
The worshippers of Śakti are grossly classified into the *samayas* and the *kaulas*. Howwever a great debate persists as per the exact definition of the two and the line of differene between them. See Das, Upendrakumar *Śāstramūlaka Bhāratīya Śaktisādhana*, op.cit., Vol. I, : 578-599.
- ⁹⁴ Image: From Alexis Sanderson, “Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions”, op.cit., : 669.

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Public Health in British India: A Study on British Response to Leprosy in the Brahmaputra Valley

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Abstract

The evolution of Public Health in British India and policies on disease prevention made remarkable contribution in India. It brought colossal changes in the health care system. Following the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, British began to penetrate into the North East India. After arriving in the region, they encountered numbers of diseases i.e. cholera, kala-azar, malaria, and other ailments. Leprosy was another disease that was common in the area and had a large impact on the inhabitants. The British government established a number of dispensaries, asylums, and clinics in the Brahmaputra valley to cure leprosy.

Keywords: Public Health, Diseases, Leprosy, Policies.

Introduction

The discipline of 'Public Health' is concerned with the protection of people's health. It is the process of protecting people from diseases by doing research and formulating disease prevention policies. According to Winslow, an American public health theoretician and leader, "Public Health is the science and the art of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting physical health and efficiency through organized community and their efforts for environmental sanitation, community infection control, health consciousness and personal hygiene education, and the organisation of medical and nursing services for early diagnosis and treatment".¹ In 1988, the Institute of Medicine defined the Public Health in their report as "activities

undertaken within the formal structure of government and the associated efforts of private and voluntary organisations and individual".² It is the organizational mechanism for providing such condition.³ The public health functions in a community are akin to those of a physician caring for a patient. It cures the community's illness and health by adopting policies, assessments, and assurances.⁴

The history of modern public health first emerged in England. The Industrial Revolution in England in the 18th century was one of the key causes that contributed to the establishment of public health. Many new factories were established in different cities and individuals from rural areas began to migrate to the urban localities in search of work. Despite finding work in factories, their low wages prevented them from purchasing a home to live in. As a result, a number of slum areas with insufficient sanitary facilities and inadequate water supply emerged. Subsequently, cholera epidemics began to spread over Europe, killing thousands of people. This outbreak was quickly discovered to be uncontrollable unless sanitary conditions improved. Consequently, the first Public Health Act was passed in England in 1848, making the government responsible for the health of the people. It marked the beginning of modern public health.⁵ In the case of America, the age of modern public health began in 1850. In 1850, Lemuel Shattuck prepared a health report for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, detailing the state's public health requirements. It included the suggestion for the formation of health boards, the collection of vital statistics, the adoption of hygienic measures, and research on poor health. The report also advocated for health education and limiting exposure to substances like alcohol, tobacco, contaminated food, and nostrums (quack medicines).⁶ The significance of this report was that it marked the beginning of the modern age of public health in the United States.⁷

The arrival of western medicine in India can be traced back to 1600 AD when first medical officers accompanied with the fleet of British East India Company arrived in India as the ship's surgeons.⁸ The establishment of the East India Company's authority over India in 1757 prompted the growth of both the civil and military services.

In Bengal, a medical department was founded in 1764 to provide medical care to the company's soldiers and employees. Subsequently, in 1785, medical departments were established in three presidencies i.e., Bengal, Madras and Bombay, which involved both the military and civil medical services.⁹ However, it only rendered medical services to the company's servants and soldiers. The history of public health administration dates back to the assumption of Crown rule. During the Revolt of 1857, the fighting capacity of British troops had been severely weakened by epidemic diseases. Following the Revolt of 1857, a special commission was established in 1859 to investigate the sanitary state of the British troops in India. The commission submitted its report in 1863, stating that annually 69 out of every 1,000 British troops in India died because of various diseases. This report caused outrage in Britain and aided India's military hygiene improvement. The report of the Commission also led to the formation of a sanitary commissions to supervise conditions in and around military cantonments. The Military Cantonments Act of 1864 established a system of sanitary policy under the general authority of military medical officers, as well as a system for the registration of deaths within military stations.¹⁰ In 1869, the Government of India appointed a Public Health Commissioner and a Statistical Officer. In 1896, with the abolition of the presidential system, all three presidential medical departments i.e., Bengal, Bombay, and Madras medical departments were merged to form the Indian Medical Services (IMS).¹¹ Till 1919, the medical departments were under the control of the central government. The Montgomery-Chelmsford Constitutional Reforms of 1919 resulted in the transfer of authority of public health, sanitation and vital statistics from the central government to the provinces. This was India's first step towards decentralising health administration. In 1920-21, the Acts of Municipality and Local Board were approved containing legal provisions for the improvement of public health in provinces.¹²

The industrial revolution and rising economic activities of Company brought health hazards to the east as it sought new markets and drew raw produce.¹³ The rapid growth of industrial development posed

major challenges to British health and labour efficiency. British foreign expansion triggered a series of medical difficulties that jeopardised the company's profits as well as the lives of both colonizers and colonised. Disorders caused by warfare and population migration within India facilitated the spread of epidemic diseases such as cholera and smallpox, resulting in a number of severe epidemics in the early and mid-nineteenth centuries.¹⁴ Moreover, epidemics spread over India as a result of economic and military penetration. The creation of colonial infrastructure such as roads, railroads, and labour transportation systems also played important role in carrying diseases in every nook and corner of the country. The spread of epidemic diseases was helped by the unclean coolie lines, where British capitalists forced workers to stay in plantations, mines, and industries. The expansion of irrigation canals and the construction of railways created favourable environment for malaria-carrying mosquitoes in India.¹⁵ The ever-expanding colonial policy of British led them to confront with a new range of diseases that were endemic in the area. India was a vast country with a diverse range of ecosystems, from the world's tallest mountains to plain green fields, from tropical forests to arid deserts. Such a diverse territory had its own distinct diseases like cholera, malaria, and leprosy, which were difficult to control with the IMS's limited resources.¹⁶ Thus, it was only in the 19th century that the government realised the importance of public health and sanitary provisions for the improvement of health condition of the people. It became crucial for the British to implement public health policies in India to deal with the diseases for the consideration of British soldiers in India. Many efforts were made to prevent epidemics in order to defend the lives of imperial troops and officers in particular and Indians in general.

Assam is separated into two valleys: the Brahmaputra valley (also known as Assam valley) and the Surma valley (also known as Barak valley). The districts that make up the Brahmaputra valley include Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, and Lakhimpur.¹⁷ The Brahmaputra valley is an alluvial plain that

developed between the Himalayan Mountain range on the north and the Shillong plateau's block mountains to the south. The uplift glaciations and erosion of the Himalayas, as well as basement tectonics impacting the Shillong massif, are all tied to the Brahmaputra valley's genesis and growth.¹⁸ Assam has a tropical monsoon rainforest environment with high humidity and substantial rainfall. Because of vulnerable climatic condition a number of diseases are found in the region. Assam's contact with the western medical system dates back to the late 18th century, when doctors and surgeons accompanied the soldiers and visited the region. The British entered Assam steadily after the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, which was signed to end the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-1826).¹⁹ Since the last decade of 19th century, the company had been administering the region, and one of its primary concerns was the health of its employees as well as locals.²⁰ The arrival of the British in the Brahmaputra valley marked the beginning of massive change in the health and medical policies. Gradually, in addition to administration, the public health care system was also introduced in the Brahmaputra valley. The unhealthy climatic condition became source of various health hazards for the British and their soldiers. They encountered varieties of health problems and diseases, including cholera, *kala-azar*, malaria, leprosy and smallpox in Assam. Therefore, to deal with various diseases as well as to protect the lives of Europeans and natives, many health and medical policies were introduced in the 19th century by the colonial rulers. The condition of sanitation in Assam's urban and rural areas was in very deplorable condition. Sanitation was assigned to Local Boards and Municipalities with the foundation of these bodies. Nonetheless, due to a lack of funding, no significant improvement in the filthy conditions, particularly in rural areas, could be achieved.²¹

In the early period of mediaeval Assam, knowledge on modern medical facilities was relatively very diminutive. The Ahom court had physician known as Bezbaruah who was well-versed in *Ayurvedic* (the traditional Hindu system of medicine).²² The literary sources of

medieval Assam mentioned about the *Bez*ⁱ⁾, *Ojha*ⁱⁱ⁾ and *Kaviraj*ⁱⁱⁱ⁾, who attended to the ailments of the people.²³ The science of medicine, *Ayurveda*, was thoroughly researched. There existed a state medical department, which was led by the royal physician.²⁴ During the early years of British rule, *Ojhas*, *Kavirajas*, etc. and other indigenous systems of medicine were used to treat diseases. The preventive aspect received little emphasis.

History of Leprosy

The Greek word '*lepra*' from which name 'leprosy' is derived, originally meant a scaly disease, possibly psoriasis, and was only later applied to leprosy. The earliest references to leprosy confirmed by clinical descriptions are in the ancient literature of India; the *Sushruta Samhita* (about 600 BC) contains definite references to, and descriptions of leprosy.²⁵

Leprosy was one of the oldest diseases. The Sanskrit word *Kuṣṭha*, which is now generally used for leprosy, originally meant skin disease in general. Sushruta, a 400 BC Indian surgeon, mentions leprosy as widespread among Hindostan's inhabitants.²⁶ In the West Leprosy is said to be an ancient disease, with references to it in Leviticus and Christian history, however, it was rarely seen. Despite this, the disease has a strong symbolic quality and the term "leper" is still used to describe someone who is feared, disliked and thrown out of society.²⁷ In Egypt Leprosy seems to be known since the time of Moses. According to Manetho, who lived around 260 BC, a large number of Jews contacted this disease and as a result of this they were exiled from Egypt.²⁸ Various medical understandings of leprosy were accepted by indigenous medical tradition in the early nineteenth century. Siddha, the Tamil indigenous medical system, recognised 18 types of leprosy, including seven types of 'big leprosy,' mahā kuṣṭha, and eleven types of 'light leprosy.' *Kuṣṭha*, also known as skin sickness.²⁹ It is an ancient disease that has long been associated with superstition, with lepers being seen as "unclean" and social outcasts.³⁰

ⁱ Bez: a physician.

ⁱⁱ *Ojha*: healer who believes that they are able to heal.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kaviraj: Sanskrit word meaning a healer or a doctor.

Leprosy was one of the most feared diseases in those days as it occurs only in human and was a chronic disease lasting for many years.³¹ Leprosy affected a man's skin, nose and nerves. It produced swelling, lumpiness, and discoloration of the skin. Because it harmed the patient's looks, it was one of the most feared diseases. Peripheral nerves in the face, arms, and legs were commonly affected by leprosy. A loss of feeling in the skin was caused by nerve injury.³² Paralysis, swelling, and loss of feeling were the basic symptoms of leprosy, which were caused by nerve damage produced by the body's defensive reaction to bacterial invasion.³³ The organism of causing leprosy, as was stated, was *Mycobacterium leprae* (Leprosy Bacillus) which was similar to tubercle bacillus.³⁴ The tuberculated, anaesthetised, and mixed types of leprosy were being encountered in India, as well as other regions of the world. It was further stated that the first type of leprosy growth invaded the skin, then the mucous membranes, and finally the viscera, while the second type of injuries affected mostly the peripheral nerves, whereas the third was basically a mix of the first two.³⁵

There were numerous opinions about the elements that cause leprosy which were still being debated and discussed. Officers of the Indian Medical Services (IMS) conducted extensive research on the scientific treatment of leprosy. H.V. Carter of the Bengal Medical Department, who assumed the authority of leprosy control in India after G.A. Hansen discovered in c.1873 that leprosy is spread by contact. He gained a lot of respect in India's central imperial administration and proposed isolating lepers. He advocated for the building of Leper Asylums in India, similar to those that existed in Norway. He claimed that there were three different ways by which segregation might be implemented. Firstly, by constructing asylums at certain centres each of which would function as a place of detention as well as refuge to several districts under adequate monitoring and supervision. Secondly, by establishing leper colonies or village communities made up primarily of the affected, who should be protected from mixing with the local peasantry while still being given more freedom of movement, hence the necessity for strict supervision. Thirdly, by ensuring strict home isolation of leprosy.³⁶ Following the Leprosy Bill of 1889, the British Empire established the National Leprosy Fund under

the chairmanship of Prince of Wales. The Leprosy Commission was established to study the etiology and epidemiology of leprosy and came to the conclusion that leprosy was not a hereditary illness. It could be transmitted through communicable ways, but the chances of this happening were very small. However, it was stated that the poor sanitation and malnutrition had an indirect impact on the spread of leprosy. According to the Commission, segregation might not be beneficial in India. It proposed banning of selling of food, practising prostitution, and other activities that would involve infected persons directly interacting with others, such as barbers or watermen. It urged on the improvement of sanitary and living conditions.³⁷ Moreover, in 1898, the British Indian Government passed the All-India Leprosy Act, which resulted in the establishment of Leper Asylums in key cities across the country, as well as the compulsory separation of lepers.³⁸

As per the assessment of Isaac Santra, there were significant variances in leprosy in different parts of India, and the main causes of these variances were racial differences. Based on this assumption, surveys on various groups of people or races were conducted in Assam and other regions of India. It's unclear whether and to what extent climate and other factors play role in causing the leprosy.³⁹ The British argued that the environmental factors, notably climate and diet, were thought to be the source of sickness.⁴⁰ Leprosy was stated to be undoubtedly more common between the tropics than in the temperate zones. India lying half within the tropics was not quite free from this disease.⁴¹ Moreover, Mr. Jonathan Hutchinson⁴² asserted that leprosy was more prevalent on the seaboards or in the valleys. Many writers supported the dietary argument, claiming that regular consumption of outdated or rotten seafood, rancid oil, and substandard grains was the cause of leprosy. Jonathan Hutchinson backed up this claim.⁴³ On the other hand, fish and milk were thought to be beneficial to this illness.⁴⁴

The Leprosy Commission in India 1890-91 reported that the leprosy in India had been called an "Imperial Danger" in the initial stage. However, the extensive survey of leprosy with the total number of population, it was taught to be too small to regard it as an "Imperial Danger".⁴⁵

British Response to Leprosy in the Brahmaputra Valley

Dr. Isaac Santra, a propaganda officer of the Indian Council of British Empire Leprosy Relief Association reported that the infected cases of leprosy in Assam was low compared with the figure reported in some parts of India. Taking his studies altogether he examined a population of 11,000 in different parts of Assam in different groups. The result of the study was low compared with the cases reported in some parts of India. On the whole, this survey indicates that leprosy while common in Assam was frequently of the mild type, and there were no indications that the disease was seriously on the increase.⁴⁶ On visit to Assam he remarked "in Assam there is wide diversity of race and climates and it was thought that regional surveys might throw some light on regional variations. The Kacharis, a Mongoloid race, some living in the hills and some in the plains, were studied. The incidence in the hills was found double than that of the plains, but in both areas the proportion of Lepromatous cases was very low only about 60 percent".⁴⁷

But when the three census reports of 1867-72, 1881 and 1891 were examined, the highest leper ratio was found in the province where cholera disease was extensive. Among the provinces, Assam was also one of the highest choleric regions of India. The cholera disease mainly occurred in the region with hygienically unsound condition and Assam was considered to be the location with worst hygiene conditions.⁴⁸

Many initiatives and works were carried out in the various districts of the Brahmaputra valley under the Medical and Public Health Department. The Public Health and the Medical Department were previously separate department which were combined together to one under civil surgeons of district in 1958.⁴⁹ Dispensaries, as well as leper colonies, wards, and clinics were established in the several regions of the Brahmaputra valley similar to the Norwegian style of segregation. The Medical Department proposed a special leprosy study in four selected districts in 1924 as a prologue to a general investigation and action against leprosy in 1925.⁵⁰ In 1939, many leprosy clinics were founded in all districts and sub-divisional headquarters, as well as other specified locations, where cases of the disease could be treated.

Throughout the year, the disease's treatment facilities were completely inadequate. As a result, by the end of the year, all *kala-azar* dispensaries and out-centers were equipped to treat the disease.⁵¹ Though no special leprosy scheme existed at the outset, later steps were taken to organise a special leprosy work scheme in the province under the supervision of the Indian Council of British Empire Leprosy Relief Association in 1939, which was expected to begin the following year and for which a special leprosy officer would be trained and appointed. A special leprosy officer was trained and assigned in the province in 1940. Until then, the Public Health Department's Sub-Assistant Surgeons conducted leprosy surveys in combination with *kala-azar* surveys. Until 1939, no formal leprosy survey was conducted in Assam.⁵²

1. Public Health Department Dispensaries and Outdoor Clinics

The Public Health Department set up a number of dispensaries and outdoor clinics to treat leprosy patients. In the early part of 1932, numbers of dispensaries were established by the Public Health Department in the five districts of the Brahmaputra valley i.e., Nowgong, Darrang, Kamrup, Goalpara, and Sibsagar.

The number of dispensaries established in the different districts are shown in the following table:

Table: 1
Number of Dispensaries Under Public Health Department

Year	1932	1933	1934
Districts			
Nowgong	8	8	11
Darrang	4	6	6
Kamrup	4	4	8
Goalpara	3	2	2
Sibsagar	4	4	4
Total	23	24	31

Sources: Annual Public Health Report of the Province of Assam for the Year 1932; Annual Public Health Report of the Province of Assam for the Year 1933; Annual Public Health Report of the Province of Assam for the Year 1934.

The following table shows the number of outdoor clinics run by the Public Health Department:

Table: 2
Numbers of Outdoor Clinics Under Public Health Department

1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	Total
61	62	68	68	66	62	387
61	62	68	68	66	62	

Sources: Annual Public Health Report of the Province of Assam for the Year 1935; 1936; 1937; 1938; 1939; 1940.

The following table shows the number of leprosy cases treated by Public Health Department Dispensaries in various districts.

Table: 3
Numbers of Leprosy Cases Treated under the Public Health Department Dispensaries

Year									
Districts	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1944
Nowgong	463	464	544	374	310	230	155	118	70
Darrang	640	820	474	368	301	145	142	184	58
Kamrup	348	406	301	249	343	310	161	146	40
Goalpara	26	32	46	45	47	77	56	46	21
Sibsagar	31	32	32	19	12	12	7	6	41
Total	1,508	1,754	1,397	1,055	1,013	774	521	500	230

Sources: Annual Public Health Report of the Province of Assam for the Year 1933; 1934; 1935; 1936; 1937; 1938; 1939; 1940; 1944.

According to the Annual Public Health Report of 1933, the results of treatment at these dispensaries were quite encouraging. Treatment was increasingly becoming popular, and the number of patients was fast expanding as the number of dispensaries grew during this period.⁵³ It was also reported that the rise in patient numbers was due to healthcare being made available at all the headquarters and sub-divisional hospitals. When the leper community knew that they could be treated with a reasonable chance of improvement or even a complete

cure, the attendance for this disease would almost certainly show increase in number.⁵⁴

2. Other Centres

Apart from the Public Health Department dispensaries and outdoor clinics, the Brahmaputra valley was also home of numerous leper clinics, leper wards, leper asylums, and leper colonies. These facilities were established to help leprosy patients.

Leper Clinic

At Bengbari and Tangla, there were two leprosy clinics. Bengbari's clinic was well-known and effective. The clinic's popularity, may be, due in relation to the fact that the medical officer was a Kachari who cared about his community. However, it appeared that the Tangla clinic's records were of little use.⁵⁵

Leper Ward

Dhubri, Barpeta, and Gauhati each had their own leper ward. The origin of these leper wards was at the conclusion of the work of the Assam Leprosy Survey. Clinics were attached to important dispensaries where patients could be treated. Patients suffering from leprosy and those requiring minor surgical treatment frequently required traveling long distances, and leper asylums were frequently located far away. As a result, leper wards were constructed to respond to such situations. The leper wards have a doctor, compounder, chowkidar, chef, and gardener. The municipality is in charge of the leper ward.⁵⁶

Leper Colony

Leper colonies were set up in the Goalpara district for leper sufferers. It was managed by missionary societies. In 1939, the mission acquired 1,000 bighas of land from the government and built residences for the Superintendent, Medical Officer, and Dispensary. *Kutchas*^{iv)} houses for 50 patients were built, roads were made and wells were dug, most of the work were done by the patients.⁵⁷ Two Northern

^{iv} *Kutchas* house: house made of mud and straw.

Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC) missionaries, Lars Olsen Skrefsrud from Norway and Hans Peter Boerressen from Denmark founded Santal colony in Assam. Skrefsrud negotiated with the Assam government on behalf of the Santal, and they were given thirty square miles of land for the settlement of emigrant Santals roughly thirty miles north of Dhubri, the sub-divisional headquarters of the Goalpara district. In 1881, Boerressen arrived with the first settlers of forty-two (42) families and gathered under a huge tree near market place Dingdinga.⁵⁸ After arriving, they named the village Takurpura and worked for the development in the field of education, agriculture and medical in Assam. They had made remarkable contribution in the field of medical in Goalpara district.⁵⁹ The missionary workers had surveyed 16 villages in the area and discovered 660 cases of leprosy, with as many as 20 cases recorded in certain villages. The survey resulted in the establishment of three out-patient clinics in Santipara, Gaurang, and Gharubasha, each with a capacity of 40, 40, and 90 patients respectively⁶⁰ under the extensive supervision of Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church. Medical services to the patients were rendered either by missionary nurse or by the departmental nurse or both. Numerous cases of leprosy were treated in these colonies.

Borbheta leper colony of Jorhat run by the mission had 106 patients with 16 healthy children. This colony had 40 acres of land. The patients lived in bamboo houses largely built by them at the cost of about Rs. 30 for each house. A reasonably good diet was provided and was supplemented with garden produce as each house had a garden. This colony was facilitated with schools for both boys and girls. The medical officer lived on the spot and the colony functioned work was well run.⁶¹

In Darrang district, the survey on leprosy detected nearly 800 infectious cases. Therefore, the Director of Public Health proposed to establish a leper colony. A site of 1,000 acres with suitable huts, cultivable land and jungle for fire wood and grazing had been selected. The suggestion was that it should accommodate up to 800 patients. However, it was doubtful that the proposal to develop such a large

colony in Darrang would be practicable or not. The reason was that the leper patients who were from different racial groups might not be coming to such a colony and they often only would go to the colony in or near their own tribal areas.⁶²

Leper Asylum

In 1927, colonial government opened the Tura Leper Asylum. 500 patients were admitted till the end of 1940, but 225 had gone missing. Many patients were admitted against their will under the order of local authority which certainly contributed to the high number of absconders. 47 were discharged as relieved or cured, but 76 were burnt out. 50 people had died out of the remaining 154. However, only one death rate was documented in 1940. There were 50 acres of land on which rice, cotton, pineapple, and other crops were farmed. Recommendation was made to separate the lepers from the healthy in order to control marriage and prevent infection in the asylum.⁶³

After conducting a thorough investigation, Isaac Santra had recommended that leper colonies and asylums need to be reformed, and various anti-leprosy related activities should be carried out throughout the Brahmaputra valley. He had recommended for a comprehensive review of the asylum policy. Since contact between infectious patients and healthy people, particularly children, was not prevented or even minimised at the Tura asylum. It was questionable whether the work of asylums had any benefit for the public health or not. The Medical Officer needed to keep an eye on things more closely. He ought to go to the asylum more often. From the Civil Surgeon's office, the work cannot be supervised. The sick ward was needed for some leper patients. He also advocated for the transformation of current institutions into colonies of reasonable size as well as the creation of new colonies. There should be suitable provisions in the new colonies for the people from different types of races and tribes. The colony should be located at or near the area inhabited by the people, and it should be staffed by people who are adapted to their culture, language, and have genuine desire to help leper patients;

non-governmental agencies, missions and charitable bodies should be encouraged to make capital grants for the development and maintenance of colonies. In the areas where there was no such body to undertake the work, the government or the local bodies should work there with the help of government aid. In the areas where home isolation or village isolation was not practised, the local people should be encouraged to take such initiatives. If any acceptable result was attained in Assam, it should be implemented in other colonies too.⁶⁴

In 1944, the Special Leprosy Officer conducted an extensive Leprosy Survey in Goalpara district with a population of around 3,035, primarily Boros and Santals, and discovered 157 cases of leprosy. The government sanctioned one Public Health Department Dispensary with out-center for the treatment. The Special Leprosy Officer and other department doctors carried out routine propaganda work, and infected were encouraged to be isolated at home or in villages. The survey suggested that the province urgently required a well-equipped and staffed central institution, as well as subsidiary colonies. More comprehensive regional leprosy surveys were required. It was advised that as opportunities arise, additional doctors be trained in modern methods of leprosy work. It further reported that the response of the government and other agencies related to leprosy control in the province was insufficient, and an anti-leprosy scheme was included in the Post-War Reconstruction projects.⁶⁵

3. Public Awareness Programme

The Assam Public Health Department played a commendable role in raising public awareness about leprosy. Assistant Surgeons from the Public Health Department used to carry out leprosy propaganda campaign using magic lanterns to raise awareness among the indigenous people.⁶⁶ They demonstrated utilising a magic lantern, an early form of pic

ture projector, to promote awareness on leprosy among the public. In 1940, a two-days demonstration programme on leprosy was organised by the Tezpur *Bihu*^{v)} Exhibition. About 5000 people

^{v.} *Bihu*: set of three important non-religious festivals in Assam.

participated in this programme and demonstration was given to them on how to detect leprosy, how it spreads, and how to combat it.⁶⁷ The Assam Leprosy Committee distributed preventative measures pamphlets in English, Bengali, and Assamese. All the government agencies like the Director of Public Instruction, Registrar, Co-operative Societies, Local and Municipal Boards, and Assistant Surgeons and Sub-Assistant Surgeons of the Public Health Department were engaged in distribution of pamphlets. Furthermore, some funds were received from the Assam Leprosy Relief Committee and the Assam Branch of the Indian Red Cross Society for the acquisition of medicines and equipment as well as for the treatment of lepers.⁶⁸

The following table shows the donations made by various committees and societies towards the treatment of leprosy and the procurement of necessary equipments:

Table: 4
Contributions from Various Organisations for Medical Equipment and Leprosy Treatment

Year	Organisations	Amount
1932	Assam Leprosy Relief Committee	2,500/-
1932	Assam Branch, Indian Red Cross Society	2000/-
1933	Assam Leprosy Relief Committee	1,000/-
1934	Assam Leprosy Relief Committee	200/-

Sources: Annual Public Health Report of the Province of Assam for the Year 1932; Annual Public Health Report of the Province of Assam for the Year 1933; Annual Public Health Report of the Province for the Year 1934.

The myth of *Gurjun* Oil

Gurjun oil is made from the wood of the *Gurjun* plant using the steam distillation method. Its scientific name is *Dipterocarpus Turbinatus Balsam*. It was used as healing remedy for the skin diseases in early days. On 2nd October, 1876, the Officiating Deputy Surgeon General, Dacca Circle sent a report to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam on the existence of treatment of leprosy by using *Gurjun* oil, which was extensively used.⁶⁹

However, the report claimed that the effectiveness of *Gurjun* oil treatment was so conflicting as to be harmful. Medical authorities of Sibsagar and Tezpur gave positive response, but Nowgong, and Goalpara disregarded its usefulness.⁷⁰ In Sibsagar, M. Mookerjee, a Civil Surgeon, regarded the treatment as "the best he has ever employed," indicating that its consistent and methodical use shows promise in even the worst cases of the illness and unquestionably prevents the progression of all forms of leprosy. But due to his limited experience, he was unable to say with certainty whether it completely wipes the lepraic poison from the person. Leprosy was reported to be prevalent especially among the men in Sibsagar. It was more prevalent in youth and middle aged people and was not restricted to any certain region or race, particularly when combined with poverty. It rarely affected infants or the elderly, and only approximately one-third of the cases could be proven to be inherited. In Tezpur, Dr. Imthum claimed that four cases had been successfully treated. At the Lakhimpur Branch Dispensary, two cases were treated and returned as relieved but on the inspection, this assessment did not seem to be supported. In the Gauripur Branch Dispensary, nine cases were treated; two patients returned relieved, and seven others stopped attending. The Civil Surgeon did not feel that writing a favourable conclusion is justified by having the few opportunities for observation.⁷¹

In Dibrugarh, Surgeon Major White indicated that he was unable to provide any judgment regarding the use of *Gurjun* oil in the treatment of leprosy. He claimed that only sepoys of the regiment affected by leprosy who were invalided after coming under his observation for a few days. In the Goalpara district, Dr. Slane claimed that he had personally attempted the remedy on only one case with an unsatisfactory outcome. In this case, the sickness was of six years duration and it already had affected the patient's feet's soles and nails. The face's skin was also glazed and tuberculated.⁷² Moreover, the Civil Surgeons in the provinces used *Gurjun* oil as a traditional local remedy to treat leprosy at that time. Even though the *Gurjun* oil treatment could not gain favourable response, it treated a number of cases in some areas like Sibsagar, Tezpur, Lakhimpur and Dhubri.

Conclusion

From the above discussion it is certain that the colonial government in order to combat leprosy sickness, implemented public health and medical policies in the Brahmaputra valley. They had established a number of public health dispensaries and out-door clinics throughout the Brahmaputra valley since 1932. As treatment became available at public health facilities, the number of lepers gradually declined in the following years. In different places, number of leprosy colonies, wards, and asylums were established. Financially many organisations aided the leper health centres by donating good amount of money. To enhance public awareness in the Brahmaputra valley, leaflets on leprosy were prepared in English, Bengali, and Assamese languages and distributed. Awareness programme were conducted by using magic lantern. Furthermore, steps were also taken to organize special leprosy awareness program in 1940 under the supervision of the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association. To handle the leprosy case, a special leprosy officer was trained and sent to the province. In 1944, the Post-War Reconstruction Scheme included an anti-leprosy programme to enhance the leprosy control methods that had been ineffective. The noble attempt made by the colonial administrators to eliminate the leprosy from Brahmaputra valley by introducing public health care system helped the leper patients to a great extent. However, at the same time the leprosy took heavy toll of life in the Brahmaputra valley. It is apparent from the discussion that the causes of occurrence of leprosy were not bound to any particular reason. As per reports from civil surgeons, leprosy cases could be seen even in some places that uninfluenced from the marshes or jungles or any unhygienic food habits. The report also states that the people from the poor background had to face the most. It is also evident that more than one factor contributes to the prevalence of leprosy. Numerous studies have produced conflicting results regarding the agents that cause leprosy. The extent to which environmental factors, unclean practices, or poverty contribute to the development of leprosy is unclear, for which the debate is still going on among the scholars about the etiology of leprosy.

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Dynamics of Village Society - A Multi-Ethnic Village in India: Re-Study After Sixty Years

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to understand the dynamics of the social relationships among various caste communities in Daharpur village, Medinipur district, West Bengal. Based on a re-study of the same village after a gap of sixty years, the paper provides a historical overview of the process of development and change at a micro level. The caste type of stratification is deeply rooted in the minds of Indian people which is again structured and penetrated in the day-to-day level interaction of the villagers. Daharpur village is not an exceptional one and till today it maintains the legacy of rural culture. As a result, after sixty years when the same village has been studied by the present researcher, the changing village social structure, especially in terms of social relationships has also been observed. The study is purely a comparative longitudinal study based on a period of time. In spite of demographic and structural changes in the village, the socio-economic and political lives of the villagers have also changed, especially in terms of power relations, which have destroyed the traditional power structure played by the Brahmin and other dominant land-holding classes.

Keywords: Social relationships, development and change, rural culture, power relations, structural change.

Introduction

A village study in India primarily focuses on the issue of demographic and structural reality in contemporary rural Indian society, especially emphasising the caste type of stratification that still predominates with its 'traditional calling' based on heredity. Over

time, many changes have taken place in every aspect of the lives of the villagers, owing to socio-economic and political transformations in their village society. Especially since the 1990s, globalisation and information technology have had a tremendous impact on society and culture everywhere. Villages are not an exception. At present, our traditional villages do not look like they did earlier. The metaphors of our traditional villages in relation to their structure and network of relations with their neighbours have transmuted abruptly in various parts of India.

Since the 1950s onwards, an academic zeal has been observed among the social anthropologists and the sociologists (Bailey, 1960; Dube, 1958; Mayer, 1960; Epstein, 1962 and Bèteille, 1974, 1979, 1996) to study villages as a 'totality of the system' by focusing 'field-view' based on the scientific method. A systematic village study for academic purposes would provide an authentic picture of Indian social reality. Consequently, after independence, a series of plans and programmes have been taken to promote all-round development at the village level, though during the colonial period, villages were treated merely as units of administrative work. Even India was identified as a land of 'village republics' (Jodhka, 1998).

Dumont's (1998) classical work 'Homo Hierarchicus' envisaged caste as the unit of study of Indian society, and many earlier social anthropologists had also shown their inclination to focus mainly on the nature of social relations among the various inter-groups in connection with the caste, class, and kinship spheres. Even in some cases, the social anthropologists were more interested in studying different anthropological issues like rituals and kinship than mobility and equality (Sundar et al. 2000). In this context, Jodhka also stated in his article that:

"Castes were also seen to be functionally integrated and ideologically over-determined in a manner that questions of power and social inequality or marginality and exclusion either seemed secondary or simply irrelevant for understanding the 'essence' of Indian rural life" (Jodhka, 2014:7).

The dominant roles of the Brahmins, due to their ascription of high status and their religious supremacy over other groups, have until now determined the status of various groups and their respective functions for maintaining the stable social commonality of the village. The notion of Indian civilisation was understood by the Indologists through their "book-views", which analysed the classical Hindu scriptures and indicated the supreme role of Brahmins.

In general, the rural societies are stuffed with various social problems caused by unparallel socio-economic conditions of the villagers, unequal social development among them, and the nature of social exploitations by the upper castes and classes on the poor and the Dalits, which are rampant and are generally studied in-depth through the detailed observation by the researchers. Considering those observations connected with village social transformations the planners and policymakers develop a blueprint for our future society.

The socio-economic conditions of the majority of the villagers are not good today. But regarding food security, the Indian farmers have achieved a new trajectory due to the availability of high yielding varieties of seeds, chemical fertilisers, pesticides and new technology that raises the productivity of land in every sector. In spite of this massive economic change, the positions of the low-caste communities remain almost unchanged in the majority of the cases. Subsequently caste-based types of stratification are still deeply rooted in different villages of India in general and in village Daharpur in particular, which has been re-studied by the researcher. Though the exploitation done by the hands of upper castes and the big landholder families is not so rampant as earlier. Nevertheless, villages differ from one region to another and from one state to another due to its nature of topography, geo-physical condition, composition of different caste groups, nature of soil, climatic condition, etc. As a result, types of crops and their production vary from one village to another. For example, the villages of West Bengal differ from the villages of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and the like.

'Historically Indian villages varied significantly in size and in their social fabric. Their character is determined more by regional agrarian histories and local trajectories of social, economic and ecological processes. No single village, or a group of villages, can represent the entire rural India' (Jodhka 2014: 11).

In general, villages in India have been marked by caste stratification, but the nature of social distance from one group to another varies. The treatment of Dalits and other subaltern groups by the other high-caste groups differs significantly. For example, South Indian villages maintain more social distance between the low caste groups and the high caste groups than other villages in India (Srinivas, 1955). In comparison to other states, West Bengal is more liberal in the context of maintaining social distance with the high castes and low castes, and the tribes and non-tribes in the existing social reality (Bhowmick, 1961; 1976). Village study is not very simple, following a homogeneous pattern that is applicable to all villages in India, even in the same state or district. Different scholars, with their subjective understanding make the study according to their own perceptions, thoughts and approaches. In general, social anthropologists generally adopt one of the popular and well accepted methods known as observation (participant and non-participant), following the tradition of early Indian anthropologists' and sociologists' legacy (Srinivas, 1976; Ghurey, 1932; Beteille, 1996; Lewis, 1965; Bose, 1968; Vidyarthi, 1968; Danda, 1973; Bhowmick, 1992) to study the village social structure. Village society is well integrated and interdependent with the diverse caste communities living within the village. Ghurey (1932 : 23) also observed that "... it was in the village that caste society manifested its other aspect, viz. cooperation and interdependence".

Study Area

Research Design Sample

In Daharpur village there are 172 families who belong to different caste communities. They are staying at different areas of the village Daharpur like Kali mandir Para, Shib mandir Para, Debnath Para,

School Para etc. In an earlier study, in the 1960s, when Bhowmick studied the village Daharpur, there were only 46 families belonging to different caste groups.

Table 1: Distribution of Caste Communities People in Daharpur Village (1960s)

Caste/Tribe	Present Day Occupation	No. of Family
<i>Brahman</i> (Brahmin)	Priesthood, Worship, Land Holding	01
<i>Kayastha</i>	Land Holding	02
<i>Sadgop</i> (Clean Caste)	Land holding	17
<i>Barber</i> (Nāpit)	Hair Cutting and Paring Nails, Agriculture	01
<i>Kamar</i> (Blacksmith)	Iron Work, Day Labour	02
<i>Jugi</i> (Nath Sect)	Umbrella Repairing, Agricultural Labour	03
<i>Barga Kshatriya</i>	Cultivation, Day Labour	14
<i>Dhopā</i> (Washerman)	Cleaning and Dying Cloths, Day Labour	01
<i>Bagal</i>	Cultivation, Day Labour	04
<i>Hādi</i> (Sweeper)	Drum Beating, Day Labour	01
	Grand Total	46

Source - Bhowmick, 1961:4

Table 1 displays the distribution of caste communities in Daharpur village in 1960, when the earlier researcher conducted his village study. The village is inhabited by ten caste communities, of which the clean castes are the Barhmin, Kayestha, and Sadgop. The Barber and Blacksmith belong to the *Nabasayak*, or pure Sudra group. The other unclean castes are the Bagdi or Barga Kshatriya, Washerman, and Bagal (cattle herders); the untouchable caste is Hadi (sweeper); and the Jugi belonging to the Nath sect live in this village.

In the year, 2022, when the restudy was conducted by the present researcher, it was observed that the total number of families in caste communities was 172. Very little change is seen in the existing compositions of different groups. The newly added groups are the

Vaishnabs and the Weavers. On the contrary, now one family of the Barber (*napit*) who inhabited earlier has now left. So more or less the village is quite stable in addition to the new groups.

Village Daharpur is located at a distance of around 21 kilometres from Kharagpur railway station. The village is more than 300 years old. It is a multi-ethnic village with diverse caste communities. Tribal people and the caste communities live here together year after year. Dahar Chaṇḍī is the old village goddess who holds the traditional heritage of the village. The name of the village is Daharpur, following the name of the goddess. In olden days, the village consisted of only the caste people, and in time the tribal people were brought in to assist them with the agricultural related works. Narayangarh railway station is the nearest station for the locals. The place has had great historical importance as Sri Sri Chaitanya Mahāprabhu crossed this area on his way to Puri. A popular temple named Brahmanī is there. Historically its importance has been immense. The temple is unique in its architecture as well as the nature of worship here is not traditional. Tribal and caste people worship together, and the temple stands as an example of unity as this area is known as 'Frontier Bengal'¹. Every Thursday a village *haat* are organised to cater to the needs of the local people. Many tribal cultural traits are still present now with the local culture of this area. The *haat* is now changing fast carrying the seeds of globalisation.

The Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the social relations of various caste communities within the existing village social structure in relation to different socio-political and religious institutions and organisations after sixty years. This village, Daharpur, was studied by Bhowmick in the 1960s. In his village study, Bhowmick mainly observed on the social structure of the village based on hierarchical arrangements of different caste groups and their day-to-day function, with the inter-caste groups centering around the different important institutions like economy, polity, family, religion, and ritual practised on caste hierarchy with traditional belief patterns.

The present researcher is trying to find out the changes over sixty years and their aftermath in the same village. It is purely a comparative longitudinal study based on a period of time. The objectives that were framed by the former researcher are strictly followed. Purposefully, in his earlier village study, the researcher did not include the two tribal groups: Lodhas and Mundas, who lived in the same village but were a little bit isolated from the caste groups (Bhowmick, 1975). But he studied these two groups separately not in his 'village study'. Over time, these two tribal groups have come closer, especially after the formation of village Panchayets and the implementation of various developmental projects. So, the present researcher has also excluded the changing social lives of these two tribal groups after sixty years of the study done by P. K. Bhowmick.

Table 2: Distribution of Caste and Communities in Village Daharpur (2022)

Caste/Tribe	Present Day Occupation	Total
<i>Brahman</i> (Brahmin)	Priesthood, Worshipping, Jobs, Small Business	5
<i>Vaishnab</i> (Religious Sect)	Cultivation, Singer of devotional songs, Jobs and Small Business	10
<i>Mahiṣa</i> + <i>Kayestha</i> (Scribe)	Land holding community with Cultivation, engaged with Jobs and Business	12
<i>Sadgop</i> (Clean Caste)	Land holding community with Cultivation, engaged with Teaching and Business and different type of Jobs	47
<i>Tāntī</i> (Weaver)	Weaving, Cultivation and Jobs	4
<i>Kāmār</i> (Blacksmith)	Iron Work, Cultivation and Small Business	6
<i>Bāgdi/Barga Kshatriya</i>	Day Labour, Cultivation and Petty Jobs	44
<i>Jugi</i> (Nath Sect)	Umbrella Repairing, Bedding Works, Cultivation and Business	24

Caste/Tribe	Present Day Occupation	Total
<i>Bagal</i> (Cattle Harders)	Cultivation, Day Labour and Small Business	16
<i>Dhopā</i> (Washerman)	Washing, Cultivation, Job and Small Business	2
<i>Hāḍi</i> (Untouchable Caste, Sweeper)	Drum Beating, Cultivation and Small Business	2
	Grand Total	172

The present-day occupations of the different caste groups are also mentioned in Table 2. Except for Brahmin families, all caste groups are associated with cultivation, along with some present-day occupations or caste-based occupations. The main occupation of the villagers is farming. But the possession of land varies from one group to another, even from family to family. In general, the majority of the low caste groups in the village have little land, so, as an alternative, they do agricultural works in other fields. But now, a few low caste groups have improved their socio-economic status by accepting new types of jobs along with a little education. This changing picture was not observed by Bhowmick in his study in the years of 1960-1962.

Method of Data Collection

The village has been studied by the method of observation (participant and non-participant). Depth interviews and case studies are also used to collect information from the respondents. Focus group discussions have been arranged several times to note the changing aspects of village social life.

The villagers are very cooperative, because a good rapport has already been established with them. For more than one year, the researcher has been attached to them. The village re-study was started in January 2022 and it is still going on.

Table 3: Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Families of Caste and Communities in the Village Daharpur

Caste Communities				
Family Types	Nuclear	Joint		Total
	117 (68.02)	55 (31.98)		172 (100.00)
Number of Family Members	1 - 3	4-6	Above 6	Total
	81 (47.09)	86 (50.00)	05 (2.91)	172 (100.00)
House Types	Pakka	Kachha	Mixed	Total
	61 (35.47)	15 (8.72)	96 (55.81)	172 (100.00)
Family Income (Rs.) Monthly	Up to 5000	5001 - 15000	Above 15000	Total
	116 (67.44)	25 (14.53)	31(18.03)	172 (100.00)
Electric Facility	Have	Have Not		Total
	172	0		172 (100.00)
Drinking Water Facility	Tube well	Tap Water		Total
	46 (26.47)	126 (73.53)		172 (100.00)
Fuel Facilities	Wood	Gas and Wood	Kerosene	Total
	126 (73.25)	41 (23.84)	05 (2.91)	172 (100.00)
Toilet Facilities	Open Field	Toilet		Total
	46 (26.74)	126 (73.26)		172 (100.00)
Kitchen Place	Kitchen	Open Place	Veranda	Total
	96 (55.81)	20 (11.63)	56 (32.56)	172(100.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

Irrespective of different divisions of caste communities, the dominance of nuclear families is seen in each group (table 3). The majority of the families in the village consists of four to six members which shows the predominance of nuclear families among them. Daharpur village is dominated by mixed house types. Pure brick-built houses and mud-built houses are less common in different caste communities. In this village, the majority of the families, irrespective of caste communities, have low monthly earnings.

The Daharpur village did not look like at it was in sixty years ago. Many changes have taken place in the everyday life of the villagers, especially those who are in the good earnings group. 35 caste communities have different types of electrical gadgets like washing machines, TVs, refrigerators etc. The majority of the villagers in this village have beds, chairs, tables, bi-cycles and mobile phones. Motorcycles are popularly used by a good number of villagers. Among different caste communities (*Jugi, Baishnab, Mahisya and Sadgop*) possess five cars respectively. They mainly rent their cars for business.

From the year 2016 onward, the traditional bullock farming has been replaced by tractors. As a result, gradually the system of cattle ownership is going to be weakened. Now 50% of the caste communities have either one or two cows cattle ownership culture has been gradually fading away. Women folk also do not like to work in cattle sheds any more. The needy families sometimes earn money by selling milk or fodder. The use of cow dung also has been gradually decreasing.

The members of all families in the village have been enjoying the electric facility since 1990. The everyday lives of the villagers have changed after getting access to electricity. The villagers are now conscious of safe drinking water. For drinking purpose, they collect water from tube wells and nowadays tap water (73.53%) is also available for drinking purpose. Among the caste people, only 23.53% use gas for their cooking purpose. There is not a single family that uses only gas. In rural areas, the available of waste natural woods and wood-like substances are very commonly used for cooking purpose. This trend in rural culture has been continuing for year after year. Now a days. The villagers are quite interested in using toilets. This change is very remarkable. Since 2016, more than 50% of the villagers use toilets through the *Swachha Bharat Mission*. But still, the practice of open defecation is also seen among them due to some poor economic conditions and old habits. Due to the lack of separate kitchen, they mostly use an unstructured covered veranda for cooking purpose.

Table 4: Rankwise Distribution of the Caste Groups

Caste/Tribe	Rank	Total
<i>Brahman</i>	1	5
<i>Vaishnab</i>	2	10
<i>Mahiṣya + Kayastha</i>	3	12
<i>Sadgop</i>	4	47
<i>Tāntī</i>	5	4
<i>Kāmār</i>	6	6
<i>Bagdi/Barga Khatriya</i>	7	44
<i>Jugi</i>	8	24
<i>Bagal</i>	9	16
<i>Dhopa</i>	10	2
<i>Hāḍi</i>	11	2
Total		172

Table 4 describes the rankwise distribution of the caste groups. In this village there is a total of eleven caste groups. Different caste groups possess different ranks according to the hierarchical ordering of the caste system of that village. The villagers are well adjusted to maintain their caste-based positions in the village social structure without creating any disputes among them. Focus group discussions have been arranged three times to determine the caste based ranking positions of each group in the village of Daharpur. According to their statements, in respect to the village caste hierarchical model, the Brahmin remains at the top and the Hadi occupies the lowest position. In all villages in this district, these two positions are almost fixed. But other positions of various caste groups may vary from one village to another, according to the socio-economic status of the group (Manna, 2003). In this village, the Vaishnab occupies the second position; the third position is occupied by 'Mahisya and Kayestha', from whom Brahmins take pakka food² the Brahmin remains at the top and the Hadi occupies the lowest position in respect to the village caste hierarchical model. In all the villages of this district, these two positions are almost fixed. But the positions of various other caste groups may vary from

one village to another according to the socio-economic status of the group (Manna, 2003). In this village, the Baishnab occupies the second position and the third position is occupied by 'Mahiṣyas and Kaysthas', from whom the Brahmins take *pakka* food² from their hands; the fourth position is occupied by the *Sadgops*. They are treated just like the earlier group in the village caste hierarchy. Next in order comes the Weavers (*Tāntī*), and the sixth position is occupied by the Blacksmiths (*Kāmār*). The seventh rank has been assigned for *Bāgra Kshatriyas* or *Bagdī* and the eighth position is marked for *Jugi* and they belong to *Śaiva* sect. The ninth position is occupied by *Bāgāl* and the tenth is for *Dhopās* (Washer man). In general, the caste communities holding the positions from seventh rank (*Bagra Kshatriya*) to tenth rank Washerman (*Dhopa*) are considered as low castes in the village caste hierarchy model. The *Hāḍī* occupies the lowest rank of the social ladder and known as untouchable caste. Caste is a regional concept and the different positions of the caste groups sometimes vary from one area to other area and from one village to another, except the position of Brahmins (the top position) and the position of *Hāḍī* (the lowest position). The positions of the two extreme ranks are almost fixed everywhere. Even Ghurey (1932) in his book has also asserted the same type of extreme social positions occupied by the Brahmins and the untouchables in all the villages of India.

Caste with Occupational Association

In the village of Daharpur, the Brahmins occupy the highest position in the caste ladder. Almost 300 years ago only one *Brāhmin* family came here and now there are five such families. Since the time of their arrival to this village, they performed their *jajmani* system³ (Wiser, 1936) and kept the village alive. They are not fully dependent on agriculture as they do not possess a lot of land. Mainly they depend on their priesthood. At present, the role of village priest is performed by the son of Phani Bhusan Chakraborty, who died fifteen years ago from the date of the survey (2022). During his illness, his younger son, Pradyot Chakraborty (55 years old) took all the responsibilities of the worship of the village gods and goddesses. For

last seven to eight years, his son, Manojit Chakraborty (28 years) has been assisting his father. The wives of the priests also perform the sacred related activities like cleaning, cutting fruits, collecting flowers, and different types of sacred leaves for worship on the major festive days. They also prepare *bhog* (food prepared by the Brahmins) for the village temple gods and goddesses. The other sons of Phani Bhusan Chakraborty are also engaged in their traditional calling in the village, and sometimes if they are invited by other villages, they also accept it, but not in a regular basis as each village has its own priest. The socio-economic position of the Brahmins is not so good. Even today, they have to depend on the *jajmani* system and the younger generations also maintain their livelihoods on it. Until today, they have not had sufficient agricultural lands. Even their education is not appreciated. But they enjoy the high status which is purely ascribed to them.

These Brahmins had earlier maintained a strong sense of social distance with the other caste groups during 1961-62, when they were only engaged in their priesthood services to the houses of the clean castes. But now they also do *jajmani* services in the houses of all caste groups except the houses of Harijan (Hāḍi, an untouchable caste) and the Washermen (Dhopā, a low caste). In general, they accept *pakka* food from the house of the clean castes like Mahiṣya/Kayastha and Sadgop. In this village, the others are Weaver (*Tāntī*) and Blacksmith (*Kāmār*), who belong to the *Nabasāyak* group and also known as pure sudra caste (Bhowmick, 1976). But their social position in the caste hierarchy is below that of the groups above them. Previously, the Brahmin did not take food from their houses, but today if the food is prepared by a Brahmin, they take food even from the houses of the *Jugi*, *Barga Kshatriya*, and *Bagal* who are regarded as low castes according to the caste hierarchy. In his study, Bhowmick (1961) observes that the Brahmins maintain some sort of social distance from them in relation to performing religious duties and obligations. But now these practices no longer persist. The tenth and eleventh positions in the hierarchy are occupied by the Dhopā and Hāḍi communities and the Brahmins maintain social distance from them till today. They accept

pakka food from all caste groups if the food is prepared by a Brahmin cook, and also take food by sitting in a place separated from the others. Apart from their priestly work, they also sit together, drink tea in different shops, and take many decisions regarding the activities of the village welfare programmes with them. In earlier studies it has been observed that in the same village, the same Brahmin priest did not worship in the houses of the *Barga Kshatriya*, *Jugi*, and *Bagal*. At that time, they had separate priests. But the re-study reveal a new message for the public. The rigidity of the caste system has gradually been eroded. Now the Brahmins in the same village also perform the priesthood service to their houses except the Washerman (*Dhopā*) and Hāḍi.

Regarding the agricultural activities, the Brahmins engage the labour belonging to low caste groups from the same village, even the *Lodhas* and *Mundas* also work in their agricultural fields. They hire tractors from the local *Jugi* caste, and also purchase water from their submersible pumps for seasonal *amon* (winter rice) and non-seasonal *boro* (summer rice) cultivation. Now a days, they also hire paddy cutting machines for collecting paddy from the field from other caste groups. The rate of labour charges for doing various agricultural activities is Rs. 300.00 to Rs. 400.00 per day per person.

Weekly Lakshmi puja is celebrated at every Thursday and Hari puja on the day of full moon are done by the Brahmin priest on regular basis. Prodyot Chakraborty collects money from his clients in the village. He has twenty to twenty-five families who are his *jajmans*. So, the *jajmani* system still prevails there. He collects for Lakshmi puja an amount of *Bhujji*⁴ and Rs. 25.00 as *dakshina* from each and every client, and for Hari puja Rs. 50.0 to Rs 75.00 and the same amount of *Bhujji* from his clients. In this way, Prodyot Chakraborty collects around Rs. 3000.00 per month. He also collects a monthly subscription from the puja committee to worship the village gods and goddesses. It is around Rs. 200.00 per month and the puja committee has given three bigha of land for puja purposes. From these lands, each month he earns Rs. 3000.00. During the annual festive days, he also collects money as

pranamy from the temples. The other family members of different Brahmin families also collect money from their *Jajmans* and do other ceremonial activities for other families of this village and a few of the nearby villages. In this way, the village Daharpur still maintains its tradition year after year.

Ten Vaishnab families are there. Hierarchically, their position is high, and in this village, they hold second place. The majority of them practise agriculture, but three families are engaged in jobs.

Mahiṣya/Kayasthas (12 families), and *Sadgops* (47 families) mainly practise agriculture. In general, these families are landowners. Since till date, the *Sadgops* in this village has held a good amount of land. There are altogether 12 *Sadgop* families who have more than 10 *bighās* of land, of which the names of Nirmal Maity, Rabin Pal, Bomkesk Maity are mentionable. In earlier times in this village, *Sadgop* families were economically solvent group and after sixty years the same trend is going on. As it seems that the *Sadgops* are socio-economically an affluent caste, so the other families belonging to different castes in the village respect them. In decision making process they take a major role. Till now the *Sadgop* families a mainly depend on cultivation. But some affluent families are also engaged in jobs and business. They are the dominant caste of the village.

There are four *Tāntī* (weaving) families. They are not directly involved in cultivation. They have lost their traditional occupation, i.e., weaving. The members of all four families have engaged in jobs. They have sufficient agricultural land cultivated by the agricultural labourers who belong to low caste groups and the neighbouring tribes.

There are six Blacksmith (*Kāmār*) families. The majority of them have two to three *kathas* of land. They cultivate their own land and never do agricultural work in the fields of others. Sometimes they are also engaged in different non-agricultural activities and small businesses. Two families are engaged in their traditional occupation.

Barga Kshatriya or *Bagdi* is known as low caste in this village. The majority of them have land approximately from 1 to 4 bigha. These four families have a good amount of land amounting to more than 10

bighas. A few people are there who possess a few *kathas* of land. They mainly depend on agriculture.

Generally, they themselves cultivate their own lands. Some poor families engage themselves in some agricultural or day labouring work. In this village, there are 44 families of which Ganesh Dolo, aged 55 years is the President of the Village Puja Committee possessing a good amount of land. In earlier times, they were stigmatised as low caste and the Brahmins maintained social distance from them. But now in the perspective of changing social relations, a drastic transformation has been observed in the field of maintaining social distance. In spite of their low ranking in the social ladder, the local Brahmin accepts them and during the time of daily or annual festive days, the Brahmins perform all the religious activities like other castes in their houses. Six people are engaged in jobs or small businesses.

Jugi families belong to the Śaiva sect. In this village, there are 24 *Jugi* families. At present, a few *Jugi* families have changed their socio-economic status. They supply water through their submersible pumps. They are engaged in businesses. They have their tractors, so they earn money by giving them on rent to others. Many of them are devoted to their traditional business — like repairing umbrellas, preparing beds and many other day-to-day works. As a result, they have improved their lifestyle.

Bagal is a different group not seen in every village. Earlier, they were engaged in cattle herding, but now these cattle related activities are not seen, as plough cultivation has been replaced by tractors. So, the whole community is now engaged in different types of activities, either in the agricultural fields or in the day labouring works. There are 16 *Bagal* families. The majority of them have 1 to 4 *bighas* of land. The socio-economic position is not good for all, but a few families are engaged in jobs and businesses. They are the low caste in the village caste hierarchy.

Two *Dhopas* (Washerman) families live in this village. They have sufficient agricultural lands, and they are also engaged in businesses. One of them is a teacher. There are two Hāḍi families living in this

village. They were earlier known as an untouchable caste. Female members of this caste used to perform important roles during the time of childbirth, and they were known as *dhaimas*. But now the situation has changed. Home delivery has been completely halted since 2010. They belong to the lowest caste in the village.

Continuity and Change

Stratification based on caste system still prevails in the day-to-day life of the villagers. On the other hand, some positive changes are also seen owing to the introduction of various schemes by the state government and central government that have brought changes in the rigid closed caste-based society. Since 1910 the government's health scheme has been functioning which has brought tremendous changes not only in the traditional mother and child health affairs but it also knocks the door of the traditional system of home birth which was mainly assisted by the *Hāḍi* women. Now the reproductive health service is available in rural health centres for mother and child where the reproductive mothers and the children up to the age of 5 years are given the same facilities. On the other hand, the traditional job of the professional *Hāḍi* women is no more operational. Bhowmick's study is the right example of how the home birth system in the village society had segregated a particular group from the rest of the community due to their engagement with their filthy occupation associated with birth of a child. These women were considered as an untouchable group, till now they occupy the lowest position but through time the severity of social distance has been lessened. The *Hāḍi* community's people live together and attend different social roles and even participate in village pujas but the offerings of puja are not done by the same Brahmin of the village and the village priest is not allowed to perform religious duty in their houses. But they are allowed to do work with others in the MGNREGA i.e., the hundred days of work scheme. Even the men and women are allowed to do agricultural works along with other caste people. They are allowed to go shopping in the same shop, even in the common place where they are entitled to take a seat and drink tea, eat

biscuits. The children are also allowed to go to school with other children of high caste. But in this village no one from the *Hāḍi* community has got government job. The names of their priests are Pradeep Bhattacharjee (from Kuchli village, 65 years old), Bishnu Bhattacharjee (from Kashba village, 42 years old). Sometimes the Baishnabs act as priests to perform the rituals of the life cycle processes like marriage, birth and funeral rites. Madan Das a *Baishanab* by caste (32 years old) lives at Bahurupa village in the same block, also acts as a priest. The other villagers also accept it.

The names of the *Dhopās* (Washer man) are Anil Sit having 5 to 6 bighas of land and Dipak Sit possessing 6 to 8 bighas of land. They are economically better than the earlier times. But till today, they are associated with their traditional roles. In this village, there are two families of *Dhopā*. In Daharpur village, they do their traditional role of sacred specialists. Mainly the time of birth and death they perform the vital roles of making the family free from pollution. They also maintain social distance with other caste communities. Previously the *Dhopās* used to wash the unclean dresses of the polluted families. But now they simply give some water to the affected families and sprinkle water to make it free from pollution. The villagers have to purchase one bottle of water from him *Dhopa* by giving a Rs 100.00. As a result, the low caste group also avails this opportunity. In rural hospital as well as village health centres, there is no such restriction to separate the pregnant mother in relation to caste hierarchy. In village Daharpur, there is no *Nāpit* (Barber) family so they hire the *Nāpit*, named Monaranjan Manna from Siara village who performs different traditional religious and purificatory rites in this village. Especially, during the time of death and marriage they have to perform important roles.

Now in the village of Daharpur many changes have taken place through the last sixty years. The Brahmins have lost their rigidity. Except *Hāḍi* and *Dhopā*, they are allowed to do different role of sacred specialities in different neighbouring houses.

Considering the structural and functional aspects of the village Daharpur, it has been observed that village social relationships among

various caste groups have changed, though the caste hierarchy is still there. In this study during 2022-2023, after sixty years, (present study) reveals that very little migration and occupational mobility have taken place. In case of mobility and migration the village remains quite static. There is only ten to fifteen adult persons go outside the village for employment (most of the cases for non- governmental temporary jobs). Socio-economically the status low caste groups of the have changed within the village social relationships but the position of the low caste groups is still marked in the social hierarchies i.e., in the low ladders of the society. Many changes have taken place in different villages of West Bengal in recent era. Village Daharpur is not an exception. But the nature of the changing situation in reality is not hopeful at all. One of the important features in village society is good cultural integration. Different groups of people living in same geographical boundaries maintain their identity amidst holding their cultural togetherness.

Cultural Integration

Village Daharpur is a multi-ethnic village. All caste communities and tribal groups interact with one another to maintain village social relations smoothly. Especially during the time of farming, there is no distinction among the groups. Now there is no system to keep agricultural labourers in one's house for the whole time, which was earlier known as the *munis system*. This system is not in place now. "The relationship with attached labourers had also become completely formalised" (Jodhka, 1994). The rate of labour charge on a casual and contractual basis is Rs 300.00 to 400.00 per day, irrespective of caste and tribe. The social distance between high caste and low caste is there, but during the time of work in the field no such difference is seen. The tribal people not only do agricultural work in their own fields, but in seasonal times they always help the other caste communities, especially the landholding class.

After Sixty Years

Daharpur is a multi-ethnic village with diverse caste and tribal communities living together. The tribal population is a little bit

segregated from the caste communities. Bhowmick, sixty years ago, in his village study, had noticed a clear-cut division of the two groups when the tribals addressed the members of caste communities as 'Bangali Babu', and reversely, the tribals were projected by the members of caste communities as "Adibasi". But now this type of distinction between the two groups does not persist. Despite growing awareness among the people, the Brahmins still hold the highest position, and the Harijans (Hāḍi) occupy the lowest position of the village caste hierarchy. In this village, there are eleven caste communities. But the local Brahmins still maintain social distance in relation to performing rituals and accepting food from the houses of Hāḍi and Dhopā. But the other low caste communities like Bagdi, Jugi, and Bagal are now accepted by the local Brahmins of the locality, who were earlier treated as unclean Śudra groups.

Many infrastructural changes have taken place in the village of Daharpur within these sixty years. Demographic and ecological changes are significant. The number of people in each community has increased. The village has grown with the number of houses of each caste and tribal community. Mud-built roads are replaced by *morām* or *ḍhālāi*. 50% of the roads built on *morām*, 30% of the concrete *ḍhālāi*, and 20% of the mud-built roads are observed there. In the year 2007, the first moram roads were constructed, and since then it has been continued. In 2017, the construction of metal road was started with the implementation of the central government scheme *Grāmīn Sarak Jojonā*. The earlier mud-built houses are replaced by *pakka*, or mixed houses. The villagers are benefitted by *Abas Yojana* scheme which was started during Left Front period. 33% houses are *pakka*, 60% are mixed and the rest of the village houses are *kacha* respectively.

In spite of various changes in village social structure, land continues to be the most economically valued asset in rural India in general and the village of Daharpur in particular. Farming is the primary occupation of the villagers. New technology in farming has change the socio-economic status of the villagers. In the village of Daharpur, the red soil was not suitable for the production of good crops as it lies

under the draught area, but now the villagers can afford a submersible pump to get a better flow of water for growing two crops. This has changed the life style of the villagers, and the villagers have also earned much more 'disposable income'. The small farmers and the marginal farmers dominate the agrarian structure of the village. The 'munis system', i.e., the attached labour system, does not exist any more and that has freed the agricultural labourers from exploitation by the land holding class from 1975. Casual and contractual labours are engaged in agricultural fields.

After sixty years, a massive change has been observed in education and health. Village Daharpur has three schools (primary and upper primary) and in its nearby areas- Narayangarh and Makrampur, and Bidisa have higher secondary schools. Aṅganwāri centres are there to support the pregnant mother and the pre-primary level school children up to age five. In this village there are three Aṅganwāri centres. '*Asha karmīs*' — as Aṅganwāri workers are doing well to change the traditional rural health practices. No home birth takes place in the village since 2010. The rural hospital and health centres provide the health *facilities* to the villagers. The role of medicine men or *gunin* is expected to going to be abolished which is mainly performed by the tribals. The provision of 'mid-day-meal' has inspired the students to go to school. But on the contrary, the attendance of the college goer students is less. Educational zeal among the students has been emerging owing to the implementation of 'mid-day meal'. A good number of students from class V to class VIII attend the schools irrespective of caste and tribe.

Migration and mobility are lower. Till today, agriculture has been the main occupation of the villagers. Within these sixty years, nearly 40% of families' adult members are engaged in non-agricultural work along with cultivation. In the majority of the cases, they do their agricultural work in their own fields. Economically, their position is better than it was earlier due to the implementation of various schemes, like Kanyasree, widow pension, *Lakshmir Bhandar*, *Rupasree*, old age pension, and hundred days work. These schemes have had a

tremendous impact on their socio-cultural lives. All villagers, irrespective of class or caste difference, think that they all belong under a common roof as the members of the village and they have also understood their rights. Caste system is not so rigid as it was earlier. Brahmins are more flexible when entering the houses of the uncleaned Śūdras. Through different religious rites, rituals, and local rites, the Brahmins are engaged in the worship of gods and goddesses. The local festivals, centered round the worshipping of village gods and goddesses, are still maintained to protect the common heritage of village solidarity, where the social distance among the castes and tribes are no longer visible.

The role of the village Panchayet is immense. Panchayat members from different castes and tribal groups make the integration of the village strong. At present, Indrajit Singh, the Panchayet member of this village, is a Munda. Daharpur village is under Makrampur gram panchayet which has 20 villages. Among the total 16 members, 5 seats are for general categories and 11 seats are for SCs and STs. The name of the Panchayet Pradhan is Jogendra Doloi. Over the past sixty years, no industrial developments have taken place; only the change in the agricultural sphere has had a tremendous impact on their lives. Two-times cultivation makes the villagers solvent and helps them improve their socio-economic standard. A new political entrepreneurship has emerged, lessening the traditional power structure enjoyed by the Brahmin and the dominant land-holding class. The power structure has become much more fluid. A new type of political mobility is seen among the local groups. The marginalised sections are also represented by their members. As a result, a new power structure has emerged in Village Daharpur.

Notes

¹ Frontier Bengal has been addressed as Western Frontiers by Bhowmick (1976) in his book *Socio Cultural Profile of Frontier Bengal*. It is known as 'Samanta Bhumi' of Aṅga-Baṅga and Kālīṅga region of ancient legends ... the area is still now inhabited by many autochthonous or primitive people represented by the Santals, Mundas, Lodhas, Kharias, Mahalis ... most of whom still cling to their pristine culture.

- ² Pakka food, prepared with oil, butter and ghee, is accepted by the Brahmins from the hands of clean castes if the food is prepared by the cook, who is also a Brahmin by caste.
- ³ W.H. Wiser who had initially, in his classic study *The Hindu Jajmani System*, first published in 1936, had conceptualised the social relationships among caste groups in the Indian village in the framework of 'reciprocity'.... Reciprocity implied, explicitly or implicitly, an exchange of equal services and non-exploitative relations. Mutual gratification was supposed to be the outcome of reciprocal exchange.
- ⁴ Bhujji offers a few items as *kacha* food, like rice, green vegetables, oil, salt, turmeric, and some spices to the Brahmin as a ritual of any worship of gods and goddesses.

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A Historical Note on Bhakti Movement of Medieval Assam

Bhaskar Jyoti Das

Abstract

Change is an enduring historical force. All societies are involved in a process of social change and religion is often considered as one of the influencing factors in it. Religious beliefs and idea had a significant impact in the life of the Indian people and its culture. In this context, the particular paper is an attempt to explore the role of a religious movement in Assam known as Neo-*Vaishnavism* and its impact in the medieval societies of Assam.

Keywords: Assam, Movement, Neo-Vaishnavism, Religion, Social change.

Introduction

Medieval societies of India, its culture and its literature entered a new phase of growth and evolution with the *Bhakti* movement of India. *Bhakti* movement is a pervasive cultural movement which appeared in various forms of cultural expression including religion, philosophy, language, art and literature.¹ The religious history of Assam also witnessed a new turn towards the closing decades of the fifteenth century CE. Sankaradeva, a scholar, introduced a new creed, adhering to the main principles of *bhakti*, which finally took the form of a great reform movement and came to be known as Neo- *Vaishnavite* movement. This movement reformed the religious outlook of the people and constructed a progressive socio-cultural phenomenon of medieval Assam. Another special characteristic of the movement is that, it alongside played the role of literary movement. This movement of Sankaradeva revolutionised the face of the life of Assamese people

and led to the formation of a broader civil society.² In this context, this paper is trying to understand Sankaradeva's *bhakti* movement and its significance in medieval Assam of sixteenth century CE.

In general, the Indian society before the arrival of *Bhakti* movement was in an early stage of feudalism. Geographically, it was divided into a large numbers of villages which were more or less economically self-sufficient and hence insulated from each other. This stagnant life style gave rise to the consolidation of castes, petrification of religious dogmas, unimaginable increase of superstitions and subjugation.³ By the tenth century, a small change appeared with the growth of industries, development of commercial transactions, and the expansion of agricultural areas. The self-sufficiency of villages which had made money economy meaningless began to lose ground and giving a way to an advanced stage of feudalism.

The *bhakti* movement was the culmination of the new awareness that had been brought about by the changes in the condition of material life. However, most important point to notice is that compared to the other parts of India, the socio-historical surrounding of Assam displayed a different picture. The Assamese society till the advent of Neo- *Vaishnavite* movement in the sixteenth century was in a phase of transition from a primitive to a feudal one and the appearance of Sankaradeva with his new faith of *Bhakti* supplied the essential requirement for the formation of a feudal society.

Feudal Nature of Medieval Assam

The *bhakti* movement in all other parts of India implied the transition of society from a lower order of feudalism to an advanced one; on the other hand, Assam signified a change in the earlier stages of society i.e. in a period of transition from a primitive society to a feudal one. C.U. Wills was the first author who suggested that the emergence of states in the high land areas of east-central India in the sixteenth century represented a system of feudalism super-imposed on the earlier tribal organisation.⁴ Kosambi (1956) and Sharma (1965) picked up the theme and maintained that the widely diffused practice

of granting land grants to Brahmins by the 'Hindu' states was the principle of the early mechanism of planting the seeds of feudalism in tribal societies.⁵

However, this theory does not sufficiently fit in the context of Assam. Assam from the very beginning largely inhabited by the indigenous tribes long before the appearance of Sankaradeva. There was some evidence of land grants to the Brahmins in the ancient period. For instance, some of the copper plates of King Bhaskaravarman of seventh century had been discovered in the Sylhet district. These plates all together were known as Nidhanpur inscription.⁶ These copper plates were issued with the purpose of granting lands to Brahmins. But it has to be noted that Bhaskaravarman renewed these grants that were already made by one of his predecessors, Mahabhutivarman.⁷ The system seems to have disappeared after the disintegration of the powerful Kamarupa Kingdom in the twelfth century because of the absence of any powerful authority to hold the supreme power of the land.

The economic self-dependency that is essential for an early formation of a society in medieval Assam was fulfilled by the *Ahoms*⁸. They were mainly agrarian community, who brought with them the technique of wet-rice cultivation in the lands of Assam. The uncultivated land was brought into cultivation to satisfy the need of the growing population, because of which, Assam ultimately experienced the surplus production. The growth of surplus production undoubtedly contributed and worked as one of the determining factor in the process of social formation in medieval Assam. Barman mentioned that, by the time Sankaradeva appeared the medieval society of Assam was in an evolving stage of feudalism accompanied by the synthesis of various cult and communities and in the formation of a general Assamese society. Sankaradeva was the ideologist of such a society.⁹

However, it was a fact that a single factor cannot all alone work and determine the process of a social formation at large. Engels in one of his letter to Block wrote that in the materialistic conception of

history, the ultimate determining element is the production. He further mentioned that though the economic element is the basis, there are various other elements of superstructure like the political, juristic, philosophical theories and religious views which exercise their influences upon the course of historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form.¹⁰

In this particular context, with the growth of surplus production in Assam, the newly formed religion of Sankaradeva played a significant role in unifying the people and bringing them under one roof. It triggered the process of social formation and merging it into a composite Assamese society. *Neo-vaishnavism* of Sankaradeva assumed a strong local character that contributed immensely to the growth of a more broad-based homogeneous social formation in Assam. The liberal and rational views of the *Neo-vaishnavite* movement shatter the intellectual lethargy of man, and compel to accept the idea that is suitable with the time.

Conceptualising Sankaradeva and his idea of *Bhakti*

The social and religious condition of Assam before the sixteenth century represented a period of all round deterioration. The society was engulfed by several jarring cults and creeds without having any common religious code. The morality of the people, in general, appears to have been at its lowest ebb. In addition, superstitions and meaningless ritualism was at its height and were the practice of the day. Moreover, the rituals people observed were more like magical than religious. Injustice, tyranny, selfishness and indulgence in immoral pursuits in the name of religion were in vogue everywhere.¹¹

In contradistinction to all irrational beliefs and magical rites and practices, Sankaradeva introduced his philosophy of *bhakti*, which laid stress on a direct and emotional relationship between God and the people without intervention of any external divine agency. Sankaradeva made the people realised that actual realisation of God can be felt only by surrendering completely to Him, not by performing any kind of ceremonials and sacrifices or with the help of any external agencies.¹²

The main purpose of Sankaradeva was to reform the society from the long going traditions of irrational beliefs and practices that were associated with many heterogeneous faiths of the time. He offered a very simple and liberal Faith to the people compared to the contemporary customs and made it appealing to the imagination of the people. Sankaradeva spoke of nine forms of *Bhakti* i.e., *Sravana* (listening), *Kirtana* (chanting) *Smarana* (remembering), *Archana* (worshipping), *Pada-sevana* (prostrating at Visnu's feet), *Dasya* *Bhakti* (serving), *sakhhya* (friendship), *Vandana* (invoking) and *Deha-arpana* (bodily surrender). Sankaradeva gave special importance to the *Sravana*, *Kirtana* and the *Dasya* form of *Bhakti*.¹³

The idea of *Bhakti* can be considered as a non- *Vedic* concept because it was a kind of adoration of an omnipresent and omnipotent God.¹⁴ The *bhakti* principle did not include any kind of rituals, which contains rites and practices connected with sacrifices as compared to that of *vedic yajna*.¹⁵ *Vedic* traditions contain some of the rituals which were more magical than religious. In this connection, Levi defines the characteristics of the *Vedic Yajnas* as the magical operation, independent of divinities, effective by its own energy and which is capable of producing something good as well as evil.¹⁶ Therefore, as the idea of *Bhakti* is exclusive of any kind of rites and rituals, it can be considered as a non-*Vedic* concept.

However, Sankaradeva and his disciples did not directly deny the *Vedic* tradition. Vishnu was considered as the chief figure in the Sankaradeva's idea of *bhakti* and Vishnu was a *Vedic* deity. The vaishnava saints of Assam were much conscious that the minds of the people of their times were so deep-rooted with the authority of the *Vedas* and they understood that the verbal allegiance to the *vedic* scriptures would be necessary for their religion to reach the populace.¹⁷ The popular work of Sankaradeva *Bhakti-Pradipa* speaks out that the words of the *Vedas* are written in stone. So knowing this, one should strengthen mind and leave aside all other gods, and pay obeisance to Vishnu in the form of Krishna and be contented.¹⁸

The idea of liberation in the philosophy of Sankaradeva holds uniqueness. He taught people that liberation could be attained even when a person is alive.¹⁹ This idea is called *Jivan-Mukti*. Sankaradeva gave much emphasis to *bhakti* and regards it superior to *mukti*.²⁰ *Bhakti* is also described as being itself the emancipation (*mukti*). Sankaradeva in one of his work, *Bhakti-Ratnakara*, stated that though the state of liberation is all happiness, yet *bhakti* is superior to *mukti*, in as much as, the latter is devoid of joy inherent in the service to the Lord, while the bliss of *mukti* is inherent in the former (*bhakti*).²¹ Again, Sankaradeva's chief disciple Madhavadeva stated that devotion to Hari saves the soul of its own accord and does not expect help from anything else. Knowledge and the rituals cannot save one until devotion is generated.²² He believed that liberation is inherent in *bhakti* and comes automatically taking its own course.²³

Sankaradeva presented the necessary ideas to the society and it appealed the people to accept it without a second thought. He used many techniques and methods for the propagation of his movement. He often used the simplest methods that could be suitable to all sections of the people. His main tool was *Nama-dharma*. The term, *Nama-dharma*, literally meant chanting the name of the supreme self with undeviated devotion and with pure heart. The term undeviated was used because in his creed the worship of any other God was strictly prohibited.²⁴ He stated in one of his work, *Bhakti Ratnakara*, "Hari never shuns the company of His name. It is absolutely certain that *nama* is Hari himself."²⁵ Sankaradeva propagated the idea of *Bhakti*, when Assamese society was engulfed by many irrelevant rites and rituals and the performances of various religious practices that were more or less of magical type. The advantage of reciting the name of Hari for the realisation of God was a very simple and easy way, which everybody could do, irrespective of caste or age, and stage of life or place.

However, of all the different modes of *bhakti* or devotion, Sankaradeva insisted on the *dasya-bhakti* (servitude) as the relation between Sri Krishna and His devotee.²⁶ The attitude of the votary is

not to look upon Krishna as an play-mate as in *Sakhya* (Friendship), nor as one's child as in *Vatsalya* (filial love), or as the male lover as in *Madhura* (conjugal love), neither as an impersonal being as in *santa Rasa* (calm sentiment) but as the master demanding love and veneration of the devotees as of a servant.²⁷ The *Madhura* (love) conception is popular in *Bhakti* movement in other parts of India but Sankaradeva probably discarded it seeing that it could not be worked out practically when it would fall into less enlightened minds.²⁸

***Bhakti* and the construction of Assamese Identity**

Sankaradeva emphasised on the *dasya* form of *bhakti*. It helped in strengthening the emotional bondage between the different classes of people and also brought stability in the political plane. The prominent historian Amalendu Guha said that the feudal model of a personal bond between the master and his serf was projected into this relationship.²⁹ Moreover, Barman pointed out that in order to hold together a newly formed society, which had been in a transitional stage from a primitive to a feudal one, a kind of emotional bondage between different classes in the society had been a historical necessity and in order to maintain this stability there must be the allegiance of peasants to landlords, landlords to vassals and from vassals to the king etc.³⁰ This spirit of allegiance was supplied by the concept of *Bhakti*; because *bhakti* of a devotee to his God is what loyalty of the subjects to the king. Particularly, Sankaradeva's *Dasya* form of *Bhakti* helped in strengthening the bond between the master-servant relationships that was inherent in the feudal way of life. Sankaradeva's writings are replete with instances that give expression to this material meaning of *Bhakti*. In the popular work *Kirtana Ghosa*, Sankaradeva³¹ taught people that the kind of allegiance we serve to God by our undeviated devotion should be the same we pay to our King by paying our taxes. He further mentioned that this allegiance should be without any desire.

Sankaradeva even declared in his rendering of the sixth Book of the *Bhagavata* (v. 5413) that king was the greatest sage, who looked after his subjects like sons and dispenses justice to them. A King does

not punish his subjects without fault.³² He even believed in the divine origin of the King. At some of his work it can be noticed that he compared the qualities of a King with the God. In his work *Kirtana Ghosa*, he stated that when there was chaos and disorder in the planet Earth, God came under the name of *Prithu*, the first king, to save the people in the world.³³

Sharma's idea on political and economical feudalism, which were similar to Kosambi's views, highlight the practice of granting land to Brahmans was the most significant sector that contributed to the fundalisation of the state system across India from the Gupta period onwards.³⁴ It is also to be noted here, unlike the feudal lords in England, the Brahmins in India did not render any military service to the state. However, they did preach to the people that the sacred duty of carrying out their *Varna* functions and of obeying the King as the need of military service if the people could be persuaded to behave themselves and to acquiesce in the existing order.³⁵

The *Neo-vaishnavism* of Sankaradeva served the similar purpose like that of feudal lords in the Indian context, which helped in building the political order of the land. The philosophical ideas of the movement brought to the minds of the people a state of political consciousness. Sankaradeva, through the medium of songs and poems brought the allegiance in the minds of the people towards their King. The movement contributed in the process of political consolidation of the state in medieval Assam. Further, it also strengthened the state power by holding the different segments of the people in the society and maintaining the social equality among all.

The philosophical ideas of Sankaradeva also contributed considerably in the economic growth of the region. The ancient society of Assam largely depended on agriculture³⁶ and thus, was always in a great need of cattle. However, the rapid growth of the *Shaktism* or worship of Mother Goddesses (*Devi*) from the twelfth century along with *Tantricism*, encouraged the number of animal sacrifices for the religious rituals. It indirectly affected the economy of the land. The religion of Sankaradeva was based on moral values and was exclusive

of any kind of sacrifices. This principle of Sankaradeva minimised the practice of animal sacrifices to a larger extent and helped the agrarian society of Assam to flourish.

Sankaradeva's movement stood firm against the blood sacrifices. The movement strongly opposed the blood sacrifices that were taking place in the name of rituals in the *Shakti* cult of Hinduism. Sankaradeva in his work *Bhaktiratnakar* mentioned that any individual who will perform blood sacrifices in the name of religion is destined to hell and dark perdition.³⁷ Sankaradeva's approach towards the animal sacrifice was accepted by a vast section of people. This was evident from the traveller account of Ralph Fitch, an English traveller, who visited Assam towards the end of Koch king Naranarayana in the sixteenth century. He noticed that the people of the kingdom were averse to the killings of animals and there were establishment of hospitals for the domesticated animals.³⁸

Another important contribution of the movement towards democracy was the method of spreading the movement in the language of common people. Sankaradeva broke the seal of classical learning by making it available to all the sections of the society including the unlettered masses. The use of regional language is one of the common features of the *Bhakti* movement in all other parts of India. Prior to the *Bhakti* movement, a few classes of people in India had captured its hold on the knowledge of Sanskrit language and the common people lost interest in it. Moreover, all the sacred scriptures were written in Sanskrit and, therefore, the common people could not read or learn anything from religious texts and started depending on the priestly class. In contradiction to this, the *Bhakti* saints spread their movement in vernacular language and gave a great impetus to the development of learning and literature in India.

In addition, Sankaradeva, throughout his life worked to wipe out the caste differentiation and established equal rights for all castes and communities. He looked for a society in which every individual irrespective of any caste or creed would enjoy equal opportunities without any discrimination in the field of religion. However, it is to

be noted that Sankaradeva focussed on the idea of egalitarian society in the spiritual domain. The idea of equality in the philosophical views of Sankaradeva towards the caste system varies compared to the other medieval *Bhakti* saints of India. The *Vaishnava* sects of Kabir, Nanak and Dadu in the other parts of India challenged the caste ladder strictly which was not a strong point of Assamese *Neo-Vaishnavism*. Sankaradeva never tried to do away or interfere with caste regulation and his sole concern was to see that the social difference did not take place unnecessarily putting restriction upon one's inherent right to spiritual development.³⁹

"The service of humanity is the service of God"⁴⁰ had been the motto of the *Bhakti* saints of Assam. Sankaradeva questioned the Brahmanical dominance in the religious activities and wrote many verses in support of the backward caste people to improve their religious status. The works of Sankaradeva were replete with breaking this Brahmanical religious dominancy. Sankaradeva in his popular work *Prahrada-Carita*⁴¹, mentioned that every individual in the universe including the Chandala by caste, is better than a Brahmin if he meditates in the name of Hari (God).⁴² He further mentioned in his *Vaikuntha-Prayana*⁴³ that those who do not discriminate any person on the grounds of caste are recognised as a scholar.⁴⁴

One of the most striking features of the Sankaradeva's *Bhakti* movement was that it accelerated the pace of a renaissance of literature and fine arts. The actual growth of the Assamese literature and its culture took the real shape and form, and have been permanently established only by the litterateurs of the sixteenth century which was started by Sankaradeva.⁴⁵ Sankaradeva translated *Bhagavata-purana* into Assamese language. Sankaradeva and his disciples shared the work of the translation. He himself undertook the rendering of the major portion namely, *Books I, II, III, VIII, IX, X and the Book XII*⁴⁶ Sankaradeva's rendering of the *Bhagavata* was not a simple translation with that of original. It marked an era of renaissance in Assamese poetry. The literary influence of *Bhagavata* proved as a shaping force in the writings of the Sankaradeva. He was not indebted to *Bhagavata* only for the legendary

stories of Krishna but also for literary forms, expressions and traditions. Moreover, Sankaradeva translated the *Bhagavata* not only into Assamese words, but also into Assamese idioms.⁴⁷

The most popular and important work that requires a special attention was the *Kirtana Ghosa* of Sankaradeva. It holds a very important place in the minds and thoughts of the Assamese society. In fact, there would be a very less Assamese house-hold in present time that did not possess a copy of *Kirtana* at their home, which was used for the purpose of reciting prayers at the religious occasion. The original date of the composition of this text unknown. However, some of the biographers hold that the book was not completed at a one particular period. Looking into the methodical arrangement of the chapters, it could be said that the book was written at different periods and were later complied by different authors.

In addition, Sankaradeva introduced different forms of music in Assam which are popularly known as *bargita* and the *ankiya-geet*. *Bargitas* are the devotional songs that were composed by Sankaradeva and his spiritual disciple Madhavadeva in different places throughout the movement and under different circumstances. The lyrical songs were written in an artificial speech called *Brajabali*, a mixed form of both Maithili and Assamese language. The *bargitas* were used as a medium in propagating the *vaishnavite* movement of Assam. Each *Bargita* is tuned to a particular *raga* (melody). The *Bargitas* are considered as distinctive school of Indian classical music. It would not be wrong to speak that these *bargitas* were used as a medium Sankaradeva to create an atmosphere of tranquillity in the heart of the Assamese people based on a new religious enthusiasm and were able to lead them nearer to God.⁴⁸

Assamese literature is also blessed with another typical form of Sankaradeva's poetry, which is called *Bhatima*. It is a class of lyric similar to the English ode, often in the form of an address, generally dignified or exalted in subject, feeling and style.⁴⁹ These classes of lyrics are classified into three sections, firstly, *Natya-Bhatimas* or

dramatic *Bhatimas*, which were used in the dramatic performances or the plays, secondly, *Deva-Bhatimas*, which were used in the praise of God and lastly, *Raja-Bhatimas* or panegyrics to the kings.

Apart from the literary works, *Ankiya Nat* is one of the most important and valuable creations of Sankaradeva. It constituted a great treasure for Assam for shaping its cultural history. The term *Ankiya Nat* is an Assamese word, which meant the religious dramas that are traditionally performed in the religious institutions. The plays contributed in creating an environment of mental pleasure to the people, which were earlier engaged in and under the influence of the magical acts and superstition.

In all the plays of Sankaradeva, there was only one act in each drama and therefore, it was known as *Ankiya Nat* (one act plays). This *Ankiya-Nats* later came to be known as *bhauna* and the actors performing in the play were called *Bhaoriyas*. These plays were accompanied by the musical instruments like the drums (*Khols* and *Mardangas*) and cymbals (*Tals*). Sankaradeva was said to have composed seven plays but unfortunately one of his plays named *Kamsa-vadha* was not available in the present time. The names of his other plays were *Rukmini-harana*, *Parijata-harana*, *Keli-gopala*, *Patni-prasada*, *Ram-vijaya* and *Kaliya-damana*. These dramatic performances helped in the evolution of a new kind of dance that was very popularly known as *Sattriya Nritya*. In the modern times, *Sattriya Nritya* had occupied its position in the Indian classical dance system.

The list of literary works of Sankaradeva is never ending and it requires a deep research, giving particular preference to each of his work. After the death of Sankaradeva, the tradition was carried further by his disciples and other *Vaishnava* saints of Assam. The most important and influential work of Madhavadeva i.e., *Nam-Ghosa* holds a unique attention of the Assamese people. The literary works of the sixteenth century had established the characteristics of the Assamese people such as mode of living, habits, customs, society, spiritual uplifts, mental and moral dispositions and what not.⁵⁰

Sankaradeva and the *Bhakti* saints of Assam propagated the movement throughout the region and it led to the establishment of religious institutions. These religious institutions occupied a significant place till the present time in Assam. These institutions could be divided into two categories, firstly, *Namghar*, which means prayer hall and secondly, *Satra*, which means the *Vaishnava* monastery. The *Namghars* were set up as central institutions of the village that served the purpose of spreading the intellectual and the cultural activities in the village, and in course of time this prayer halls became the nerve-centre of the village and came to co-ordinate all the aspects of social, political as well as the economic life of the Assamese people.⁵¹ These institutions not only served as a place for reciting prayers but other various cultural activities like singing *Bargitas* (devotional songs) with proper melodies and dramatic performances were also held here. These institutions worked as a repository of cultural activities that helped the Assamese society till to the modern times to hold strong and charming cultural image. The *Namghars* also worked as a democratic platform and played a judicial role. The villagers gathered at this place to have discussions and solve their problems related to their day to day life.

While the *Namghar* worked at the base level, *Satras* i.e., the central monasteries were at the top. The word *Satra* is a Sanskrit word. The term “*Satra*” was mentioned in the *Rig Veda* and its etymological meaning is that which protects the good and the honest.⁵² In the initial stage of the *Vaishnavite* movement, *Satra* was used as a religious sitting or association where the *Bhagavata* was recited or explained and not as a systemised institution.⁵³ Inside the *Satra*, there would be a prayer hall where the main activities were performed. The structure of these *Satras* gradually changed with the later development of the movement. However, from the biographical literature of the *Vaishnava* Saints it is known that each *Satra* contained a prayer hall and the Shrine.

The *Satra* institution at the formative stage was completely different as compared to that of the later-day *Satras*. However, in general, each *Satra* of Assam was under the control of a chief *Vaishnava* guru known as *Satradhikar*. It was under his supervision that a person could take

Sarana (initiation) into the *Vaishnava* cult by accepting him as his *Guru* (spiritual head). These religious institutions created a kind of bondage between the spiritual leader and the masses. The *Satra* institutions were also under the supervision of the political authority, and thus, two kinds of social affiliations could be noticed — firstly, a kind of temporal affiliation to the ruling authority and secondly, the spiritual submission to the head of the *Satra* (*Satradhikar*) by complete acceptance of the *Vaishnava* cult. These double allegiances to both the authority helped in binding the people in the politico-religious environment of the state and strengthened the unity of the Assamese people in the formation of a broader civil society.⁵⁴

Conclusion

Sankaradeva was a very socially conscious person who had sensed the sufferings of the people and decided to spread his ideals that would fit in the society at that period of time and being an artist, he took up his pen and used his literary works as a tool for the propagation of his Faith which ultimately contributed in the development of Assamese literature and its culture at a proud position and as a distinctive identity in India and outside. H.V. Murthy⁵⁵ in one of his articles tried to compare the ideas of Sankaradeva to some of the modern concepts like Community Development, Adult Education and the *Panchayati Raj*. However, it would not be wrong though if we look to these modern concepts from the lens of a medieval times. For instance, the ideas of *Bhakti* was used as a tool for the betterment of the society and the literary movement that was initiated by Sankaradeva served the learning purpose of the people and lastly, the religious institutions which worked on a democratic platform served the purpose of those of the *panchayats* in modern times. The philosophical ideas of the Sankaradeva's movement, indeed, helped in transforming the medieval society of Assam.

Notes

¹ Maneger Pandey and Alka Tyagi, "Bhakti Poetry: Its relevance and Significance", *Indian Literature*, Vol. 45 (6), 2001 129-138.

- ² S.L. Baruah, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, Delhi, 1986, 447.
- ³ Sivanath Barman, *An Unsung Colossus*, Forum for Sankaradeva Studies, Guwahati, 1999, 59-60.
- ⁴ C.U. Wills, "The Territorial System of the Rajputs Kingdoms of Medieval Chhattisgarh", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. 15, 1919, 197-262.
- ⁵ Suranjit K. Saha, "Early State Formation in Tribal Areas of East-Central India" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31(13), 1996, 824-834.
- ⁶ Dinesh Chandra Sircar, *Studies in the geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, Motilal Banarsidass Publication, New Delhi, 1971, 161.
- ⁷ Debabrata Dutta, *History of Assam*, Sribhumi Publishing Company, Calcutta, 1989, 19.
- ⁸ The *Ahoms* are the members of the Shan branch of great Tai or Thai family of South-East Asia.
- ⁹ Barman, 1999, *op.cit*, 60.
- ¹⁰ K Marx and F. Engels. *Selected Works*. Vol.3, 1983, 487.
- ¹¹ K.D. Goswami, *Life and Teachings of Mahapurusa Sankaradeva*, Forum for Sankaradeva Studies, Guwahati, 1982, 20.
- ¹² Barman, 1999, *Op.cit*, 61.
- ¹³ *Ibid*, 62.
- ¹⁴ S. Farquhar Vide, *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1977, 82.
- ¹⁵ It means ritual sacrifices with specific objectives.
- ¹⁶ J. Frazer, *Magic Art (Golden Bough Series)*, Macmillan, New York, 1955: 288.
- ¹⁷ Barman, 1999, *op.cit*, 63.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, 6.
- ¹⁹ In one of the Sankaradevas work *Kirtana* he said "He who sees Vishnu in the entire world gets salvation forthwith even while he is alive. Of all the means by far the best is to deem all creatures as one's own self".
- ²⁰ Birinchi kumar Barua, *Sankaradeva Vaisnava Saint of Assam*, Assam Academy for Cultural Relations, Gauhati, 1960, 95.
- ²¹ *Ibid*.
- ²² Maheswar Neog, *Sankaradeva And His Times*, LBS Publications, Guwahati, 1965, 243.
- ²³ *Ibid*, 95.
- ²⁴ Maheswar Neog, "The Bhakti Cycle of Assamese Lyrics: Bargits and After" *Journal of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha*, Vol. 11, 1999, 1-19.
- ²⁵ "Aponar namar sanga nacarata Hari; Yeyi nama seyi Hari jana nista kari" (Cited from B.K. Barua's *Sankaradeva Vaishanava Saint of Assam*, Guwahati, 1960, 97.
- ²⁶ Banikanta Kakati, *Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, Assam Publications, Guwahati, 1961, 75-77.
- ²⁷ M. Neog, "The Bhakti Cycle of Assamese Lyrics: Bargits and After", *Journal of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha*, Vol.11, 1999, 1-19.

- ²⁸ Cited in "History of Vaishnavism in India", an article reproduced from Lakshminath Bezbarua's *A Creative Vision: Essay on Sankaradeva and Neo-Vaisnava Movement in Assam*, 2004, 17.
- ²⁹ Amalendu Guha, *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: Society, Polity, Economy*, Centre for Studies in Social Science, Calcutta, 1991, 100.
- ³⁰ Barman, 1999, *op.cit*, 68-69.
- ³¹ *Ibid*, 69-72.
- ³² *Ibid*.
- ³³ *Ibid*.
- ³⁴ Suranjit K. Saha, "Early State Formation in Tribal Areas of East-Central India" *Economic and Political weekly*, Vol. 31 (13), 1996, 824-834.
- ³⁵ *Ibid*.
- ³⁶ Dutta, 1989, *op.cit*, 35.
- ³⁷ Maheswar Neog, *Sankaradeva and His Times: Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Assam*, LBS Publications, Guwahati, 1965, 365.
- ³⁸ Dutta, 1989, *op.cit*, 59.
- ³⁹ Satyendranath Sarma, *The Neo-Vaishnavite Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam*, Guwahati University Press, Guwahati, 1966, 64.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 63.
- ⁴¹ "Yito candalra kaya vakya mane, sadaya sumare hari
Ache bahra vrata yito brahmanara, si si srestha tato kari."
- ⁴² For details see K.D. Goswami, *Life and Teachings of Mahapurusa Sankaradeva*, Forum for Sankaradeva Studies, Guwahati, 1982.
- ⁴³ "Brahmanara candalara nivicari kula, datata corata yara bhaila eka jnana Nicata
sadhuta yara bhaila eka jnana, tahakese pandita buliya sarvajana"
- ⁴⁴ Goswami, *op.cit*, 37.
- ⁴⁵ Sankaradeva was the first person to begin the age of *vaishnava* literature in the Assamese society, because it had a long heritage starting back from the fourteenth century. In this connection, the works of three scholars made a remarkable contribution to the Assamese society. Madhav Kandali, who was a profound scholar, wrote an *Assamese* version *Ramanaya*; Haivara Vipra wrote three books based on *Mahabharata* and Hema Saraswati's *Prahrada carita* was the notable one.
- ⁴⁶ Barua, 1960, *op.cit*, 11.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 11.
- ⁴⁸ Nirmali. Das, "Social Impact of the Bargitas", *Journal of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Research Institute* Vol. 1, 1990.
- ⁴⁹ Neog, 1965, *op.cit*, 195-196.
- ⁵⁰ Hara Mohan Das, *Sankaradeva: A Study*, Guwahati University Press, Guwahati, 1945, 127. 51 Barua, 1960, *op.cit*, 107-108.
- ⁵² Barman, *op.cit*, 86.
- ⁵³ Sarma, *op.cit*, 103.
- ⁵⁴ Gautam Kumar Bera, *Religious and Cultural Legacy of Sankaradeva*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 2016, 34. 55 H.V Sreenivasa Murthy, *Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva and Ramanuja: A Comparative Study*, Motilala Banarsidas Publication, Delhi, 1973.

Impressionable Minds and the Missionary Picturesque: A Study of the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

This paper will attempt to reveal how A. W. Marston's work *The Children of India: Written for the Children of England* (1883), a nineteenth century missionary children's book, caters to the conceptualisation of the colonial space in the minds of the young readers. Applying the concept of Pramod K. Nayar's 'missionary picturesque', the paper will scrutinise how such a text for juveniles by a missionary strategically employs colonial discourse to identify sites of reform and legitimise the activities of the colonial powers. It will reveal how the colonizer creates the idea of "otherness" in the impressionable young minds by using the text as a tool in indoctrinating the English children to be responsible young individuals who would later support the empire and take care of the infantile natives by taking up a role in mission work.

Keywords: missionary, children's literature, colonial space, missionary picturesque, otherness, empire.

Introduction

Nineteenth century was a remarkable period in England as it witnessed a proliferation of tracts, magazines, periodicals and books aiming at young readers. The trend of publishing moral/religious material specifically focussing on the juveniles began in the last decade of the eighteenth century and was popularised through the Sunday School.¹ This practice continued in the nineteenth century which was also the time the two concepts of childhood became prevalent, that of the 'romantic child' and the 'evangelical child'.² Enlightenment thinker Jean Jacques Rousseau during the eighteenth century had already put

forward the notion of the child being different from the adult, and suggested a new approach to child rearing and education different from the English philosopher John Locke.³ The Romantics, whose ideas were an extension of Rousseau's 'natural' child, viewed childhood as a state of 'innocence', a stage conferred with blessings from God, whereas the Evangelicals perceived children as capable of sin and therefore needed instruction. Eileen Wallace points out how "the *Evangelical Magazine* urged parents to teach their children that 'they are sinful and polluted creatures'" (5). In tune with the religious understanding of childhood the periodicals, magazines and books were designed "to improve and instruct the young".⁴ Kirsten Drotner notes how this literature did not just contain moral stories, pictures, hymns, explanation of passages from scriptures, poetry and the like but also had "extracts from travel books describing exotic countries such as China, Ceylon, and Greenland and even the more exotic customs of their peoples" (24).

A. W. Marston's *The Children of India: Written for the Children of England* published by Religious Tracts Society in 1883, is a non-fictional book, a primer, which provides ethnographic details about the people of India and their culture. In it she presents various aspects of the country like its surroundings, religions, gods and festivals, their marriages and other aspects of life in picturesque but critical terms. The last module of the book also introduces to the young reader as to who missionaries are and what their nature of work is.

Concept of Missionary Picturesque

A reading of A.W. Marston's missionary children's literature in the light of Pramod K. Nayar's concept of the 'missionary picturesque' reveals how mission work colluded with the colonial scheme in India. In his book *English Writing and India, 1600-1920: Colonizing Aesthetics*, Nayar observes how missionary literature uses "visual vocabulary and aesthetic ideas, specifically that of the picturesque, in order to trope Indian primitivism and colonial improvement" (94). Such a view helps to unravel the narrative of the importance of appropriating and

controlling the primitive subcontinent. Here picturesque denotes the aesthetic of observation introduced by William Gilpin combining the ideas of “sublime” and “beautiful” put forward by Edmund Burke. He defines it as “the peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture” (Gilpin, p.xii). This aesthetic, however, is not limited to painting and is introduced by writers in their work especially in the nineteenth century. Its use is also discernable in the works of missionaries about India.

Pramod K. Nayar in his book portrays in depth, how in the works of the missionaries, an aesthetic of ‘missionary picturesque’ was prevalent in the nineteenth century. He talks of how the missionary picturesque has three stages such as the primitive picturesque, Christian georgic and Concordia discors. The Primitive Picturesque refers to the aesthetics used to portray India as “primitive, idolatrous and backward”, while the Christian georgic sees India as a place where missionary labour can bear fruit, and through the aesthetics of Concordia discors imagines India transformed into a “deeply moral, Christian landscape” (Nayar 97-98), which can be only possible through large amount of mission work in a larger field.

A. W. Marston’s book, *The Children of India: Written for the Children of England*, can be fittingly read using the idea of the missionary picturesque, as a moral allegory of the Indian subcontinent as it echoes many traits of missionary literature on India. Through the collation of data pertaining to its people, their religion, customs and rituals, the book charts the sites of Indian primitivism where missionary intervention will bear fruit. The comment of Anna Johnston about *Missionary Sketches*, stands true in the case of this book too. It “...informed Britons about the specific instances of heathen otherness that evangelical interventions sought to eradicate and replace with British Christian ideals” (23-24). A. W. Marston begins this non-fictional piece of writing, by giving the reasons for her writing it and warns the audience on how it is going to be unlike the well-known fictional literature for children.

Now some of the things in this book are going to be very sad, and some very nice; but everything is going to be true, because I do not

want you to forget any of it, nor to think it does not much matter. It is going to be about things that do matter very much, and the sad things will nearly all be things that you can help to make less sad, even if you are only tiny boys and girls. (8)

It is interesting to note how the author urges the young readers to take a look at the map of India which has been appended to the book. With the aid of the map she persuades the readers to visualise India geographically, and then communicates to them how this vast country, way bigger than theirs, actually belongs to England. This technique enables the juvenile reader, imagine a colonial space like India which is considered 'as a domain of British cultural and political sovereignty' (Tickell 20). Through the act of calling attention to the map, as Megan A. Norcia notes, Marston, "...invests the English child with the imperial responsibility of ownership and stewardship of vast territories"(187).

Further, in tune with the typical missionary writing, the *Children of India: Written for the Children of England* elucidates how the country, its people, their Gods and festivals, the other religions practiced in the country and the life of the people are like. A variegated image of India drawn up by the writer sparks the curiosity of the reader. India is pictured as a land of disarray where people are divided by caste; their religion, rituals and festivals are pagan, and their life marked by suffering. The book, thus, conforms to the characteristics of Nayar's primitive picturesque, where the ethnographic details are presented and at the same time critiqued as a "deformity" (111). This is specifically discernable in the comments of Marston regarding the Hindu religion and its Gods/Goddesses. Apart from telling her readers about the innumerable Gods/Goddesses that the people in India believe in, A. W. Marston adds how these Gods/Goddesses were wicked.

They often quarrel amongst themselves, so the way to please one god is to offend another. The people worship them not because they love them, and want them to do them good; but because they hate them, and want to persuade them not to do them harm. In the South of India the people are not ashamed to confess that they worship devils.(21)

Marston then half-mockingly adds while describing the idol shop “[a]lmost anything can be made into a god by putting a little patch of red paint on it;...” (23). This tone of derision that the author uses is not just because the missionaries were fired by the spirit of evangelism, but because of their own notion of how Christianity is a far more superior religion than others, which is supported by notions like those put forward by Thomas Maurice and other theories like British Israelism or Anglo Israelism.

Thomas Maurice, an English Indologist, was unlike Sir William Jones, Sir Charles Wilkins, Nathaniel Halhed, Warren Hastings and others who had been to India and had had a first-hand experience of the richness of the true culture of India. On the other hand he remained in England and did a keen investigation on the subcontinent based on secondary sources. He, for instance, tried to undermine the suggestion in the advertisement of *Asiatick Researches Vol.5* that the “very high antiquity”(iv) of the Hindu script in comparison to Hebrew of the scriptures will make us think if “the Hindu Brahmens borrowed from Moses or Moses from the Hindu Brahmens” (v). Maurice in his book *Brahminical Fraud Detected*, contended this thought by stating that the laws of Manu were codified 200 years after the departure of Moses from Egypt (18). Later in his book *History of Hindostan; Vol. 2*, Maurice vehemently attacked the “impious attempt” of C. F. Volney, who according to him, declared that stories about the miracles of Christ may be traced to those of Krishna (vi). [Volney traces the etymology of Christ to *Christna* in his book *The Ruins: Or a Survey of the Revolutions of the Empire* (292)]. British Israelism, alternatively, refers to “[a] collection of thinkers and Bible students since the sixteenth century who held that England (Great Britain) is genetically, racially and linguistically the descendants of ancient Israelites”(Brackney 61).

What is discernable about the nineteenth century England is the fact that, despite the evidence collected by the Britishers themselves in the second half of the eighteenth century, especially its last two decades, by the so-called Orientalists, there were still many who liked to believe

theories which upheld Christianity. But it has to be kept in mind, as M.S. Dodson points out, that there is "...textual bias of orientalist scholarship in India," as "...Sanskrit came to be viewed as the storehouse of India's authentic history and culture, as opposed to Persian, or popular practice (37)". The rhetoric of the text follows the claims of Maurice and the like, and highlights the fact that reform in religion is something which is seen as crucial in order to convert India into a morally enriched nation.

Role of Indian Women

In many colonial discourses, especially in missionary literature, the images of the Indian women have been taken up as points of rallying cry justifying the presence of the British in India. Antoinette Burton notes how, "[c]hildmarriage, the treatment of widows, the practice of suttee, and the prison of the zenana represented the typical catalog of woes that ... enumerated as the 'condition of Indian women'"(10) and "... it was more or less axiomatic in the Victorian period that the condition of women was the index of any civilization"(11). Descriptions about the state of women chronicled in the book, thus gives a space for explaining the degeneracy of the Indian society which treats their women so harshly – again an evidence of how primitive and backward they are and therefore an evident space requiring transformation. With reference to child marriages Marston explains thus,

...a man may marry as many times as he likes; but a woman only once. Even if a little baby were to be married, and her husband were to die before she was old enough to speak, which does sometimes happen in India, the poor little girl may never be married to anyone else, but must be a widow all her life, and such a miserable widow too. (56)

The descriptions of Sati, which Lata Mani defines as "...the practice, prevalent predominantly among high caste Hindus, of the immolation of widows on the funeral pyres of their husband"(WS-32) are often highlighted with graphic details which add to the notion of primitivism of Indian religious beliefs.

"... and after the fire was lighted and the dead body placed on it, the living wife was laid by the side of her husband, covered over with dry

wood, held down by men, in case she should try to get up and run away, and then the two bodies, the dead one and the living one, were burned together. (79-80)".

What has to be understood in the context, as Lata Mani identifies, is how viewing Sati as a colonial discourse would reveal how the British colonial power played a major role in drawing points in favour and against it as it was found in the Hindu scriptures. This was done with the help of Brahmin Pundits who had the sole access to it. The British planned the abolition of Sati based on the Hindu scriptures so as to avoid any kind of economic and political backlash for the East India Company. She highlights how the British authorities saw the majority of the people as uninformed about their religion. She says,

... Religion was equated with scripture. Knowledge of the scriptures was held to be largely the monopoly of Brahmin pundits. Their knowledge was however believed to be corrupt and self-serving. The civilising mission of colonisation was thus seen to lie in protecting the weak against the 'artful'; in giving back to the natives the truths of their own "little read and less understood Shaster". (WS-35)

In the process of basing their discourse on the scriptures rather than on customs, the British centralised the discourse of the Hindu elite, which was also reinterpreted by them in their own way. By denying the Indian woman a subjectivity and presenting her as being manipulated by those around taking advantage of her weak mental and physical condition, as Indira Goshe explains, the coloniser "... bolstered the Orientalist image of India as deeply religious, traditional and unchanging...". (24)

Apart from this the detailed description of the cruel customs a widow has to go through immediately after the death of her husband, if she decides not to jump into the funeral pyre, a thorough account of the life of a widow is delineated in a perturbing manner arousing feelings of pity and a need to reform the situation, in the minds of the young readers.

For a year after her husband's death she may only eat once in twenty-four hours; indeed in many parts of India a widow is allowed one

meal a day as long as she lives...When she is fasting she may not drink even a drop of water... She may never sleep in a bed, but always on the floor, and she must be the drudge of the house, scolded for all that is wrong, and praised for nothing that is right; everyone may be just as rude and cross and unkind to her as they like. Even her one meal a day she may not eat with others, but must carry it away and eat it herself after every one else has finished. (82-83)

Even the life of a married woman is presented as not something better. For instance, while explaining how an Indian household is, Marston specially highlights the condition of women in the women's quarters. She describes thus,

They may laugh or cry, quarrel or kiss, eat and sleep and talk, be well or ill, and sometimes even die, without anybody caring very much; and whatever happens in the world, or in the town, or in the street, or in the gentleman's part of the house, they know nothing about it. There they are shut away by themselves all the year round, from the time they are born, or a few years after, to the time they die. You will find out a great deal more about them, which will make you more and more glad you are not an Indian child, and your mother is not an Indian lady.(18)

After tracing the "primitive" aspects of India, the missionary develops a "moral response" to his/her observation (Nayar 104). Following this, the stage of Christian georgic evolves when "[t]he narratives, with their 'cultural fable' of the 'wrongs' of India...proceed to provide 'solutions' or a programme of action" (Nayar 110). In the process of moving from observation to formulating a plan of action, very often the practices in the Hindu religion is set in contrast with the Christian religion. This technique is quite evident in the book too. For instance in the third section, where Marston describes the Gods and festival, she mentions Holi and calls it a "very wicked festival" as "people seem to try and be bad as possible" and adds,

This shows how wicked the gods must be, and what a very bad religion the Hindus have, since the wickedest days are always that are kept in honour of the gods, so the more they worship, the more they sin.(100)

This is contrasted with Christianity and the Christian God. A. W. Marston comments thus "With our religion it is quite the other way.

The more we worship our God, the more we love Him; and the more we love Him, the more we hate sin, because He hates it".(100) While the Hindu prays and give offerings to Gods because he fears his anger, the Christian is depicted as considering his God as a friend whom he can approach at any time.

A.W. Marston further highlights another major difference between Hinduism and Christianity. She notes how "...the Hindus never seem to feel that they are sinners... they do not seem to know that sin leads to death... they do offer sacrifices, it is only as presents to the gods, not so that the life of another shall be given as a ransom for their life." (100-101) Where as in Christianity, she points out that,

We know that we are all sinners, and that our souls must die because of sin, unless another takes our place; so we go to God and tell Him that Jesus died instead of us, and that we have died in Jesus, and we ask Him to forgive us for the sake of what Jesus has done. And the sacrifice we bring Him is not flowers and fruit, not even sheep and cows, but our hearts and bodies for Him to dwell in, and our lives for Him to use. (101)

Thus Hinduism is portrayed as a wicked religion with wicked Gods who enjoy the suffering of the people and offer no redemption to their soul, while Christianity is contrasted as a religion with a civilised and compassionate God. In this manner she hints that the souls of the heathens can be saved only by means of converting them to Christianity. Here the missionary is not merely an observer who comments and leaves, but an "'educated' spectator...who is aware of the moral issues involved when s/he sees the Indian ritual or landscape" and "...provides the pre text to missionary's formulation of a 'design' or agenda for improvement"(Nayar 105).

Missionary writing expresses how controlling the Indian customs and practices can be a way of civilising India (Nayar 109). Marston for instance, at many junctures within the text, includes the measures of reform taken by the English government to improve the situation. For instance while narrating about the temples of Juggennath, she mentions the large car which is used to carry the image of the God on the day of

the festival. While relating the practices that people carry out on such days she comments,

Until quite lately, many people in the crowd used to throw themselves down in the road in front of the car, and let it roll over them and break their bones, or even kill them; they thought this was a very good deed, and that they should be sure to go to heaven for it. The English Government has forbidden this now, as it has forbidden suttee, so the people are obliged to content themselves with taking hold of the car and dragging it through the streets. (94)

Here the British government acts as an agent with its laws, trying to induce the people in India to act like civilised beings. Thus both the British government and the missionary are joining hands to introduce reforms in the Indian society.

Another fact noticeable in the text is the way the missionary is presented as a figure equivalent to the image of Jesus Christ. Sacrificing his/her health in the harsh weather and physical conditions in India, the missionary tries to save the souls of the heathens. As Nayar puts it, it is “the moment of Christian georgic”(111). Marston says,

So you see how much a missionary must love Jesus, to be ready to go and live in India and teach the people, even if he knows it may kill him. That is like Jesus Himself, is it not? He wanted so much to save us, that He came to live in a strange country, and to die for our sakes. (14)

This example reveals the hypocrisy of the missionary. Despite of the fact that his health is affected in the tough climes of India, the missionary sees it as a sacrifice for saving the souls of the heathens. This they believe brings them closer to God. However, the very act of physical pain gone through by the Hindu to rise to higher plains of spirituality is looked down upon with derision.

Further, the text roughly outlines the amount of work done by the missionaries in India and the number of people they have been successful in bringing into the folds of Christianity. The author narrates in detail the difficulty involved in communicating to groups where people from different communities speak different languages. The foreign missionary often has to spend years in learning local languages

and translating the Bible and tracts into the native tongue before even attempting to gain converts (Marston 132-133). The work amongst the women in the *zenana* is not easier either. Very often they have to face the disapproval of the men of the household when it comes to teaching the Bible lest their wives would become Christian. A.W. Marston notes,

The thing that the gentlemen did *not* like, was that their wives should be taught about the true God, and some of them tried hard to persuade the lady missionaries to give up teaching the Bible, and only to teach reading and needle work; but the ladies said no, if they must not teach the Bible they would say, 'Very well, then, you must not come to my house again;'... (155)

Marston goes on to site examples on how women accept Christ, but often don't get baptised out of fear of losing their caste and of others who face difficult situations in society in order to accept Christianity as their faith openly. Most of them have to leave their homes and often seek the help of missionaries. Some are trained to become Bible women, who are native missionaries who help to spread the faith. Marston describes them thus,

Some are trained as Bible-women, and go into the streets and cottages to teach the poor women, some become teachers in mission schools. Others spend a great deal of time in knitting and different kinds of needlework, and give the money they get to the missionary societies. (159)

Thus a pattern of Christianity spreading from the epicentre to the margins appear, either through preaching, work in the *zenanas* or teaching in schools, where the foreign missionary is at the centre and the Bible women acts as the medium through which the word of God is carried to the margins. This feature of multiplying missionary labour into a dilating circle is recognised by Nayar as an important part of the third stage in missionary writing termed as Concordia discors.

To strengthen the missionary claim of increasing number of heathens turning to Christian faith, Marston draws the individual case of a Brahmin boy who despite of facing physical tortures from his family in order to prevent him from becoming Christian, accepted Christianity

as his faith. He later becomes a teacher but takes up mission work as it was his calling (Marston 141-150). Such examples help to reinforce the idea that the effort of the missionary has not been in vain and that every little act of help done by those believers in England can bear fruit with more and more souls of ignorant heathens being saved. This is further strengthened by illustrations of a calm group of Indians eagerly listening to a preacher or a group of Indian women in the *zenana* enthusiastically surrounding the English missionary woman reading out from a Bible, which again is presented by Nayar as an important aspect of Concordia discors, “the image of the organized and ordered India/ Indians” (124).

Conclusion

The elements of the missionary picturesque, therefore, is palpable in *The Children of India: Written for the Children of England* despite it being a book focussing on juvenile readers. In a true missionary style this book traces the sites of Indian primitivism, recognises sites of reform and depicts the fruits of the missionary labour. A close scrutiny of the text reveals how this piece of literature constantly engages in the process of comparison and contrast between the Indians and the English as well as their lives. This technique is used by the author as a strategic tool not only to build the notion of the ‘otherness’ of the imperial space but at the same time to build the notion of their own nation hood in the juvenile readers. The young reader, while reading the book, is unconsciously made to comprehend the blessings of their nation and is confronted by the lack of it in the colony. The calculated use of examples from the Bible/mission work, help to inculcate a deeper sense of moral responsibility in their mind towards their imperial counterparts. As Edward Said points out, “Every empire... tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate” (Said). The juvenile readers who are ignorant of the pillage, thus reflexively colludes with imperial agenda of both the nation and the missionary in the course of reading the book. They come to imagine themselves as part of a “sacred community,” a

nation, chosen through “the myth of ethnic election” to spread the word of God and save the heathen through mission work.⁶ The author convinces them that even within their limitation as a child they can be as useful as a missionary in the field by contributing either in the form of money or little things they can make. The book not only enables the young readers to conceptualise the imperial space but also helps them understand the role they could play in supporting the empire and in taking care of the infantile natives by taking up a role in mission work when they attain maturity. It thus bolsters the “providential discourse”⁷ of the British who believed themselves to be the chosen ones to convert the heathen India to Christianity, a belief which was quite prevalent in the nineteenth century.

Notes

- ¹ G. H. Spinney, “Cheap Repository Tracts: Hazard And Marshall Edition”, *The Library*, Volume s4-XX, Issue 3, December 1939, pp. 295–340. Oxford Academic, <https://doi.org/10.1093/library/s4-XX.3.295>
- ² H. Hendrick, “Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood: An Interpretative Survey, 1800 to the Present,” *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, edited by Allison James and Alan Prout, Falmer Press, London, 1997, pp. 33-60.
- ³ Jane Bingham and Grayce Scholt, *Fifteen Centuries of Children’s Literature: An Annotated Chronology of British and American Works in Historical Context*, Greenwood Press, 1980, p. 148.
- ⁴ Kristen Drotner, *English Children and Their Magazines, 1751-1945*, Yale University, 1988, pp. 21.
- ⁵ M.S. Dodson, *Orientation, empire, and National Culture : India, 1770-1880*, Palgrave Macmillan 2007, p.37.
- ⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen peoples*, OUP, New York, 2003, pp. 32-49.
- ⁷ Stewart J. Brown, “Providential Empire? The Established Church of England and the Nineteenth-Century British Empire in India,” *Studies in Church History*, vol. 54, 2018, pp. 225–259, doi:10.1017/stc.2017.19.

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Sisir Kumar Das: Comparative Literature in Indian Aspect

Saberee Mandal

Abstract

Sisir Kumar Das was an eminent academician who was originally a Bengali language and literature student, but he saw through the narrow approach of 'single literature' and was thoroughly inspired by the broad peripheries of Comparative Literature. This paper is a study of his notions regarding how to approach literature and literary studies in a comparative method, and how studies in literature are essentially comparative in nature. In this paper, I have specified my discussion within some of Das's seminal essays which reflect his thoughts on Comparative Literature, which, eventually had an Indian aspect. Das pointed out that the methods of teaching literature in India are not flawless and need reformation to change the outlook of the teachers and students towards literature and literary studies. The history of India and Indian literature had the legacy of the coexistence of various races, religions, languages and naturally, literatures. Keeping the history of India's rich past and colonial interactions in mind, Das conveyed the voice of the unavoidable perspective of a comparatist, which was necessary for Indian literary studies. This helps the reader to relate Indian literature to a broader area of literary studies which is not confined to the narrow approach of 'single literature' departments in India. Though most of the critics suggest a sense of oneness or unity, Das always focused on the multilingualistic situation of India, which is an important trait of India's literary reality. This paper delves into the literary notions Das studied in the field of Comparative Literature with an Indian aspect.

Keywords: Sisir Kumar Das, Comparative Indian Literature, Multilingualism, Indian Literary Studies, Teaching literature in India.

Introduction

Sisir Kumar Das (1936-2003) believed that the primary intention of literary study is 'enlargement of taste'; to achieve this, one must apply

the comparative method in literature. He was an academician who crossed the boundaries of 'single literature' and thrived towards an extensive world-class thought process. Being a student of Bengali language and literature, Das was above narrow provincialism. He realised the limitations of 'single literature' departments and walked through the broader path of comparative literature. His thought process was embedded with a certain openness, allowing him to see beyond particular boundaries. He shifted to the interdisciplinary aspect of Comparative Literature to analyse literary texts and ideas. Das contributed to the idea of Comparative Literature from the Indian aspect, opening many scopes and possibilities. He believed the very structure of Indian Literature to be comparative and its texts and contexts to be Indian.¹

The primary texts where he discussed Comparative Literature from an Indian perspective are — 'Muses in Isolation', 'Why Comparative Indian Literature', 'Comparative Literature: A Pedagogical Framework', 'Comparative Literature in India: A Historical Perspective'. Das weaves his thought into different articles, which gives us a clear view of his notions. He believed that even 'single literature' students would agree that studying a literary genre or history within the limitations of a single literature is quite impossible. For example, he explained how we need to understand 'Illiad' to know the complexity of content and structure embedded in 'Meghnādbadh Kābya', written by Madhusudan Dutta. The main intention of comparison is to cross the boundaries of different languages and cultures, and discover the interconnection within literature, literary movements, genres and others. Even before the emergence of Comparative Literature, specialists realised the insufficiency and limitations of single literature as a discipline. The need for a more extensive scope was felt whenever two different literatures came into contact. These contacts often brought about changes and profoundly influenced each other. The basis of contemporary Comparative Literature is to visualise one piece of literature with another, depending on their interconnection.

Sisir Kumar Das searched for answers to some crucial questions, which reflects his ideas regarding Comparative Indian Literature. The questions are as follows: How can one connect the framework of Comparative Literature to literary studies? Single literature departments mainly prefer one literature or one culture; in this situation, how much gravity does Comparative Literature bear in literary studies? What is the difference between Comparative Literature and Comparative Indian Literature? What is the significance of studying Indian Literature in the comparative framework? Academicians must revisit literature, literary studies, literary education, literature teaching infrastructure and systems through these questions.

What do we understand of Indian Literature? It is not a total of all the literature written in different Indian languages but an equation of complex literary relations. We must emphasise Indian diversity, which reflects a certain kind of multiplicity. Most of the literary historians were vocal in favour of the unity of Indian literary history. In contrast, Das gave importance to diversity and pointed out that one should be able to read the underlying plurality with relevant literary facts and ideas.

“Multilingualism is a fact of Indian Society and of Indian Literature.”²

The literary history of India is a history of generating multilingual literature. Over the years, many languages have come to close contact with each other; sometimes, it has given birth to new literary forms (i.e., Maṇipravāḷa), or new language and literature have emerged from within (i.e., Urdu). We also must remember that many civilisations came into contact with India, among which Greece-India or India-China connections are least discussed even today. A student of single literature should keep in mind that their boundary should be expanded by exploring different languages, literature, society and culture. To understand and appreciate Indian Literature, one must have vast and extensive knowledge of literature as a whole. Indian comparatists should not limit their knowledge to the peripheries of single literature but should step into the broader perimeter. Das was not convinced by

the 'One-language, One-culture, One-nation' structure of belief; instead, he always spoke for India's plurality and multilingual context. This notion of diversity is mentioned multiple times in his idea of Comparative Indian Literature.

"The contemporary Indian history needs a more enlarged framework involving the problem of history, psychology and cultural politics. The fact that demands serious attention is the presence of a foreign literature forcing all other literatures in the country to operate within a hegemonic relationship."³

Even after the termination of colonial rule in India, the colonial impact on education or idea is still active. The yardstick of Indian literary criticism, all the critical tools of discussion and analysis are still influenced by Western parameters.

To overcome the foreign impact on literary studies, Sisir Kumar Das felt the urgency to introduce 'Indian' literature beyond the barriers of single literature to educate Indian students. If learning various languages becomes problematic, students can study literary texts in translation or original language according to their capacity. The Indian education system must have ideals and requirements specific to the country. The curriculum should also follow the same pattern to give students a holistic view of literature. An idea of 'rubaiyat' and 'haiku' is equally crucial to understand poetry. Das insisted that in the higher education phase, one should also get acquainted with indigenous literature, along with foreign literature.

Comparative Literature is not supposed to be a substitute for single literature, rather, it should be a study of inter-relations between different literature and literary studies. One has to bring about significant logical changes in attitude to receive the notion of Comparative Literature. Das was not content with the conventional method of literary studies. Hence, he believed that this process should be used sparingly. What is the method to replace this practice? His student Nandita Basu, later a professor at Delhi University, mentioned in her article 'Professor Sisir Kumar Das and his take on Multilingualism in Indian Literature' that in many personal

conversations, Das mentioned how the methods of Indian literary education or single literature of Indian languages are not up to the mark. He was against the conventional methods of teaching literature and pointed out that one should emphasise the qualitative method, not the quantitative one. So, educating students in an international parameter is more important than only conferring higher educational degrees. Das questioned the whole system of literary education, in other words. Das was concerned about the status of indigenous languages in the state universities. He always believed Indian society to be multilingual, not monolingual. The solution to this unilinear education system is to emphasise the qualitative value of education; parallelly, each literature department should include and assimilate the contemporary international standard of the education system. Literary Study with respect to contemporary reality could be a step forward. Also, these departments have to consider the factor of the multilingual setting of India while teaching literature to the students. Das mentioned two aims of literary studies: 'enlargement of taste' and 'an inheritance of the total achievement of literature'. What should be the proper way of reading literature? The essential goal of literature is the 'liberalization of the mind'. He gave importance to the first-hand 'experience of living', in both the method of teaching and learning literature.

Professor Das says, "Comparative Indian Literature not only justifies the need for literary study, but it provides the comparative study of literature with a new range and vision."⁴ Comparative Indian Literature — these words can seem contradictory because, on the one hand, it is Indian Literature; on the other, it is Comparative Literature, which is entirely a Western rendering. What is Indian Literature? It is not the sum total of all the literature written in Indian languages, but we need to understand this notion by discovering the complex literary interconnections between these literatures. Indian Literature is diverse in nature, and Das strongly voted for this variety in all his critical pieces of work.

Sisir Kumar Das tried to determine the relationship between Comparative Literature and Comparative Indian Literature. He also

explained how we can establish and study Indian Literature in the framework of Comparative Literature. Das believed that the discipline of Comparative Literature emerged in India as a resistance against India's 'national' literatures. Comparative Literature tried to bring the complete literary creations in a single periphery. Students should understand the interrelation between the various kinds of literature worldwide, crossing the narrow boundaries of language and geography. It is expected to manifest an unbiased perspective while considering the similarities, differences and connections between the works of literature. In fact, a comparative literary study must have a solid basis, and for Indian students, it can always be Indian literature. Here, by Indian Literature, we mean literature written in various Indian languages, like Tamil, Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Assamese and others. He said, "Our Comparative Literature must be Comparative Indian Literature because nothing else can be the basis of our literary study."⁵ In reality, literature is constructed by language, but there is a distinct sense of something more to language in this making. So, literary study is influenced by contemporary times and surroundings. Denying the historical basis of India can lead towards the demolition of Comparative Literature itself. Das's journey was clearly from Comparative Literature to Comparative Indian Literature, not vice versa.

Amiya Dev, another eminent academician, in his article 'Towards Comparative Literature in India', said that he wanted to receive Comparative Literature in India for two reasons — one, the multilingual situation of India, and two, India as a country of the third world. Concerning the idea of Indian Literature, Professor Das always used the concept of multilingualism, as mentioned before. He showed how this factor of multilingualism is reflected even in the writings of Kalidasa. In his Sanskrit play 'Abhijñānaśākuntalam', though Sanskrit language was used extensively, we also find the usage of other languages, like 'Śaurasenī, Māhārāṣṭrī' and 'Māgadhi Prākṛit'. Shakuntala does not use any Sanskrit sentences, although she can understand and speak the language.

Sanskrit sentences are used for the character of Dushmanta, the king, who can understand the 'Prākṛita' language but must not speak it because of his higher position in society. This equation of complex language hierarchy is also strongly present in this instance. Moreover, 'Brajabuli' Sanskrit of medieval India and Tamil/Malayalam mixed up and gave birth to various new styles, like 'Maṇipravāla' or 'Jābānimishal Bhasha' of Bharatchandra, a poet of medieval India. After independence, the unity of Indian literature was widely mentioned by academicians. Das accepted the fact and expanded this idea to the diversity that is the heartbeat of Indian Literature. Amiya Dev was also concerned about the Western comparison method, which was incompatible with the parameters of the Indian literary situation. As a third-world country, India has grown mental obstacles, creating problems in exploring literatures worldwide. Amiya Dev suggested overcoming those boundaries so that no obstacle can come to our path in exploring literature as a whole.

Sisir Kumar Das was associated with the Department of Modern Indian Language and Literary Studies, University of Delhi. This department is one of the biggest departments in India for studying Indian languages and literature. Das noticed narrowness and provincial attitude within different peripheries of language practice. He was disheartened to see detachment and distance between different departments of Indian language and literature. These departments were not interlinked and were distant from each other. He believed that this distance creates hindrances and specifies limits in literary practice. According to Das, various departments of literature are creating walls between each other, and to remedy this, we must propose to bring changes in single literature departments. He wanted to study and teach various literature with respect to a more extensive literary and cultural vicinity. Literary Study includes a certain sense of worldwide thought process, without which the literary study remains incomplete. The question arises, what should be the nature of literary education? Das believed that literary study or education remain incomplete without applying the comparative method. He said we get to know ourselves

as much as we get to know others.⁶ This is also a reflection of what Plato said in his book 'Alcibiades' - "...know another soul if you want to know yours."⁷

In his article 'Muses in Isolation', he explained why and how different Indian literature departments must be replaced with Comparative Literature and Comparative Literary Studies. Most of the Indian universities have three departments in common -

- a. Department of Classical Literatures, like Sanskrit, Pali, Arabian, Persian;
- b. Department of English Language and Literature
- c. Any one department of the Modern Indian Language and Literature

There is a certain kind of 'relative isolation' in the functioning of these departments. Though these departments are a part of their affiliated universities, they are still like secluded islands, without having any mutual connection with other departments.

Firstly, he discussed about the Departments of Classical Literatures. These departments are mostly limited to ancient beliefs and practices; they do not feel the need to connect to the present experiences of life. It is essential to note that ancient literatures must discover its relation with modern life and culture to keep itself alive. A researcher should also find the connection of the research work with the present time to make the findings valid and relevant. It also applies to the departments of various literature. This is why acquaintance with modern literature is so important.

Next he deals with the Department of English. The main problem of English Literary Studies lies in the colonial past of India. Indians came into contact with English literature because of the British rulers. Indian scholars have always considered English literature with respect to the relationship between English literature and the Western world. This is the reason why Indian students of literature are entirely unaware of other Indian languages and literature. Das constantly searched for a logical ground for the relevance of English Literature and Literary Studies in India. He was not happy with the monopoly

of the English language in India. Though he could not go beyond the increasing importance of English and had to write many articles in this language, he was against the empowerment of English. He used to say mockingly, that from Raja Rammohun Roy to Satyajit Ray, all of their fame was invalid without the certification of the 'sahibs'.⁸ English was also essential in literary translation, but Das wanted to implement translation from one Indian language to another. Based on this kind of translation, he wanted to construct the idea and method of Indian literature. Delhi University initiated research on Indian literature in the Department of English based on English translation. However, Das was more interested in learning through the original Indian language than the English translation. According to Das, language and literature have different methods of learning. Nevertheless, English is one of the most influential languages in the world. It would be foolishness to be ignorant of such a language. Then what is the point of learning English? Is it only because the British rulers imposed the language on us, the Indians? The answer should be no, it is because of their rich and powerful literature. The literary practice will be shaped appropriately only if it is connected to Indian life and culture. Das preferred this method of literary studies in the Indian context. Even if it is late, we are now introduced to 'Indian English Literature', it is undoubtedly a literary progress.

At present, the literature departments are mostly limited to one specific language. English literature is not restricted to British literature; literature like American, Australian, and African written in English are also included in the curriculum. In that case, Das insisted on including Indian English Literature also. Thus, to upgrade itself with time, English literature has converted from single to 'multiple literature', but it did not desire to eliminate the monolingual approach. Das always supported changing this kind of curriculum, which was affected by fallacies.

Most of the modern Indian literatures is included in the curriculum in the backdrop of national movements. It is prestigious for a mother tongue to acquire a place among all the other language practices. Initially, patriotism helped to formulate these departments, but later this patriotism turned into 'chauvinism'.

“Changes will come despite all resistance, and changes can be resisted only at the cost of being reduced to irrelevance. And this is the time when we need Comparative Literature most to help us recognize and restructure our literature faculties.”⁹

So, Das attacked the higher status of English in the existing universities in the article ‘Muses in Isolation’, and parallelly criticised the problems of classical and modern Indian literature departments. There was a clear indication of empowerment between these departments, which Das desired to demolish and modernly reconstruct the methods of literary study.

Sisir Kumar Das presented the history of origin and development of Comparative Literature in India, in his article ‘Comparative Literature in India: A Historical Perspective’. In ancient times, Indian researchers failed to discover any internal connection between Sanskrit and Tamil literary traditions. In the medieval period, various languages and literatures came into close contact. Most of them were more or less influenced by a Sanskrit-based tradition and Arabian and Persian languages. In the medieval age, Indian researchers were conscious of the link between Sanskrit to their own reading. However, they never focused on the interconnection between Sanskrit and the modern Indian literatures like Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Punjabi or Sindhi. The aim of a comparatist should be to establish literary studies in such a frame where one can recognise the similarities. This was a time when Indian readers started to understand the correlation within texts but could not find out the specific yardstick to study it. In the medieval period, new language styles emerged due to literary transactions, like ‘Maṇipravāḷam’, a mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam. Also, he mentioned ‘Brajabuli’, which emerged around the 16th century.

Modern Indian languages started to establish themselves in the institutional periphery around the 19th century, but they remained ‘compartmentalized’ by the limitations of language barriers. Along with British rule and Western education’s influence on the literate people in India, they grew a conscious mind to understand and explore

Western literary pieces. How original and uninfluenced a literary piece of literature as a whole could be? This was one of the questions raised in the mid-nineteenth century. How is it possible to keep it safe from the influences of other works of literature? At this time, some Indian literary critics were demolishing the notion of the 'exclusiveness' of the national literatures, whereas others were creating the base of Comparative Literature in India. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, in his article 'Śakuntala, Miranda O Desdemona' (1873), tried to create a literary frame where one could study literatures like Sanskrit and English together, which are poles apart in nature. His other article, 'Uttarcharit' is also mention-worthy. He wanted to construct a new direction for the existing methods of literary studies. He created a language and nationalism-neutral literary understanding for all. Rabindranath Tagore first said about the comparative literary method, when he was requested to deliver a talk by Jatiya Shiksha Parishad in 1907, on the topic of Comparative Literature. He delivered a lecture in Bengali, which was titled 'Bishwa Sahitya' (World Literature). He used the word 'Bishwa Sahitya' to explain Comparative Literature. Afterwards, in the late nineteenth century, the search began for new literary studies. Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee established the first-ever Department of Modern Indian Languages, at Calcutta University, in the year 1919. As the president of 'Howrah Bangiya Sammelan', he said, "We shall have to think of ways, by means of which Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madras, Gujrat, Rajputana, and Punjab can all be weaved into one garland, and can all be assembled on the same shore of the ocean of literature."¹⁰

At this time, Indian Literature and Comparative Literary Studies started emerging in full swing. The syllabus of Bengali literature at the post-graduate level included English romantic poetry as well as Sanskrit literary pieces (1958-59). These texts were included as Comparative Literature, within the curriculum. The urge to study this as a separate discipline was still not felt. Afterwards, under the leadership of R.K. Dasgupta, Delhi University introduced a course for the post-graduate in Indian literature, which came to be known as

the department of 'Comparative Indian Literature'. Sisir Kumar Das also contributed to the process of the establishment of this department. Along with R.K. Dasgupta and Harbhajan Singh, Das helped to start the course of M.Litt in Comparative Indian Literature, in 1974. Das was in favour of using the comparative method, even in the methods of Literary Study. He also mentioned that only the establishment of this discipline was not enough, it must correlate with the other literature departments, otherwise, the Literary Study would become irrelevant and meaningless. Many difficulties and disagreements existed in the initial stage of the construction of this department. The Comparative Literature Department evolved with the changing perception of literary studies, though the number of this department in India still needs to be impressive. Das presented the significance of studying Comparative Literature from the Indian aspect. He said — "Comparative Indian Literature is not merely a search for a national literature counteracting literary chauvinism nor is it a search for a universal literature which is the professed aim of the study of comparative literature. ... comparative literature is not an exercise in discovering the abstract universals of literature. It must deal with literatures in their concreteness and hence the study of Indian Literature together is but a part of the comparative literary studies as an academic discipline. The future of comparative literary studied in this country will naturally be directed towards an intensive study of various Indian literatures in the main; but as long as it realizes that its texts and contexts are Indian, its methodology comparative, but its main subject is literature, it will serve the cause of Comparative Literature."¹¹

Amiya Dev commented about Sisir Kumar Das in the book "Studies in Comparative Literature: Theory, Culture and Space, In Memory of Sisir Kumar Das" — "Thus, being grounded in Bangla and with a growing and active interest in other Indian Literatures, he became a perfect exponent of Comparative Indian Literature. But his being an exponent meant not theorizing alone, not preaching it alone with a missionary zeal, but practicing it with actual literary studies, scores of them."¹²

Sisir Kumar Das was inspired and driven by comparative perspectives throughout his life. He inculcated that in his thought process and applied it in various writings, like articles about the Bhakti movement in India, the history of Indian literature, different genres of medieval literary creations and others. Comparative notions also inspired his translation work. He translated poems, plays from the Greek language directly. His translation of Aristotle's 'Poetics' is a remarkable work, which is included as a textbook in the curriculum of Bengali literature. Another must-mention original book is 'Aloukik Sanglap', in Bengali — an imaginary conversation between the characters of Indian and Greek mythology. This effort helps us to understand his comparative method of thinking. Das also cultivated the relationship of Rabindranath Tagore with Spain, China, East-West connection and transactions, India and Germany's exchange and other ideas through his various writings. There have been many exchanges between races, castes, religions, cultures, and politics from ancient to modern times. India has witnessed many cultural transactions between civilisations like Greek and Hindus, Dravid and Aryas, Arabian-Persian and Sanskrit, European and Indian. This has enriched India culturally and offered Indian scholars a comparative perspective on literature and other arts.

The Western culture influenced India because of the political factor of empowerment by the British. In the last two hundred years, Indian scholars have been torn apart by the tension between the Eastern and Western worlds. This reality is strongly related to literary studies in India. Comparative Indian Literature flourished under entirely different historical circumstances. Our history is the history of encounters between civilisations. Hence, the consciousness of Indian writers and readers can be marked by a sense of coexistence of various traditions, mainly the coexistence of influential literary traditions. The Indian literary world faced many ups and downs, the readers' responses were evaluated over time because different literary traditions had a parallel coexistence. In the mid 19th century, the scholars started evaluating the methods of studying Indian Literature by the Western parameter. Indian scholars

started prioritising the newly learned English language, which changed our perspective on European literature.

One of the most critical yardsticks of Comparative Indian Literature is multilingualism, and Das mentioned this many times in his literary works. In the lecture Das delivered at the Second Biennial Congress, organised by the Comparative Literature Association of India (CLAI), said - "...the argument for an Indian Comparative Literature emerges from the nature of multi-lingual literary relations of India and the continuous traffic between them. The great Dravidologist Emeneau demonstrated how the Indian languages belonging to four different families: Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, and Austric – tend to converge making it possible to consider India as a language area."¹³

An eminent scholar of the present time, Sayantan Dasgupta, explains Das's idea of Comparative Literature in one of his articles thus : "A student of Bangla, he (Sisir Kumar Das) was unhappy with the isolation in which single literature departments function in India. Literary studies in India should have Indian literature as its core and should not shy away from exploring the relationship between "Literature and other areas of human activity – religion, history, geography...", he said... "If we can't relate a literature with historical movements in our languages, our idea of literature will remain fragmented," he complained.

This concern probably explains his involvement with Comparative Literature. Over the last decades, he propagated the cause of Comparative Literature as a viable and relevant model for literary studies in India. He defined Comparative Literature as "a study of literatures in relation to one another with objectives of arriving at some great notions about literatures and histories of literary evolution."¹⁴

Conclusion

Sisir Kumar Das was the president of the Comparative Literature Association of India (CLAI), from 1999 to 2003, until his death. The idea of Comparative Literature in India was constructed by this eminent academician, who taught us how to perceive literature from

a comparative perspective. The essential difference between single literature and comparative literature is not in their methodology but in their attitude, which must not be flawed by narrowness. A compartmentalised education system, or in other words, 'the pigeonholes of our universities' (A phrase by E.R. Citrus), ultimately results in a certain narrowness, especially if it ends up in the field of specialisation. Das believed that specialisation is meaningless without relevance to the reality of our life and literature. Das strongly proposed that compartmentalised literary education should be immediately done away with.

"Must we preserve our existing practice of teaching literature in complete linguistic isolation and total indifference to the literatures of other nations, or should we try to expand the scope of literary study by relating other literatures to our own, and if necessary to change the departmental structure, if not dismantle it? The future of comparative literature in India will depend upon the answer we give to this question."¹⁵

This question is the key to all the answers to Sisir Kumar Das's queries. In the present age, when specialisation of studies has become one of the most important factors of education, these questions raised by Das are highly relevant. He believed that there should be no discrimination in studying literature, and instead of studying literature in various languages, one must construct their literary consciousness as a whole. We must raise questions regarding our limitations, destroy the small wells where we live as frogs and realise the vast extension of literary studies from a comparative perspective.

Notes

¹ David Damrosch, *What is World Literature*, Oxford University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2003, 27.

² Sisir Kumar Das, "Why Comparative Indian Literature", in Sisir Kumar Das and Amiya Dev, eds, *Comparative Literature: Theory and Practice*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1989, 100.

³ Sisir Kumar Das, *Indian Ode to the West Wind*, Pencraft, Delhi, 2011, 11.

⁴ Sisir Kumar Das, "Why Comparative Indian Literature", in Sisir Kumar Das and Amiya Dev, eds, *Comparative Literature: Theory and Practice*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1989, 101.

- ⁵ Sisir Kumar Das, "Why Comparative Indian Literature", in Sisir Kumar Das and Amiya Dev, eds, *Comparative Literature: Theory and Practice*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1989, 100.
- ⁶ Subal Samanta, ed. *Sisir Kumar Das: Jiban O Manan*, Ebang Mushayera, Kolkata, 2016, 111-112.
- ⁷ Sisir Kumar Das, "Friendship with strangers", in *Inter-Asian Comparative Literature, Proceedings of the XIIIth Congress of ICLA*, University of Delhi.
- ⁸ Ajanta, Special issue on Sisir Kumar Das, Year 57, No. 3, December 2017, 6.
- ⁹ Sisir Kumar Das, "Muses in Isolation", in Sisir Kumar Das and Amiya Dev, eds, *Comparative Literature: Theory and Practice*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1989, 14.
- ¹⁰ Sisir Kumar Das, "Comparative Literature in India: A Historical Perspective", *Indian Ode to the West Wind*, Pencraft International, Delhi, 2001, 245.
- ¹¹ Sisir Kumar Das, "Comparative Literature in India: A Historical Perspective", *Indian Ode to the West Wind*, Pencraft International, Delhi, 2001, 247.
- ¹² Amiya Dev, "Sisir Kumar Das", in Jancy James, Chandra Mohan, Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta & Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharya, eds, *Studies in Comparative Literature: Theory, Culture and Space*, In memory of Sisir Kumar Das, Creative Books, Delhi, 2007, 15.
- ¹³ Name of the article is unknown.
- ¹⁴ Sayantan Dasgupta, "In Memoriam: The idea of India", *The Statesman*, 18.05.2003.
- ¹⁵ Sisir Kumar Das, "Muses in Isolation", in Sisir Kumar Das and Amiya Dev, eds, *Comparative Literature: Theory and Practice*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1989, 17.

*An Unidentified Image from the 18th Century CE Māghnowā
Doul in Lakhimpur, Assam : Finding Interpretations*

Siddhant Medhi

Abstract

The Māghnowā Doul is amongst the lesser known but significant Hindu temples or Douls in Assam built by the commission of the Āhom dynasty during the time period from 17th to 18th century CE. Most of the goddess forms depicted in the sculptural imagery or iconographic programme of the sculptural art of the Māghnowā Doul can be said to of Purāṇic and Tāntric derivation. Apart from them, there are several images depicting unidentified goddess forms which have never appeared in the religious sculptural art of Assam before the Āhoms. These goddesses do not bear any such iconographic attribute or arrangement generally associated with the mainstream Purāṇic and Tāntric goddesses. These goddess forms are also not seen amongst the evidences of art of other religious traditions contemporary to the tradition of temple relief sculptural art patronised by the Āhoms, they are also rare in the evident temple sculptural art of the Indian subcontinent. One of such images featured in the architecture of the Doul is of a four-handed goddess riding a chariot drawn by four horses. This image has not been focussed by archaeologists and art historians, and it has remained unidentified till date. The paper is concerned with a study of the iconographical details of the goddess form featured in this particular unique image, and finding interpretations for its identity, considering the contexts of the various texts and practices of Śaivism and Śaktism, mainly prevalent in the culture of Assam, the architecture of which it is a part, the preferences of the patron or patronising authority, the different religious and cultural changes and interactions that had taken place under the rule of the Āhom dynasty.

Keywords: Āhom dynasty, Devī, Doul, Purāṇic, Tāntric.

Introduction

The Māghnowā Doul is situated at Padmapur village in Dhalpur division in present day Lakhimpur district of eastern Assam. The present temple structure has been described by the State Archaeological Department and the regional historians to be built by the commission of Āhom king Rudra Siṃha or Sukhrungphā in the 1705 CE (early part of the eighteenth century CE). Several features might also be added to the structure of the temple by the Āhom rulers succeeding Rudra Singha. The temple has an octagonal plan and has a brick built structure. It has two existing architectural parts—the *Maṇḍapa* and the *Garbhagrha* topped by a conical *Śikhara*. The temple was severely affected during the invasion and tyrannical rule of the Burmese during the early nineteenth century CE. It is said that it faced severe desecration and destruction by the hands of the Burmese invaders¹ (Neog, 2008, 66). In present times, poor and unplanned conservation techniques and sheer negligence and ignorance of the surrounding people have also contributed to the temple losing several of its structural details. Many of the stone relief



Figure (i) : The Māghnowā Doul

sculpted images of deities placed within niches on the outer and inner walls of the *Garbhagrha* of the Doul are stolen, or either have fallen off and lost. The surviving stone sculpted images show signs of mutilation and maltreatment. [Figure (i)]

The extant relief stone sculpted images or icons of the different deities are seen to be arranged on the outer walls of the *Garbhagrha* of the temple in two parallel rows. The images are all housed inside separate quadrangular architectural niches or *Devakoṣṭa-s* [see Figure (ii) and (iii)].

The available sculpted stone images seen on the temple walls are mostly of goddesses hinting towards the temple as a centre of Śākta or Śaiva-Śākta worship during the late medieval period. There are claims that the Māghnowā Doul was either a reconstructed version or was built over the ruins of an earlier temple dedicated to Śākta Tāntric worship possibly built by the Bhuyān chiefs who are said to have ruled the region. It is said that the main deity or *Vighraha* once worshipped inside the Doul was *Guhyakālī*², one of the several emanations of Kālī. *Guhyakālī* is one of the most esoteric and mysterious goddesses in the Tāntric *Krama-s*. It is said that there was also another deity worshipped along with *Guhyakālī*. This deity is known as *Bor Kālīkā*.³ Presently, the material *Bighraha-s/Vighraha-s* or icons of both *Guhyakālī* and *Bor Kālīkā* are not seen in the *Garbhagrha* of the Doul. These two *Vighraha-s* were removed from the *Garbhagrha* of the Doul during the wake of Burmese invasion in the early 19th century CE and were kept hidden for the fear of desecration by the Burmese tyrants.⁴ Later, the *Vighraha* of *Bor Kālīkā* was recovered, established and re-consecrated at Kalabari, in modern day Sonitpur district. the shrine where it is enshrined is now known as the *Bar Kālīkā Thān*.⁵

There is presently, no consecrated *Vighraha* or material anthropomorphic representation or icon of any deity in the *Garbhagrha* of the Doul. Instead, several erect monoliths or pointed stone slabs, of different sizes are being installed, inside the *Garbhagrha* for worship. The symbolism of these stone slabs cannot be known and the *Garbhagrha* shows signs of poor preservation and maintenance. The



Figure (ii) [Top], and Figure (iii) [Below] : Arrangement of the stone relief sculpted images of deities on the architecture of the Māghnowā DouI



Figure (iv) : The Unidentified Image of a Goddess riding a Horse Drawn Chariot from the Māghnowā Doul

stone slabs or the monoliths revered inside the Doul reminds of the *Menhirs* prevalent in the ethnic cultures like that of Khasi-s, Tiwa-s and Karbi-s.

Amongst the sculpted images featured in the architectural niches on the outer walls of the *Garbhagṛha* of the temple, we find an exquisite representation of a Devī who is portrayed as having four hands, holding several weapons/attributes and riding a chariot driven by four horses. The horses are seen to be tended by a charioteer. This image is one of its kind in the sculptural art of Assam. It is till now unidentified and has remained unnoticed in the study of archaeology in Assam as well as the Indian subcontinent. This particular image type is unique to the temple sculptural art that proliferated under the aegis of the Āhoms. Apart from the Māghnowā Doul and the *Deḍī* Doul at Gaurisāgar in Śivasāgar district which was built circa 1724 CE under the aegis of queen Bor Rajā Phulesvarī Kuwārī/ Pramathesvarī Devī, images or of such type are not met with anywhere in the art of other Hindu temples or Douls built by the Āhoms [Figure (iv)].

The sources of such an iconographic representation is till now unclear and not much detailed study of it has been undertaken by archaeologists and art historians. This type of image, appeared for the first time in the religious art, in the architectural sculpture of the temples patronised by the Āhoms and no exact prototype or parallel of it in the religious art of the cultures of the pre-Āhom period, and even in the art of the Koces, and the Cutiyās is known till date. Such an iconographic representation is also found to be rare in the temple sculptural art of the entire Indian subcontinent. Is this particular iconographic representation or type of image depicted in the Māghnowā Doul sourced from the canonical texts of mainstream Hinduism (Śāktism and Tāntricism in particular)? Can this image be of some goddess or concept constituting some regional variant or lesser known tradition of Śāktism, or such sect or cult that had evolved or was influential during that time and gradually waned or became obscure with time? Is it possible that this type of imagery or visualisation resulted from the artisans' associating their visual and cultural memory and experiences with the Śākta narratives and imageries? In other words, is this imagery a result of the liberty that the artists/sculptors took in viewing and forming the Śākta religious narratives and their corresponding imageries in context of or in accordance to their own experiences, memories, dialogues, conflicts, persuasions, beliefs and practices they are acquainted with? In this paper, we will attempt to find certain interpretations and form an idea of the above image type/iconographic representation through a study of its different visual iconographic details and relating it with the symbolisms and narratives found represented in such texts which form (or have been forming) an important part of the practices, belief systems, rituals and conceptions centred around Devī/Śakti and Śiva. We will further look out for imageries, visual symbols in certain regional or lesser known Śākta traditions which may relate to or similar to the above image.

Study of the Details of the Image/Image type and its Multiple Interpretations

The concerned image type is seen featured in the stone relief sculptural art of the architecture of Māghnowā Doul and also the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul. We will specifically concentrate in this paper on the image from the Māghnowā Doul. It consists of a figure of a four-handed goddess seated cross legged on a chariot drawn by four horses, tended to by a charioteer. The chariot is shown as having two wheels. Chariots or carriages of such a design are also met with in the Rajput and Mughal miniature paintings of the contemporary period [see Figure]. Her four hands are shown to be holding different attributes or weapons. Her upper right hand holds a *Aṅkuśa* or an elephant goad, which is clearly discernible. The lower right hand holds an unidentified object. Her upper left hand holds an object which seems like a *Khetaka/Mudgara* a type of club. The object in her lower left hand is broken and almost out of recognition. The features of the charioteer in the front of the goddess are damaged and are not so clear. He is wearing a headgear almost like that of the Mughal style turban the depiction of which became very much popular in the sculptural images in the architecture of the Āhom temples or Douls. The Mughal style turban is seen to be used extensively as a headgear for the male figures in the miniature paintings produced under the patronage of the Vaiṣṇava *Sattras* and the Āhom court.

As three of the attributes held by the goddess in the image are unclear and damaged, there arises a problem in properly deciphering the image. From its arrangement, the image can be thought to be relating to the narrative from the Lalitopākhyāna section of *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* [IV. 11. 30-38] which describes goddess Lalitā or *Lalitā Mahātripurasundarī* going for a war with *Bhaṇḍāsura*— a powerful evil entity born from the ashes of *Kāmadeva* who was once immolated by the fire generated from the third eye of Śiva⁶. Here, [IV. 18. 9-11a, 19. 1- 95], goddess Lalitā is described to ride a resplendent chariot named *Cakrarāja* or *Śrīcakra* and charge, along with her retinue of gods and goddesses towards *Bhaṇḍāsura* and his *Asura* army⁷. The

Aṅkuśa or goad symbolising emotion and material existence is described as a characteristic attribute held by goddess Lalitā⁸ in one of her four hands. So, can the concerned image or image type portrayed in the Māghnowā Doui be identified as that of goddess Lalitā or Tripurasundarī going for a war with *Bhaṇḍāsura*? Will this identification be justified in the context of the culture of Assam where the text of Lalitopākhyāna and narratives of the goddess Lalitā or Mahātripurasundarī in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* are seen to be totally unknown? We till now do not come across any such literary and ritualistic evidence in the culture of Assam which may give us an idea of a possible prevalence of a Śākta tradition, especially in the Āhom period which centred around Lalitā or Tripurasundarī as conceived and elaborated in the system of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*.

Though the practice and concept of Śrī Vidyā was prominent and prevalent in the Śākta tradition of Assam at one point of time, as traced from the concepts of *Tripurā*, *Tripurā Bālā* and *Tripurasundarī* in the texts like *Kālikā Purāṇa*⁹, it was totally different from the tradition of Śrī Vidyā practiced in southern India. The iconography, symbolisms, texts and practices of the Śrī Vidyā tradition in Assam were, in many respects, different from that understood and followed in southern India. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, in particular, as said earlier, is a canonical text of the Śrī Vidyā Śaktism in the southern Indian traditions. It was never a part of the Śrī Vidyā in Assam or the eastern part of India, thereby restricting us from assuming the above image from the Māghnowā Doui to be featuring the narrative of goddess Lalitā marching for a war with *Bhaṇḍāsura*.

The *Vāmakeśvara Tantra* mentions of *Ṣoḍaśa* (sixteen) Yātrā-s to be performed for the pleasure of the goddess during different times or seasons of the year. One of these Yātrā-s is the Ratha or chariot Yātrā. All these sixteen Yātrā-s are to be performed by the Śākta Upāsaka-s or Śākta practitioners according to the prescribed procedures, for attaining different kinds of merits, knowledge, virtues and powers. Ratha Yātrā of Devī/Śakti as Durgā is also found mentioned in the *Devī Purāṇa* [31. 2- 7] where it is said that the icon

of a manifestation or form of the Devī should be established on an immensely decorated chariot, offered oblations and paraded.¹⁰ A ritual of establishing an icon of the goddess or Devī/Śakti/Ambikā/Śivā on a chariot, offering oblations and parading it is also spoken about in the *Umāsaṁhitā* section of the *Śiva Purāṇa*. The *Umāsaṁhitā* [51. 63-66] instructs that one should perform the festival of chariot for the pleasure of the goddess who is the Śakti or consort of Śiva on the third day of the bright half of the month of Āṣāḍha.¹¹ The representation or icon/*Mūrti/Vigraha* of the goddess should be placed on a jewel studded and immensely decorated chariot which would symbolise the earth, and its two wheels, the sun and the moon. The chariot should be drawn by four horses symbolising the four Vedas. The charioteer of the chariot would be the lotus born Brahmā. The devotee should conceive and imagine that the supreme goddess, the Śakti of Śiva-Ambikā/Śivā seated in the middle of the chariot is surveying the whole world for protecting it.¹²

In the concerned image from the Māghnowā Douḷ too, the chariot is yoked to four galloping horses. The charioteer shown is also male possibly hinting towards Brahmā. Considering these similarities, we can assume that the whole of the image from the Douḷ is an attempt to visualize whatever is elaborated regarding the ritual symbolisms of the chariot festival of the goddess in the *Śiva Purāṇa*. The *Śiva Purāṇa*, has been a very influential and popular Purāṇic text in the culture of Assam. During the Āhom period, it might had became a very revered text right from the days of reign of king Rudra Simha who himself composed/authored a version and interpretation of the *Śiva Purāṇa*. There are also accounts of him receiving initiation into Śaivism under the guidance of Guru Śrī Padmanābha Brahmacārya or Mukalimuriā Gosāi and remaining a staunch and devoted Śiva worshipper throughout a significant part of his life. Relating or identifying the above image with the imagery of the ritual chariot festival of Śakti or Śivā elaborated in the *Śiva Purāṇa* may be justifiable because the building of the Māghnowā Douḷ of which it is a part is claimed to be built under the commission of Rudra Simha, who was a dedicated

worshipper of Śiva and an adherer and follower of the texts like the *Śiva Purāṇa*.

The *Umāsaṃhitā* [49. 24-25] further describes the supreme form of Śivā or Umā in the *Śiva Purāṇa* as four handed, and holding a goad and a noose in her two hands while the other two hands are said to be posed in the gestures of blessing and protection.¹³ It is akin to the form of *Bhūvaneśvarī* — one of the *Mahāvidyā*-s as mentioned in texts like *Mundamālā Tantra* and *Niruttara Tantra*.¹⁴ The image from the Māghnowā Doui is assumed to be portraying the ritual chariot festival of Śivā/Umā/Ambikā as described in the *Śiva Purāṇa*. This assumption has been made observing certain sharp similarities between the two imageries, particularly the four horses yoked to the chariot, and the male charioteer identified as Brahmā. But, the form of the goddess in the image does not seem to conform to the four handed form of Umā/Śivā in the *Umāsaṃhitā*. Though the *Aṅkuśa* or goad is common to both the forms, the rest of the intact or visible attributes held by the goddess in the image from the Doui does not seem to match with the remaining attributes held or displayed by Umā in the *Śiva Purāṇa*. There can be two possibilities, either it is i) surely portraying the chariot festival of Umā/Śivā described in the *Śiva Purāṇa* but featuring a different iconographic form of Umā/Śivā/Durgā/Ambikā, or ii) it is not at all portraying the chariot festival of Umā as mentioned in the *Umāsaṃhitā* of *Śiva Purāṇa*; rather, it is featuring a different iconographic conception, imagery or narrative.

A conception of Durgā as Raṇacaṇḍī or the fiery martial goddess has been seen conveyed or portrayed in the tradition of *Sukannānī* Ojā Pāli, one of the significant ancient living performing art traditions of Assam. It has been presented through the narratives and through the hand and body gestures in *Sukannānī* Ojā Pāli performances that goddess Durgā assumes the Raṇacaṇḍī form, and advances towards the destruction of *Asura*-s with a vigorous speed of a horse or *Aśvagati*.¹⁵ Here, she may either be moving by herself towards the enemies with the immense speed of a horse, or, riding a horse in place of the lion, her usual mount or, riding a vehicle yoked to fast galloping horses/

steeds. If we now assume that the artisans who sculpted all the images in the architecture of the Māghnowā Douḷ were well acquainted with the tradition of *Sukannānī Ojā Pāli*, the concerned image of Devī riding a horse drawn chariot can be somewhat thought of an attempt by them to visualise and materialise the narratives and conceptions of Durgā as Raṇacaṇḍī advancing with a vigorous speed of a horse in their own way. They might have preferred a chariot drawn by multiple horses rather than a single horse as a vehicle of the goddess either to instil more energy or to bring out more expressiveness and effect.

In *Sukannānī Ojā Pāli* which is centred on the worship of Śakti, the form of goddess Durgā is always seen to be conceived as ten handed, as per evidences. If the image is assumed to be a visualisation by the artisans of the conception of Durgā as Raṇacaṇḍī advancing with the speed of a horse elaborated in the narratives of *Sukannānī Ojā Pāli* performances, then why she has been depicted four-handed? Can it be because of some constraint or paucity of the pictorial space that the artisans did not sculpt her ten handed form? We cannot be sure about that.

The *Devī Purāṇa* [50. II. 24] describes a four handed form of Durga known as Mānasī and is described to be Syandanārūḍhā or riding a Syandana which usually refers to or is a synonym for a chariot in Sanskrit. Mānasī, included amongst the 64 forms of Durgā in the Purāṇa is said to be holding *Ghaṇṭā*, *Mudgara* or a pestle/type of club, *Vajra* and a *Aṅkuśa* in her four hands.¹⁶ Now, if we closely observe the remaining fragments of the damaged attribute held in the lower right hand of the goddess in the concerned image from the Māghnowā Douḷ, its form approaches close to a *Vajra*— the form of the *Vajra* as stylistically depicted in the art of Assam from 16th century CE onwards. The weapon held in the upper left hand of the goddess can also be assumed as a *Mudgara* or a club. Now, if we say with certainty that the attributes held by the goddess in her lower right hand and her upper left hand are *Vajra* and *Mudgara* respectively, and the unknown attribute held in the lower left hand of the goddess is a *Ghaṇṭā*, then along with the *Aṅkuśa* held in upper right hand, the

whole combination of attributes will resemble that held by Mānasī. Also, the chariot mount or vehicle of the goddess somewhat equates her with the form of Mānasī.

The single wheel of the horse drawn chariot in the concerned image has enabled several scholars to identify it as Surya or a female form of Surya. But, they have not mentioned the iconographic texts based on which such an identification was put forward. A goddess having all the essential attributes of Sūrya named *Saurī Caturākṣarī* is found described in the text *Śilparatna* [42. 73].¹⁷ In a way, we can say that *Saurī Caturākṣarī* is a female form of Surya. This particular form hints towards a synthesis and a confluence of the cults of Devī and Sūrya. No cult, temple, or ritualistic practice centred on this syncretic iconographic form or concept is known. Also, we are unknown of any region within the Indian subcontinent in which the cult of *Saurī Caturākṣarī* might have been practiced or flourished. No sculpted or painted example of her form has come to light till now. So, we are not clear about the history of its cult. There is a probability that it might have evolved into some other imagery whose worship is still continuing or have become obscure or unknown in the passage of time. The concerned image in the Māghnowā Doul may be one of those imageries. We cannot be sure about it and a more deeper study is required in this regard.

The artisans sculpting images in the ateliers patronised by the Āhom dynasty turned to different texts and conceptions of Hindu deities in the diverse folk and tribal/*Laukika* traditions of Hinduism in the region. In the context of this knowledge, the form of the goddess in the above image will be having more affinity or related more with the visualisation of Durgā as Raṇacaṇḍī in the regional tradition of *Sukannānī Ojā Pāli* where she is associated with the motif of a horse or with the attributes of a horse. Moreover, there is also a context of the profound encouragement and liberal patronage given to the different indigenous and regional forms of music, narrative, singing and dance including Ojā Pāli by the Āhom rulers from Rudra Siṁha onwards. So identifying or understanding the visualisation of the

goddess in the above image as inspired or derived from an imagery of Durgā as Raṇacaṇḍī in the texts of *Sukannānī Ojā Pāli* seems more justifying and convincing.

The 64 forms of Durgā including Mānasī described in the Devī Purāṇa and their conception is seen adopted and included by the smārta scholars or Nibandhakāra-s like Raghunandana and Vidyāpati as an integral part of the procedure and principles of the worship of Durgā in their composed *Durgā Pūjā Paddhati*-s. As the Raghunandana smārta ritual system of worshipping Durgā and in Śaktism became very much prominent and widespread in Assam, especially by the encouragement of the Āhom royal court of Śiva Singha and Phuleśvarī Kuwarī, identifying or putting forward an explanation of the goddess in the concerned image as bearing affinity with or none other than Mānasī can also to be to an extent justifiable.

A possible relation of the concerned image or thinking of the image as reflecting the chariot ritual of the goddess or Devī described in the *Vāmakeśvara Tantra*, *Śiva Purāṇa* and *Devī Purāṇa* also cannot be said as unjustifiable. The chariot ritual in the *Vāmakeśvara Tantra*, as said earlier, is amongst the sixteen important obligatory ritual ceremonies to be performed by Śākta-s for the pleasure of Devī. There are certain other practices amongst the rest fifteen which are still vibrant living traditions and elaborate cultural observances in several regions of eastern India which was and has been for a long period remained a seat of Śākta culture. One of this is the *Nīl Pūjā* or the *Carak Pūjā* annually celebrated in the culture of Bengal and regions having a significant Bengali population. A chariot ritual in honour of Devī *Virajā* or *Vimalā* is annually held elaborately in the culture of Odisha. This chariot festival may be same as that described in the *Vāmakeśvara Tantra*. Presently, we do not come across any chariot ritual held in honour of the Devī in the culture of Assam. But there are ritual observances in the Śākta culture of different regions within Assam where consecrated images or symbols of Devī's are brought out in ceremonial processions from their respective temples or shrines on ornate palanquins and paraded across the towns and villages

surrounding the temples. One of such a living tradition is from the *Dīpteśvarī Devālaya* at Rangīā in Kamrup district of western Assam. The Kāmākhyā Mahāpītha at Guwahati has been annually observing several rituals where the consecrated *Vigraha*-s or icons or other representations of goddess Kāmākhyā are brought out from the temple in ornate palanquins and paraded amidst beating of drums and cymbals in the region around the temple. These Śākta ritual practices have survived the onslaughts of foreign invaders, iconoclasts and the changes in religious, sectarian and cultural situations in the region and are still alive or kept alive to the present day. Though presently no chariot ritual is practiced in the culture of the Śākta temples and Śākta culture of the region, we cannot say that they were never practiced in the time periods preceding the modern era. May be, the chariots in some of these rituals have been replaced by palanquins. The temples like the *Dīpteśvarī Devālaya* and of course, the Kāmākhyā Mahāpītha started receiving elaborate patronage and grants by the Āhom royalty, especially from Rudra Singha, Śiva Singha and his queens onwards. There are records of several ritual observances and festivals held in these temples during their rule, and under their aegis and encouragement, many of which have either become extinct, discontinued, acquired a miniscule form or are gradually altered to suit to the changing cultural environment. The ritual observance of parading a representation or icon of Devī on a chariot might have been conducted in certain Śākta temples in Assam under the aegis of the Āhom court which started to lavishly and passionately accept and patronize Śaktism during the 17th to 18th century CE. The concerned image from the Māghnowā Doul may be thought of as reflecting this possibility. It may be thought of as the artisans possibly trying to portray a Śākta ritual service of parading Devī on a chariot, which might have been already in practice in the Śākta culture of the region during that time, or newly introduced in the Śākta culture of the region under the patronage and encouragement of the Āhom royalty.

It may be possible that a tradition of chariot festival or ritual service of parading an icon of Devī on a decorated chariot was introduced

for a brief period of time in the Śākta culture of region during the rule of Rudra Singha. Might be such a practice, by the orders and wants of Rudra Singha was brought in from neighbouring cultures like that of Odisha which has a rich living tradition of temple chariot festivals. Rudra Singha is said to have created a rank of officers or emissaries known as *Bairāgi*-s whose duty was to travel to different regions and lands in the Indian subcontinent, stay there with their identity concealed, document and study the different cultural practices and visual traditions of these lands and then send these information to the Āhom court, back in Assam. The king Rudra Singha evaluated these information, chose particular cultural practices and then introduced it in the culture of Assam. Chariot festival held in honour of deities might have been one of such cultural practices which was introduced under the aegis of Rudra Singha. The concerned image depicted in the sculptural art of the architecture of Māghnowā Doul may be thought of as a proof of it. The artisans engaged in making the sculptural art of the Māghnowā Doul might have been fascinated by the visual aspects of such a new tradition or practice and they could not restrict themselves from depicting it.

The concerned image is assumed to be a visual documentation of a temple chariot ritual held in honour of a Devī which was newly introduced in the culture of Assam by the encouragement of the Āhom royalty. Now a question will arise— if the image depicts or documents a chariot ritual of Devī newly introduced in the culture of Assam, then it has resemblances or can be related with which known chariot ritual of Devī practiced outside Assam? The number of horses depicted yoked to the chariot in the above image are four. It is seen that in each of the three chariots used during the annual Ratha Yātrā or chariot festival at the Jagannātha temple in Śrīkṣetra or Puri, Odisha, the number of wooden figures of horses depicted are four. The chariot of goddess Subhadrā is known as *Darpadalana* and here too, the number of figures of horses shown as attached are four. So, can we say that the chariot in the concerned image depicts the chariot *Darpadalana* and the goddess riding it as Subhadrā? Does the

iconographic features of the goddess resemble with any of the conceptions of Subhadrā? Subhadrā has been worshipped as Bhuvaneśvarī or in the form of Bhuvaneśvarī using the *Māyā Bīja* in the rituals of Jagannātha temple. Bhuvaneśvarī, as one of the Tāntric Mahāvidyā-s holds a *Aṅkuśa* as one of her attributes. The goddess in the concerned image also holds a *Aṅkuśa*. Its presence tends to bring her closer to Bhuvaneśvarī or Subhadrā in the form of Bhuvaneśvarī but the presence of the club like object in her upper left hand and the unidentified attributes in rest of her hands draws us away from assuming her as Bhuvaneśvarī.

Either the chariot motif, the conception or imagery of a horse drawn chariot is a newly introduced iconographic or stylistic feature, may be the chariot imagery is inspired from the *Darpadalana* chariot of Subhadrā in the tradition of Jagannātha temple, or derived from such visual representation from contemporary traditions outside Assam which portray goddesses or Devī-s riding chariots. The design of the chariot in the image resembles that of chariots portrayed frequently in several paintings of the Rajput traditions, mainly the miniature paintings of the Pāhārī traditions of Basohli, Kāngrā and Guler. We get to see significant number of paintings in the Basohli tradition where Devī-s or goddesses like Durgā and Bhadrakālī riding chariots resembling the design of the chariot featured in the above image from the Māghnowā Doul. But, in these paintings, we mainly find the representation of these chariots as drawn by lions or tigers, not horses. There is a possibility that the chariot in the concerned image was taken by the artisans from such miniature paintings of northern India and horses, not lions or tigers were chosen to be depicted as yoked to the chariot.

The goddess depicted in the concerned image may not have a horse drawn chariot as her attribute in her another portrayals or in another context. She may be a goddess who conventionally does not have a horse drawn chariot as her attribute. Let us now, consider the horse drawn chariot as well as the charioteer as absent in the image and just an addition to the iconographic conception of the goddess

by the artisans following some cultural or individual demands and under the influence of some newly introduced cultural view or practice that made its way into the Śākta culture of Assam. What remains is only the figure of the goddess. The imagery of the goddess without the horse drawn chariot may be thought of as the actual iconographic conception of the goddess. If it is so, then now, who can be this goddess? The combination of attributes held in her hands is unclear. Except the *Aṅkuśa* and the club like object, none of the remaining attributes are distinct and are damaged and faded. We are also not sure whether the club like object is actually a club. It can be said that the goddess may be associated with either of the goddesses *Guhyakālī* or *Bor Kālikā* whose *Vigraha*-s were worshipped in the *Garbhagrha* of the Doul before they were removed during the Burmese invasion during the early 19th century CE.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be seen that the image evokes multiple interpretations. Though the image is partially damaged, still we have tried to decipher and identify it with some related and similar imageries in Purāṇic and Tāntric texts of mainstream Hinduism and also tried to understand it as a rendering of such conceptions and narratives in the lesser or regional cultural traditions like *Sukannānī Ojā pāli* which speak of an association of Devī/Śakti with horses. In the previous paragraphs, we have tried to put forward certain identities for the image considering the context of the architecture — the Māghnowā Doul of which it is a part, and the preferences of the authority, i.e. the Āhom king Rudra Singha who supposedly patronised its construction. None of the interpretations done for the image in the previous paragraphs can be called as definite and conclusive. Much more detailed study and elaborate research is required to be done regarding the iconography, evolution and cultural context of the above image type which is seen as unique to the tradition or practice of architectural relief sculptural art that proliferated in Assam under the aegis of the Āhom dynasty during the late 17th to 18th century CE.

Notes

- ¹ Maheswar Neog, *Pabitra Asam*, Kiran Prakashan Dhemaji, 2008, 66.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ G.V. Tagare, ed. *The Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa (Part IV)*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1984, 1076-1077.
- ⁷ Ibid. 1106, 1107-1115.
- ⁸ C. L. Raina, *Sri Lalita Sahasranama Stotram*, Sharada Publishing House, Delhi, 2000, 90.
- ⁹ Kanak C. Sarma, *Prasanga Devi Durga*, Published by Bhavani Sarma Pvt. Ltd., Guwahati, 1994, 107.
- ¹⁰ P. Tarkaratna, ed. *Devi Puranam*, Nababharat Publishers, Kolkata, 1993, 172.
- ¹¹ J.L. Shastri, ed. *The Śiva Purāṇa (Part IV)*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1970, 1671.
- ¹² Ibid. 1672.
- ¹³ Ibid. 1661.
- ¹⁴ Gudrun Bühnemann, *Iconography of Hindu Tantric Deities*, Aditya Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016, 39.
- ¹⁵ Information from Drona Bhuyan Oja, a renowned Suknānni *Ojāpālī* performer from Satgharia village in Sipajhar in Darrang district of central Assam. he is also the recipient of Bishnu Rabha Silpi Bota award in the year 2021. He has been conferred upon the Padmashree in the year 2024 for his lifelong contribution to preserving the ancient tradition of Sukannani Oja Pali.
- ¹⁶ P. Tarkaratna, ed. *Devi Puranam*, Nababharat Publishers, Kolkata, 1993, 298.
- ¹⁷ K Sāmbaśiva Śāstrī, ed. *The Śilparatna of Śrī Kumāra*, Published under the Authority of the Government of Her Highness The Maharani Regent of Travancore, Trivandrum, 1929, 146.

Taranath Tarkabachaspate and Sanskrit Studies in Colonial Bengal

Pritam Goswami

Abstract

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the rising city of Calcutta was turning into a confluence of different cognitive paradigms and multiple world views, often running and interchanging between secular logics and religious experiments. The English education system, with its material values, was gradually eclipsing the older Sanskrit education. In this situation, a newer form of Sanskrit learning was gradually developing in Sanskrit College just beside Hindu College, the hub of modern Western education in Calcutta. The present article aims to discuss the cognitive sphere of Taranath Tarkabachaspati, the most renowned Sanskrit scholar of nineteenth century Calcutta. It analyses how the old school Sanskrit pundits were gradually utilising modern printing and publishing opportunities in their cognitive navigations. The elaborate efforts of these pundits of Sanskrit College in the editing and publishing of the ancient texts are discussed here. The article altogether explores the possibility of an alternative modernity in the world of a Sanskrit pundit in the colonial capital.

Keywords: Taranath Tarkabachaspate, Sanskrit College, colonial education system, anti-polygamy reforms.

Sanskrit Studies in colonial Bengal had always remained a matter of secondary importance to conventional academia. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the rising city of Calcutta was turning into a confluence of different cognitive paradigms and multiple world views, often running and interchanging between secular logics and religious experiments. The economic policies of laissez-faire had helped

the mercantile capitalism to find a hard step in the capital of a newly acquired territory where, after a series of military confrontations with the South-Asian chiefs and rulers, an atmosphere of peace had reached. The process of turning the 'British Empire in India' into the 'British Empire of India' had begun not only in the basic mechanisms of statecraft but also in generating certain cognitive and ideological spheres which would ensure the legitimacy of this process of transformation. East India Company had already found a group of associates who were intellectually advanced and exposed to the oriental forms of knowledge. With their help newer educational institutes were started to be established to spread and popularise western education from rudimentary to higher education level. The *History of British India* by James Mill (1818) was published but not yet unambiguously accepted as the guiding philosophy of the empire. So, there was hesitation and oscillation regarding the following of 'oriental' or 'western' in the company-sponsored education. As a result of this indecisiveness, within a difference of seven years, Hindu College in Goldighi (1817) and Sanskrit College in Patoldanga Street (1824) were established for the exercise of 'modern western' and 'traditional oriental' knowledge, respectively. Over the decades, these two educational institutes continued to influence and contribute in the formation of something that has been termed by scholars like John Mcguire as the 'colonial mind'.¹ This formation of the colonial mind constituted to the development of the ideals of reasoning, free thinking, and for wider cognitive domains. The nationalist scholars of the early and mid-twentieth century had mellifluously described this development of the bourgeois (with its typical incomplete sense) ethics and cognitive horizon as the 'Bengal renaissance'. The central figure of these developments of new 'cognitive revolution'² were the western educated upper caste Hindu Bengalis popularly known as *bhadraloks*. The *bhadralok* section which was constituted of the western educated upper middle and middle class certainly had multiple others around them. Endless historiographical debate had so long been conducted in defining this otherness depending upon caste, class, religion, socio-

peripheral, financial and even racial differences. However the most complicated form of this otherness is still lesser explored; that is the pre-modern cognitive sphere denying the knowledge systems and the modes of reasoning introduced by colonial modernity. The world of the Sanskrit scholars practicing their versatile forms of academics in their traditional institutions with their indigenous forms of logic, reasoning, ethics and understanding was certainly one of these peripheral groups living outside but in close vicinity of the close concentrated circle of the colonial middle class bourgeoisie. Among the two educational institutes that we have mentioned earlier, the former, the Hindu College had drawn almost the entire attention of the conventional academics in understanding the contribution in forming the colonial nous. Sanskrit College was always discussed with a bit of grudge and connivance. It was considered nothing but an extended structure of the traditional Sanskrit school or *chatuspāṭhī*.³ In fact, most of the scholars and noted figures associated with this college always wanted to see the institution as a state-sponsored *chatuspāṭhī*. Any effort of modernisation and even the slightest change of the syllabi by introducing anything new were looked at with considerable reluctance and suspicion. It is not surprising that the greatest scholar of this institution will also be rather unwelcome and vaguely noticed in the colonised society which was in a relentless effort of explaining itself in the light of western secular thoughts and the power of reasoning.

The Orientalist Quest: Place of the Traditional Pundits in the Greater Academic Studies

By the year 1784, William Jones had founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in the new colonial city. The aftereffect of the growing industrial capitalism in the West and the radically violent bourgeois uprising against the decaying aristocracy in France caused a rather distaste and terror towards the ideal of industrial progress and the modernity among a group of Western European intellectuals. In search of psychological solace they had turned towards the peaceful, unchanging and ancient orient. The orientalism growing from the late eighteenth

century in the colonised countries hence served to satisfy the image of a 'dreamland' of the Europeans, most of whom had never denied the industrial facilities and dared to appear in their dreamland. The institution of the colonial metropolis had tried to analyse the 'Asiatic' literature, scriptures, and other 'ancient treasures' of different Asian places mostly, of India. In this process, there developed a dichotomy, which Brian Allison Hatcher mentioned as the obscurity of the Pundits in the growing trend of orientalism.⁴ The orientalist research begun from William Jones, Charles Wilkins, John Colebrook and Horace Homan Wilson to the theorisation of 'Aryanisation' by Max Müller the practice of discovering the orient through the European eyes has continued.⁵ This process had given birth to many theories that were proved utopian later on. The process of analysis had drastically ignored the traditional indigenous ways of commentaries (*tīkā*), analysis (*bhāṣya*), discussions (*vṛtti*), and discussions on the commentaries (*dvivṛtti*) of the Sanskrit texts and the scriptures. As a result the European knowledge system and the theories of studying ancient remained secluded from the traditional Sanskrit scholarship. Many meanings, explanations (*byākhyā*), and understanding of different scriptural terms had changed in the modern western analysis of the orient. Shibaji Bandyopadhyay showed in his amazing article on *Bhagawat Gita* how the meaning of the word *karma* in the 2.47 verse in the *Gita* (*karamaṇyevādhikāraṣṭe mā phaleṣu kadācana*) had been refashioned in translations to develop a national motto. What is significant is that since its first translation by the orientalist Charles Wilkins in 1785 the word *karma* has differed from the views of pre-colonial Indian commentators.⁶ In the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the pundits had never been considered anything more than the translators. Between the years 1784 and 1828 in this institution which was devoted to the search or oriental knowledge, no members, with the origin of orient were allowed. Even in the first phase of the inclusion of Indian members there were no Sanskrit scholars included here (the first members were Dwarakanath Tagore, Sivchandra Das, Maharaja Baidyanath Roy, Maharaja Bunwari Govind Roy, Raja Kalikrishna

Bahadur, Rajchunder Das, Ram Comul Sen, and Prosanna Kumar Tagore).⁷ Later also the opinions and explanations of the pundits were never taken into accounts respectfully.

Sanskrit College was founded forty years after (1824) the Asiatic Society. From the very beginning of the institution, apart from teaching Sanskrit to a group of ambitious pupils who were joining the College in the attraction of both knowledge and scholarships, denying the *ṭols* and *chatuspāṭhīs*, the pundits were busy in publishing, commenting, and restructuring the Sanskrit texts by using their traditional knowledge, ideals, and understanding of the scriptures. Far before Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Taranath Tarkabachaspati had brought the manuscripts of the commentaries of Mallinath from Baranasi and published with Kalidas's *Kumārasambhavam* and *Raghuvamśam* (around 1852), the pundits of Sanskrit College had started making their own commentaries on Kalidas. In 1832, three scholars, Gobindaram Upadhyay (professor of grammar), Nathuram Shastri (professor of rhetoric and logic), and Premchandra Tarkabagis had published their own commentary on *Raghuvamśam*.⁸ Their traditional knowledge and scholarship were reflected in the studies of grammar (*vyākaraṇ*), rhetoric (*alankār*), literature (*kāvya*), law (*smṛiti*), logic (*nyaya*), astrology (*jyotiṣ*), mathematics (*gaṇit-jyotiṣ*), and philosophy (mostly *Vedānta*) in the Sanskrit College. Among the orientalists, apart from Horace Homan Wilson and later E. B. Cowell, no one could come close to the world of these *pundits*. According to Harishchandra Kaviratna (student of Sanskrit College and the son of Girishchandra Vidyaratna, a renowned professor of Sanskrit college), it was Horace Homan Wilson who, for the first time, understood the very nature of these pundits and wanted to provide them a *chatuspāṭhī* like ambience to them.⁹ Whenever any threat had appeared for the existence of Sanskrit college, scholars like Premchandra Tarkabagis or Joygopal Tarkalankar had appealed to Wilson in England (1845).¹⁰ As late as in the 1870's the key orientalist of the Asiatic society, Raja Bahadur Rajendralal Mitra was terribly hostile towards the Sanskrit college and considered the students of the college to be uneducated.¹¹ The academic attention

that the Asiatic Researches, Bibliotheca, Epigraphica, and the Sanskrit series published by Asiatic Society had received from the contemporary intelligentsia have totally eclipsed the huge number of Sanskrit texts published, commented on, and organised by the pundits of Sanskrit College with their own viewpoints. These efforts of publishing Sanskrit texts along with new commentaries had reached their pinnacle with the effort of our central figure, Taranath Tarkabachaspati, — and his son Jivananda Vidyasagar, who also became a professor at Sanskrit College. Even in this process of publication, they clashed with the Asiatic Society and its central figure, Rajendralal Mitra.

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, in his satirical writing, *Kamalākānter Daptar*, composed in the 1870s portrayed a weird situation where the protagonist Kamalakanta, under the influence of opium, hallucinated the market of fruits. He found that the Brahmin pundits clad in their typical attires were selling dried coconuts and trying to attract buyers by whimpering about their poverty. Kamalakanta agreed to buy the coconuts and asked whether the pundits had cutlass to break the coconuts. The pundits answered that they did not use cutlasses. They used to break the coconuts by biting those. Meanwhile, Kamalakanta saw a shop of 'experimental sciences' run by certain Messrs. Brown Jones and Robinson which was established in the year 1757 on the field of Plassey. It was selling delicious berries, pistachios, nuts, etc. Suddenly those European shopkeepers jumped on the shop of the pundits and they fled away desperately. The Europeans then took away those dry coconuts, broke the hard coir with modern instruments, and enjoyed the shells and water. Amazed by these strange developments, Kamalakanta asked the Europeans the meaning of their weird behaviour. The Europeans answered that this was called the *Asiatic Research*.¹² From the beginning of colonial rule to latter parts of the nineteenth century, the relationship between the pundits and the modern oriental researchers was similar to the amazing descriptions provided by Bankimchandra. The central figure of our article Taranath Tarkabachaspati (1812-1884), had grown and developed his world of knowledge and understanding of the *śāstras* during this

very period. To understand his exploration of the world of the scriptures and also his socio-cultural understanding of the world around him, this very background of unfavourable connection between the traditional understanding of India's past and the European reconstruction of the same is extremely significant.

Taranath in the background of Early Nineteenth Century: Ancestry and the Student Life

To know about the ancestors and the early life of Taranath, we have two biographies composed by Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna (younger brother of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar) and Taradhan Tarkabhushan (younger brother of Taranath). Both were published in 1892, just the next year of the death of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891). The biographies, however, differ from each other in their narratives of the ancestors of Taranath. According to Shambhuchandra, Taranath's grandfather Ramram Tarkasiddhanta lived in the village Baichandi of Barishal district. Sometimes in late seventeenth century Ramram's ascendants migrated from the village Sarol of Jessore and settled in Barishal. Ramram, a renowned scholar in different branches of knowledge, travelled in various parts of north India and defeated the pundits in the large synods in the places like Varanasi, Trihut, and Patna. He also did higher studies in Sanskrit in Varanasi. Tilak Chand Rai, the king of Burdwan (1744-1770) had organised a huge workshop of the pundits near Kalna on the occasion of the opening (*pratiṣṭhā*) of a huge mere. Impressed by the knowledge of Ramram, Tilak Chand had offered him a land grant in the area called Ambika near present Kalna.¹³ However, Taradhan mentioned that Ramram's father Mukundaram Tarkabagis was a reputed *smarta* (scholar in *smṛti*; the Hindu law codes) of late eighteenth century who used to live in the village called Shanhati situated in the Norail subdivision of the district of Jessore.¹⁴ Mukundaram had expired when Ramram was in his teens. After the death of Mukundaram, Ramram sold all his ancestral possessions and moved to Varanasi where he had studied *kāvya*, *alankār*, *darśan*, *Vedānta* and *smṛti*. In Trihut, the European Sadr

judge was impressed by his knowledge, and in his recommendation, Ramram was appointed as the *judge pundit* (the pundits who used to explain the Hindu laws in the civil courts before the publication of *Byabostha-Durpan* in 1854 by Shyamachurun Sarkar Sharma) and *Sadr Amin* in the *dewani* court of Burdwan. After getting this appointment, he had temporarily stayed in the village Ankola near Kalna, and then he had permanently settled in Ambika.¹⁵ There is no reference to the land grant by Tilakchand in Taradhan's narrative. Brian A. Hatcher, in his article "Whats Become of the Pandit? Rethinking the condition of the Sanskrit scholars in Colonial Bengal" had taken Shambhuchandra's opinion to be authentic and tried to prove the patronage of Tilak Chand and the Burdwan Raj behind the later career of these *Bangal Bhattacharjis*.¹⁶ However, Taradhan's narratives cannot be denied altogether. Taranath's prolonged odds with the Burdwan Raj in his later years on different religious issues support the same. However, it is mentioned in both biographies that Ramram apart from being in East India Company's service, used to run a large *chatuspāthī*. Here we find the effort of a Brahmin pundit to opt of his traditional profession with the newly accepted service under company's rule. After the death of Ramram, his sons had divided these two professions among them. Ramram's second son Durgadas Nyayapanchanan and his sons worked as the *judge pundits* and the *sadr-amin* of Burdwan court. Ramram's youngest son Kalidas Sarbobhouma had first established a large and permanent *chatuspāthī* in Kalna which was flooded with students even in the third decade of nineteenth century. According to Taradhan, the number of students had increased so much by the 1820s that Kalidas had to stop teaching grammar (*byākaraṇ*) and literature (*kāvya*).¹⁷ He used to teach only the difficult subjects like old and new *nyāya*. The biographies even differ over the birth year of Taranath, the eldest son of Kalidas. According to Taradhan the year is 1806, and in Shambhuchandra's account it is 1812. The service records preserved in the Sanskrit College archive mention the appointment, payment, and retirement of Taranath however supports the latter opinion. Taranath's primary and basic

education is an ideal picture of the contemporary education of the Brahmin boys in the *pāṭhshālās* and *ṭols*. According to Taradhan, Taranath had initially practiced the writings of original (*asamjuktā*) and combined (*samjuktā*) letters of Bengali on palm leaves and also practiced different indigenous formats of arithmetic including *kodākia*, *gonḍakia*, *ponkia*, *daśakia*, and *serkia*. He also practiced writing different forms of formal and informal letters.¹⁸ According to Sambhuchandra, all these trainings were completed in the village *pāṭhśālā* run by a teacher named Khoda Krishnamohan.¹⁹ After all these basic educations were over Kalidas arranged his sacred thread ceremony at the age of ten. He then admitted Taranath in his *ṭol* and first taught him the art of recitation (*ābr̥ttipāṭh*), and then the explanation (*byākhyāpāṭh*) of the grammar *Mugdhabodh* of Vopadeva Sharma. This was followed by the studies of *Amarkosh* and *Bhaṭṭikāvya*. According to Taradhan, Kalidas Sarbabhouma, unlike the contemporary professors in the *ṭols* did not shift to different texts completing only the parts of the previous one. He used to finish any *kāvya* or *nāṭaka* (drama) that he once started. Taranath had studied the epics of *Śishupalbadham* of Magha and *Kumarsambhabam* of Kalidas under the guidance of his cousin brother Tarinicharan Nyayaratna²⁰

By the year 1830, Ramkamal Sen, the secretary of Sanskrit College, had convinced his friend Kalidas Sarbobhouma to send his son Taranath to Calcutta to join the Sanskrit college. Ramkamal Sen was a leading member of the Dharmasabhā established by Radhakanta Dev and one of the key figures of the anti-Brāhma orthodox Hindu sections in Calcutta. According to Shambhuchandra, this devoutness of Ramkamal towards Hinduism convinced Kalidas about the protection of his son from being converted to Christianity. This clearly shows the first barrier of the traditional pundits in venturing into capital of British rule.²¹ From Brajendranath Bandyopadhyā's writings on the history of Sanskrit College, we find that Ramkanta Vidyalankar, a senior professor of Sanskrit College (1824-25), used to commute daily from Baidyabati to Calcutta. He refused to stay in Calcutta, where cow-slaughtering was common.²² On 10th May, 1830, Taranath

had joined Sanskrit College. Unlike his favourite student and with whom he was often compared, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Taranath had entered Sanskrit College at a much higher age with considerable Sanskrit education. Unlike Vidyasagar, he had not attended the classes of *vyākaraṇ* and joined directly in the classes of *alankār* (rhetoric) of the reputed lexicographer Premchandra Tarkabāgīsh. While being in the class of *alankār* he also completed his course of *kāvya* under pundit Jaygopal Tarkālankār and copied many hand written manuscripts which were in the personal collection of Jaygopal. By taking advantage of the non-definite demarcation of different levels of classes in Sanskrit College, Taranath joined the classes of Pundit Yogodhyan Mishra who used to teach the compulsory *gaṇit-jyotiṣ* (mathematics and astrology) for the students of *kāvya* and *alankār*. He had studied the texts of *Līlāvati*, *Bijgaṇit*, *Grahalāghav*, *Sūryasiddhānta*, *Goladhyāya* and *khagol* from Yogodhyan.²³ In his later life Taranath would frequently practice the *jyotiṣa* and also teach it to his students. After completing the courses of *kāvya*, *alankāra*, and *jyotiṣ*, Taranath had joined the classes of *Vedānta* under Nathuram Shastri, a reputed scholar from Gujarat. On 10th May, 1831, Taranath had joined the classes of *nyāya* under the famous scholar Nimaichandra Śiromoṇi. While he was under this class of *nyāya*, Nimaichandra was appointed to check the proofs of the *Mahabharata* edited in the Asiatic Society. Because of his failing health, Nimaichandra entrusted this responsibility of proof checking to his student Taranath. While undergoing this laborious project, Taranath had thoroughly gone through various manuscripts of the *Mahabharata* which had later helped him significantly in preparing some of his monumental works including his magnum opus the *Vachaspatya Abhidhānam*.²⁴ Even when he was still under the classes of *nyāya* he had studied *Vedānta* and *Sāṅkhya* in the classes of Shambhuchandra Vachaspati, and Hindu law codes (*smṛti*) under Ramchandra Vidyabagis. Shambhuchandra has mentioned that throughout his student life, Taranath had copied many handwritten Sanskrit manuscripts covering the disciplines of grammar, literature, rhetoric, six Hindu schools of philosophy, law, and astrology. While

being in the class of *nyāya* (1834), Taranath had met his student, friend, and later an ideological opponent, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, who used to join many discussions (*tarkasabhā*) along with Taranath. While still being a student of the class of *nyāya*, Taranath was offered the post of professor of rhetoric at Sanskrit College, but he refused to take the post as he always wanted to carry out his further studies in Varanasi. It is noteworthy that Taranath had always been known as the 'Professor: Grammar first class' later in his career at Sanskrit College.²⁵ Most of his famous compositions including the commentary *Sarala* of *Siddhānta Kaumudī* of Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita, the texts like *Shabdaratnākar*, and *Shabdastommohanidhi* are all composed on grammar and lexicography. But Taranath had never studied grammar in Sanskrit College. Here, he had helped to preserve and expand the tradition of the indigenous Sanskrit schools or *śols*. From Taradhan's narrative, we come to know that after completing all his courses and attaining vast knowledge in *nyāya*, *vedānta*, *sāṅkhya* and *smṛti*, Taranath had turned disdainful towards the disciplines like literature or rhetoric. He used to call these disciplines to be the *śiśuśāstras* or insignificant disciplines. This typical cognitive paradigm clearly indicates the old world of the Sanskrit scholars and also explains why their old fashioned thinking could not be accepted by the modern Bengali intelligentsia trained in Western ideals of knowledge.²⁶ However, there might be substantial exaggeration in Taradhan's claim. Among the list of the huge number of texts edited and commented by Taranath, we find different poetries and dramas composed mainly by Kalidas, Shudraka, and Sriharsa. In the year 1835, Taranath had completed his studies in Sanskrit college and was conferred the title *Tarkabachaspate* by the education council. By 1836, Taranath had successfully cleared the examination of *Smṛtis* arranged by the law committee and proved himself eligible for the post of *judge pundit*. In 1838, after the sudden demise of Tarinicharan Nyayaratna, his post was offered to Taranath. But during this time, the post of *judge pundit* in Burdwan civil court was abolished, and Taranath got the appointment only of a *sadr amin* which he refused considering the post as low graded one.²⁷ By the

same year, Taranath had visited Varanasi, where he first studied the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyam* of Śrīharṣa, a most intriguing text of *nyāya* from an ascetic named Biswarup Swami. Later he also studied the grammar *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Paṇini with its commentary *Mahābhāṣya* by Patañjali, *Vedānta*, and parts of *Vedas*, along with commentaries, *Sāṅkhya* texts, and many tracts on *jyotiṣ*.²⁸ It is to be mentioned here that a few years later, when Debendranath Tagore had sent four Sanskrit scholars: Anandachandra Bhattacharya, Ramanath Bhattacharya, Taraknath Bhattacharya, and Baneshwar Bhattacharya, to Varanasi for the studies of the *Vedas*, the pundits of the Saraswati Matha in Varanasi had refused to teach them. So they had to return after studying only the *Upaniṣadas*, and *Vedānta*.²⁹

According to Taradhan, in Varanasi Taranath became a regular opponent of Rajaram Shastri, the famous scholar of *nyāya*. Taradhan mentioned that Taranath used to consider the Marathi pundits in Varanasi to be of immoral character (*mlechhāchāri*) for their habit of consuming onions. He rejected to join in scriptural discussions with them. This association of personal behaviour and beliefs with the world of cognitive exploration indicates the pre-modern non-secular world of the Sanskrit pundits.³⁰ It is mention worthy that throughout his career as a pundit, Taranath was always in bitter relations with his Marathi counterparts. While in 1862, Taranath had published his commentary on *Siddhānta Kaumudī*, but the Marathi Pundits rejected it to be something unauthentic and also denied Taranath to be a specialist in *byākaraṇ*.³¹ In his opinions regarding the Marathi pundits, Taranath was always in contradiction with Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. From Vidyasagar's biography which was composed by Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, we find that Vidyasagar was always in favour of the Marathi pundits more than their Bengali counterparts. While staying in Varanasi he often used to invite them to his house.³² The ideological world of the two Brahmin pundits started getting separated from the beginning on an issue which flows through the edges of secular notions.

Taranath as a Professor in the Sanskrit College

By the year 1844 (December), Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, the then head of the department of Sanskrit at Fort William College, had reached Kalna, and after much persuasion, finally convinced Taranath to join the educational service as a professor of grammar in Sanskrit College. Vidyasagar had collected all the certificates (*upādhipatra*) from Taranath and submitted to Major G. T. Marshall, the then secretary of the same college. On 23rd January, 1845, Taranath joined Sanskrit College at the salary of a ninety rupees per month. By that time it was the highest scale of payment for the professors.³³ He retired on 1st January, 1874 with a salary of one hundred and fifty rupees. From the history of Sanskrit College by Gopikamohan Bhattacharya, we come to know that after the retirement of Premchandra Tarkabagish and Jaynarayan Tarkapanchanan, there was a temporary shortage of professors in Sanskrit College. So Taranath had to temporarily teach in the classes of *nyāya* and *alankāra* too.³⁴ While referring to Vidyasagar's meeting with Taranath in 1844, Shambhuchandra had mentioned that Taranath was teaching the students in Kalna after establishing a *chatuspāṭhī* there. However Major Marshall, in his recommendation paper, wrote:

"He does not teach a "Tale" or public school, but he has, I am credibly informed several private pupils....."³⁵

While referring about Taranath's profound scholarship in different disciplines Marshall wrote:

"In every department he is, in my opinion, is far above mediocrity and in several branches of science I doubt if any Pundit can compete with him namely, in the Upanishads of the Vedas, in the Vedanta, Sankhya, Memangsa, Jyotisha and Patanjala".³⁶

Marshall also ensured that Taranath's appointment as the professor had taken place completely in the interest and initiatives of the Sanskrit College Committee. Taranath had not appealed personally for the same post. Marshall wrote in his recommendation

"This recommendation is made altogether from a conviction of this individual's superior qualifications and without any solicitation direct

or indirect on his own part; only his willingness to accept the appointment if offered to him; having been ascertained".³⁷

From the reports of different years in *General Reports* of the Public Instructions, we find that his name was spelled in different ways in the government's documents. In the report of 1844-45, the name is 'Tarannauth Sarma'.³⁸ In the report of 1845-46, it is 'Taranat Sarmana'.³⁹ In the report of 1848-49, it is 'Tarannath Sarmana'.⁴⁰ and finally in the report of 1851-52, it is 'Taranath Tarakabāchaspate'.⁴¹ It was from 1851-52 onwards this particular spelling was repeated throughout his service record. In all the reports he has been mentioned as the 'Professor: First of Grammar'. Apart from these posts of professor, Taranath also temporarily worked as the inspector of the *Bangla pathshala* under Hindu School and Hindu College.⁴² Taranath's career of professorship is full of high acclaim from his students and juniors. Harishcandra Kaviratna had written in his memoir (1925):

"He was well up in all disciplines whether it was *byakaran*, *smriti*, *alankar*, or *nyaya*. Apart from these he had also studied the *Vedas* and the *Upanishadas*. By then he was the only pundit who knew the grammar of Panini. He could speak in Sanskrit freely and flawlessly. If the pundits from Punjab or Bombay had visited Sanskrit College, it was only he, who used to converse with them in Sanskrit..... From his voluminous *Vachaspatya Abhidhana* one can make an idea of the vastness of his knowledge. There is no end of the Sanskrit texts which he has edited and commented... . He used to teach us *Mugdhabodh* and *Raghuvangsham*. I am unable to describe or measure his knowledge in Sanskrit. He was the Jupiter among the professors in the Sanskrit College".⁴³

Till 1840, Nimaichandra Shiromoni, the professor of *nyāya* in Sanskrit College, owned the right to receiving the invitation letter from the pundits of the districts of eastern Bengal, including Dhaka-Bikrampur, Jessore, Maimansingh, etc. The scholars of western Bengal had to accept the challenge and visit eastern Bengal to defeat the pundits in the arguments on scriptural studies. This honour of getting the invitation letter was known as *ekpatri*. During Nimaichandra's

time as the professors of Sanskrit college used to receive the government's salary, were denied the highest scale of honorarium (*bidāy*). They used to get twenty five rupees as *biday* in every discussion. Humiliated by this discrimination, Nimaichandra declared that until the professors of Sanskrit College receive the *bidāy* on the highest scale, they would not accept it. After the death of Nimaichandra, the post of *ekpatri* was held by Bhabashankar Vidyaratna, a pundit of traditional *tol*. After Bhabashankar the honour was offered to Nimaichandra's dearest student Taranath. During his time that the professors of Sanskrit College got the *bidāy* of one hundred rupees, and Taranath remained the *ekpatri* for the longest period.⁴⁴ In 1863, Kaliprasanna Singha took his expensive initiative of translating the entire *Mahabharata* of Vyasa in Bengali. In 1867, while translating the *anushashanparva* (the chapter on law and canon), he had to translate the sub-chapters on salvation (*mokshaparvadhyāya*), and there were different complicated verses in it (*vyāskut*). Among his acolytes he found no pundit to have command in all branches of Hindu philosophy and had to take the help of Taranath. It was Taranath's involvement that made the translation possible and complete. Kaliprasanna had written in the introductory note of this chapter

"In translation of this chapter, I have got great support from Taranath Tarkabachaspate, the renowned professor at the Government Sanskrit Institution in Calcutta. Without his assistance, I could never make a proper translation of the highly complicated connotations of the verses of the *Mahabharata*".⁴⁵

Notably, in every chapter of the *Mahabharata* translated by Kaliprasanna there used to be an introductory note. But apart from Taranath none of these pundits were mentioned in those introductions.

However, Taranath's real fame and repute did not lie on these appraisals of being a great professor or his assistance in these translation works. It majorly rested on his vast number of Sanskrit texts which he had published after getting those edited and commented

among which the most well-known was his commentary (*ṭikā*) *Sarala* of the grammatical work *Siddhānta-Kaumudī* of Bhaṭṭojī Dikṣita composed in sixteenth century.

Taranath in His World of Shastras: His Role As Master Editor and Commentator

Taranath started editing the Sanskrit texts on behalf of the Sanskrit College in 1851. By the year 1858, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, who was always reluctant of new writings in Sanskrit had resigned from the post of the principal of Sanskrit College.⁴⁶ The charge was taken over by Edward Byles Cowell, the former professor of Sanskrit in Cambridge. He was an inspired student of Max Müller and extremely fond of composing Sanskrit verses. Since late 1850's Taranath's business initiatives were in tumult 1862, it faced a major setback. Cowell had advised Taranath to start editing and publishing the Sanskrit texts, which were still in the form of obscure handwritten manuscripts.⁴⁷ From his two biographies and the history of Sanskrit College composed by Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, we find the list of Sanskrit texts published, edited, and commented by Taranath. Between 1851 and 1862, Taranath had published Kalidas's *Kumārasambhavam* and *Raghuvamśam* along with the commentary of Mallinath. Based on some extremely difficult grammatical texts like *Śabdenduśekhar*, *Śabdakaustubha*, and *Baiyākaranbhuṣaṇsār* he composed a bilingual (Bengali and Sanskrit) text *Śabdaratnākar*. Apart from these, he composed *Bākyamañjarī*, commentary of *Dhananjay Byayog*, *Chandamañjarī*, *Gayāśraddhādīpaddhati*, and *Gayāmāhātmya*.⁴⁸ By 1862, Taranath started to prepare his first masterpiece, *Sarala*, the commentary of *Siddhāntakaumudī*, which needs to be discussed in detail.

Since pre-colonial period, the pundits in Bengal used to study mostly the *Mugdhabodham* of Vopdeva Shastri, the *Kalāpavyākaraṇam* of Śarabarmā, and the *Amarkoṣa* of Amarsingha. None of these grammars were very useful for properly teaching of grammar to the students of Sanskrit College. So, it was required to bring the original

manuscript of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini and the huge *Siddhānta Kaumudī* of Bhaṭṭojī Dikṣit (written mostly on the basics of Pāṇini) from Varanasi and to publish those with scholarly commentaries. Education Department of Bengal had declared that they would buy two hundred copies of the published *Siddhānta Kaumudī* in two thousand and one hundred rupees. Rajendralal Mitra, the central figure and the chief manuscriptologist of the Asiatic Society, appealed to the government to be entrusted with this responsibility. He agreed to provide those two hundred copies in twelve hundred rupees. E.B. Cowell however, reported to the education department that Rajendralal should not be the first choice for this huge responsibility as he had not prepared a single commentary yet.⁴⁹ He recommended the name of Taranath and remarked “I question if anyone in Bengal is equal to him”.⁵⁰ Taranath had made a painstaking effort of preparing *Sarala* which was warmly accepted in the academia. Between 1874 and 1876 there were three editions of it. Gopikamohan Bhattacharya mentioned that *Sarala* was included in the Sanskrit syllabus of different universities in Germany. Several pundits of Varanasi had also warmly accepted it as an example of erudite scholarship in grammar (*byākaraṇ*). The government of Bombay’s presidency had bought fifty copies of this book and the principal of the Queen’s College in Banaras had also bought one hundred copies. Cowell in his correspondence to the director of education department had written:

“The book is well-done and it is a great boon to Sanskrit learning that we have now a standard edition of such a valuable work”.⁵¹

According to Shambhuchandra, few Marathi pundits, out of their literary envy, had alleged Taranath before a higher rank government official of North Western Province’s education department and got embarrassed in the end. It is noteworthy that Marathi pundits were never favourable towards *Sarala*.⁵² Years later when Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar wrote his anonymous sarcastic texts targeting Taranath, he had frequently used and quoted those criticisms of the Marathi scholars.⁵³

Taranath's composition and publication of *Sarala* was a single and exceptional achievement. Brian A. Hatcher had shown in his article that since this phase of the nineteenth century the pundits were gradually getting sidelined and ridiculed for their old-fashioned style of argument and also individual orthodoxy. Even the Sanskrit learned scholars ranging from Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar to Vanamalichandra Vedantatirtha were gradually getting vocal about the obsolete thinking patterns and analysis by the pundits.⁵⁴ The old Brahmanical scholarship appeared to be back-dated and illogical before the newly developed 'bourgeois morale'. Bankimchandra Chattopdhyay, the literary *guru* of the contemporary Bengali youth, was loud in mocking the writing style of the Sanskrit pundits. His followers, like Akshaychandra Sarkar, were ridiculing the newspaper *Somprakash*, which was predominated by the writings of the students of Sanskrit College (Taranath's colleague and junior Dwarakanath Vidyabhushan was the editor) as the *bhattacharjirchana* (garbage of the Bhattacharjis).⁵⁵ While referring to the interpretation of Kalidas's poetry, Bankimchandra referred to Haraprasad Shastri (another student of Sanskrit College) that a proper and standard literary analysis should follow the style of the German scholars' style.⁵⁶ During such a period, when in the cultural atmosphere, the traditional *Sanskritic* understandings were practically rejected, the entrustment of such a large government initiative was certainly a solo example. Taranath's teaching and analysing style may often appear to be a product of the older format of the *ṭols*. Harishchandra Kaviratna had mentioned that during their college days in Sanskrit College none of the senior professors including Taranath used to consult books but carried everything in their memory.⁵⁷ Critiquing this tendency, Bankimchandra has remarked in his article 'The Intellectual Superiority of Europe':

"All who have studied under the older generations of Bhattacharyas of the *ṭols*, know, as I have the good fortune to know, that of the wealth of learning which flowed from their lips, much had no record except the memory of the professors. This was specially the case with artistic and simplistic knowledge, where another motive – professional jealousy–

came into play. Each discoverer, anxious to confine to himself and his own circle the discovery at which he had arrived, never trusted it to writing and satisfied himself with communicating it to his pupils in confidence. To this jealousy we owe that India has now utterly lost so many of her ancient arts and so much of her ancient sciences.”⁵⁸

In such a situation the preference of Taranath over Rajendralal, highly educated in western methodologies and the chief figure of the leading institution of oriental research, clearly shows how well known was Taranath’s depth of Sanskrit knowledge. Cowell often referred to him as an ‘encyclopedia of Sanskrit learning’.⁵⁹ One of the leading figure of the native Christian world and a former radical young Bengal, Reverend Krishnamohan Banerjee, had also referred several times that Taranath was one of the greatest exponents of Sanskrit studies in Calcutta.⁶⁰ Between 1864 and 1873, Taranath edited *Ratnavali* of Śrīharṣa with his own commentary. On the request of the Maharaja of Dhenkanol (Odisha) he prepared the commentary *Siddhāntabindusār* of the Vedantic tract *Siddhāntabindu* of Madhusudan Saraswati. *Siddhāntabindu* itself was a *bibṛti* or expanded commentary of the *Brahmastotra* of Shankaracharya. Apart from making a *tadbṛti* (commentary of a commentary) of *Siddhāntabindu*, Taranath had prepared a separate commentary named *Brahmastotrabyākhyā*. In the same year, he had prepared a collection of Vedic *mantras* and rituals named *Tulādānpaddhati*. Five hundred copy of it was bought by queen Swarnamayi of Cossimbazar Raj.⁶¹ Between 1869 and 1870, he edited the ninth to seventeenth sections (*sarga*) of *Kumārasambhavam*, the drama *Beṇīsaṁhāram* of Bhaṭṭanārāyan with commentary, dramas like *Bṛttaratnākar*, *Mudrārākṣasa* (Vishakh Dutta), *Mālavikāgnimitram* (Kalidas), and the grammatical text *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Paṇini with commentaries. He also composed *Āśubodh Byākaraṇ* (later included in the syllabus of the University of London) and *Śabdastommahānidhi*, the first dictionary ever prepared in Sanskrit in European modeled alphabetical way.⁶² Between 1871 and 1873, he edited and published multiple Sanskrit texts with his own commentaries. The list included *Dhāturūpādarśa*, *Sāṁkhyaakaumudī*, *Bhāminībilās*, *Daśakumāracarit*,

Kādamvari, *Hitopodeś*, *Sarvadarśansangraha*, *Kavikalpadrum*, *Paribhāṣenduśekhara*, *Liṅgānuśāsan*, and *Gāyatrībhyākhyā*. In 1872, he became involved in the much debated issue with Vidyasagar, which not only soured their personal relation but portrayed Taranath as reactionary figure in the future. In this year, he composed his Sanskrit text *Bohubibāha* (Polygamy) challenging Vidyasagar's tract, which claimed the scriptural forbiddance of polygamy.⁶³ In 1873, he published the first volume of his magnum opus, the *Vācaspatya Abhidhānam*, a comprehensive and encyclopedic dictionary prepared in the alphabetical order. The plan and arrangements for composing this mountainous job began as early as 1865. In 1865, Henry Woodrow, the director of the education department had granted 10000 rupees for the compilation of the text, and in 1884, the then director A.W. Croft had arranged another 5000 rupees. But to complete this multi-volume text, more than 80000 rupees were spent most of which was supplied by his son Jivananda Vidyasagar. Before *Vachasptya* no other comprehensive dictionary (not even the mammoth *Shabdakalpadruma* of Radhakanta Dev) was prepared in alphabetical order.⁶⁴ Taradhan mentioned that for this encyclopedic dictionary Taranath had collected massive number of Sanskrit manuscripts on grammar, literature, rhetoric, astrology, geography (*khagol*), six Hindu schools of philosophy (*ṣaḍadarśan*), *Purāṇas*, Vedic *sūtras*, *Tantra*, *Śaiva*, and *Vaishnava* philosophies, music, military sciences, mathematics, medicines, *dharmashastras*, *Yogashastras*, architecture, foods, science of horses, and some Vedic ritual codes.⁶⁵ In the symposium of the Oriental Congress in London, Max Müller had been loud in acclaim of this amazing work.⁶⁶ Shambhuchandra and Krishnakamal Bhattacharya's reminiscence mention that Taranath asked financial support from Krishnakamal Bhattacharya, Maheshchandra Nyāyaratna, and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar for preparing this mammoth work. But none of them had contributed anything significant.⁶⁷ Vidyasagar was critical of Sanskrit writing and considered it useless in recent ages. When he had written his sarcastic tract *Abar Ati Alpo Hoilo* mocking and attacking Taranath, then also he mocked his effort of writing a

mammoth dictionary which was always vulnerable to different grammatical errors and wrong information.⁶⁸

Apart from this huge number of Sanskrit works, Taranath had some compositions in Bengali as well. In 1906 Vikram Samvat (1851 CE) a printing press named *Biswa Prakash*, was founded in Potoldanga street to publish of Devnāgrī and Bengali works. Taranath had published a Bengali almanac from there. He had compiled the opinions of Adi Aryabhaṭṭa, *Sūryasiddhānta* of Barahamihir, and the *Golādhyāya* of Bhaskaracharya about the figure and motion of the earth in Bengali in the rhythm of *poyar*.⁶⁹ Taranath had also written a small rejoinder in Bengali named *Lati Thakile Pore Na* against Vidyasagar's sarcastic attack.⁷⁰ Most of these Bengali works are lost now. But there some Bengali correspondence of Taranath when he was the inspector of the Bangla Pathshala working under the Hindu College. The lucidity of that correspondence can certainly place a challenge towards Bankim's homogenisation of the lurid nature of the prose of the Sanskrit pundits.⁷¹

Taranath-Vidyasagar Conflict: Scriptural Debate Over the Anti-polygamy Movement

The incident which had projected Taranath as a reactionary figure before his contemporaries and got him involved in a lifelong bitterness with Vidyasagar was the publication of his Sanskrit tract *Bahubibaho* (polygamy) in 1872. Vidyasagar, since as early as 1858 (after the widow remarriage act was passed) remained instrumental in convincing the government to pass an anti-polygamy act to stop polygamy among the Hindus, especially the Brahmins. Since the eighteenth century due to the curse of *kaulinya* system, polygamy among the *kulin* Brahmins had reached an alarming situation.⁷² The situation had turned worse since Debibar Ghatak had introduced the system of *mel-bandhan* inside the fold of *kaulinya*. This made it impossible to find suitable bridegrooms for the maidens of the *kulin* household and the *kulin* males started marrying dozens of women till their decrepitude.⁷³ In his two tracts written on the ill effects and monstrosity of this uncontrolled polygamy, Vidyasagar debated

that polygamy was forbidden altogether in the Hindu scriptures. According to Shambhuchandra, Taranath accepted polygamy to be an evil practice that needed to be abolished but refused to accept it, something forbidden in the scriptures. That is the reason he tried to establish his own opinion in the tract in 1872.⁷⁴ According to Taradhan Vidyasagar, in his first tract on polygamy had boasted considerably about his unparalleled knowledge in the *dharmashastras* and arrogantly challenged the pundits to counter him. This had infuriated Taranath, and along with Rajkumar Bhattacharya, Gangadhar Kaviratna, Khetrupal Smritiratna, and Satyabrata Sāmaśrami, he had criticised Vidyasagar.⁷⁵ None of these descriptions, however explain the reason why Taranath had put his signature on the first appeal Vidyasagar had placed before the lieutenant governor Frederick James Halliday (1854-1859) for passing an anti-polygamy act. Taranath certainly knew that despite the presence of substantial emotion behind Vidyasagar's activities, his logics were mostly based on scriptural references. Even if he was aggrieved by Vidyasagar's arrogant remarks, he had not personally talked with his dearest student and attacked in bitter language, indirectly alleging him for cheating!⁷⁶ Was the relationship between these two pundits was already going under some bitterness? Taradhan had alleged Vidyasagar solely responsible behind this estrangement and claimed that his audacious behaviour was the main factor behind this decline of their relationship. He had claimed that Vidyasagar had come on bad terms first with Taranath's son Jivananda Vidyasagar (1844-1906), another student of Sanskrit College, but he has not specified any reason for this feud.⁷⁷ The reading of the memoirs of Krishnakamal Bhattacharya and Vidyasagar's counters to Taranath's allegations can enlighten about the reasons for and nature of Taranath's opposition. According to Krishnakamal, the existence of differences of opinions about polygamy in different scriptures and the possibilities of multiple interpretations of the same *slokas* (verse) prevented Taranath from reaching any definite conclusion regarding the scriptural opinions about polygamy.⁷⁸ Vidyasagar's argument and anti-polygamy stand

was actually based on a diplomatic interpretation of scriptural references. The famous quotation of Manu;

Savarṇā'gre dvijātīnām praśastā dāra karmaṇi ।
 Kāmatastu pravṛttānāmimāḥ syuḥ kramaśo'varāḥ ॥ 3.12
 śūdraiva bhāryā śūdrasya sā ca svā ca viśaḥ smṛte ।
 te ca swā caiva rājñāśca tāśca svā cāgrajanmanaḥ ॥ 3.13

Actually mentions that to follow the law code and live a religious life (*dharmācharan*; reproduction), a man should first marry a woman of his own caste, and then, to satisfy his sexual desires (*indriyatrishna*), he can again marry someone from other castes (*kamyabibaho*). According to Vidyasagar, Manu was strictly against the practice of *pratilom bibaho*, where a higher-caste woman marries a lower-caste man. So only the *anulom bibaho*, where a higher caste man marries a lower caste woman, could be proved by this verse. However, intercaste marriage has been prohibited in the *dharmashastras* in the *Kali* age. So, more than one marriage itself is prohibited in *Kali*.⁷⁹ Taranath had initially been satisfied with this argument, but later, he understood that neither this was the ultimate explanation of Manu's verdict nor the code of Manu was the only text to be followed in *Kali*. So, this dilemma about the scriptural declarations led him to oppose Vidyasagar. It is noteworthy that if Vidyasagar's argument is followed then intercaste marriage itself becomes impossible in present days. Also, while debating the introduction of widow remarriage, Vidyasagar himself followed the scriptural declaration of the authoritativeness of the codes of Parāshara (*kalou parashara smrita*) in the *Kali* age and ignored the codes of Manu.⁸⁰ However, this argument of Krishnakamal does not completely explain Taranath's opposition. Even during the widow remarriage debate, different verses in the scriptures contradicting each other. But Taranath did not engage himself in scriptural quibbling and agreed with Vidyasagar. The reasons for Taranath's opposition, hence, are not satisfactorily explained yet. However, this certainly turned the relation between him and Vidyasagar tacit forever. Vidyasagar, in his second tract on anti-polygamy stance wrote :

“They used to say that Taranath is certainly intelligent but obviously fickle minded. He has studied in different disciplines but does not have command in any. He has the power for arguing and quibbling but is unable to come to any definite and positive conclusion. I feel sorry to write that by publishing his book he has proved most of these allegations to be true”.⁸¹

Vidyasagar probably indicated the Marathi pundits under the term ‘they’ here. Charging Taranath for his ‘duplicity’, Vidyasagar further wrote

“Just as people get adored and venerated for explaining scriptures for a right objective, he gets dishonored for misinterpreting scriptures with a diabolical motive. Through his weird activities Taranath has proved himself dominated by his personal conflicts and unscrupulousness”.⁸²

While severely mocking one of Taranath’s arguments where it has been claimed that as nothing can work as a yardstick for human desires, so one should marry as many as he wishes⁸³; Vidyasagar had referred Taranath to be devoid of brain, knowledge, and courage (*nyūnabuddhi, nyūnabidyā, nyūnasāhas*).⁸⁴ Most part of Vidyasagar’s second tract on anti-polygamy contains the rebuttal of Taranath’s argument. Taradhan had refused to accept Vidyasagar’s points as arguments and blamed those to be uncultured peepers.⁸⁵ The bias in Taradhan’s claim is clearly visible here. Brian Hatcher has rejected Taradhan’s accounts as unreliable and one-eyed.⁸⁶

Conclusion

Taranath was certainly not a secular thinker in his ideals and world views. However, most of the so-called father figures of the ‘Bengal Renaissance’ were not in favour of separating the secular fields of life from religion. Rammohun Roy had rejected to be a part of the directors of the Hindu College when it decided to make the education free of religious studies. So-called ‘atheist’ Vidyasagar had been compelled to include the term *Ishwar* in the second edition of his primer *Bodhodoy*. From Bankimchandra to Rabindranath, the figures of the upper class Bengali intelligentsia had been confident about the influential and

positive role of *dharma* and spirituality in the life of humanity. Even the most radical social reformers in Bengal, the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, did not deny the need for daily *upasona*. The grudge towards accepting Taranath in this fold was hidden in the fact that he always tried to reform the existing form of religion not with the help of scriptures but by obeying it. Unlike Vidyasagar, he did not try to use scriptures as the tools of reform or get the support of scriptures behind the modern reforms. He rather accepted whatever was in the scriptures and placed those over the social customs, which he found harmful and deviating scriptures. He cannot be compared even with the radical Hindu revivalists like Sasadhar Tarkachudamani or Satyabrata Shamasrami as he never tried to find out any pseudo-scientific theories out of the Hindu rituals or scriptural doctrines. He never felt any need to compromise between the scriptures and modern science. Probably, this effort itself had made him disgusted with the theosophists like Col. Henry Alcott. He belonged to the old school, having no paradoxes. For him, the scriptures themselves appeared as ultimate truth. He did not need to justify those (like Sasadhar Tarkachudamani) as some parallels of modern science. In his ideals, he probably came closer to Dayananda Shastri and Arya Samajists but he never considered *Vedas* to be the soul ultimate. For him *dharmashastras* (*smṛiti*) carried equal importance to the *Vedas* (*shruti*). He did not select any particular forms of scriptures that were authoritative over the rest.⁸⁷

Taranath was probably more connected with the pundits across India than any other Sanskrit scholars in Bengal. His excellent knowledge of Hindi helped him to develop this contact further. But he certainly considered the Bengali scholars to be the greatest in India, while Vidyasagar often credited Marathi pundits as superior to their Bengali counterparts. Taranath never felt any need to learn English. This often detached him from western education and opinions. However, many of the professors of Sanskrit College who never knew English were also exposed to European opinions and knowledge through the English-educated people. Jaynarayan Tarkapañcānan had

included many decisions of Western science in his *Padārthatattwasār* and had achieved high acclaim from *Sulabh Samachar*, the newspaper edited by Keshavchandra Sen.⁸⁵ Many of the scholars of Sanskrit college like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Dwarakanath Vidyabhushan and later Maheshchandra Nyāyaratna did not find a chance to study English in their student life. But, later they had learned English well and two of them (Vidyasagar and Maheshchandra) regularly wrote the reports of Sanskrit college in English.⁸⁶ They were close to the English-educated section. Maheshchandra was probably the only scholar in Sanskrit college who came close to Rajendralal Mitra.⁸⁷ Unlike them, Taranath never came even with the distant contact of Western education. E.B. Cowell also considered himself a true Pundit whose world-view was completely in relation to Sanskrit studies. Since the dawn of the new century, these nineteenth-century scholarships were becoming obsolete.

Like many other academic stalwarts of nineteenth-century Taranath is a forgotten character today. The more Sanskrit scholarship was getting neglected, the more the pundits lost their place of veneration. Influenced by the ideologies of Thomas Babington Macaulay the English educated youth started developing a prerogative view of Sanskrit. At Calcutta University, Sanskrit was an optional subject. From the Macaulay Minute (1835) and Charles Woods' Despatch (1854) to the future educational reports, the place for vernacular education of Sanskrit and Persian was regularly marginalised. Since the First World War period, the economic hardship caused a social situation where the veneration that Taranath had achieved from his contemporaries for following the *śāstras* and rituals in his life had turned irrelevant. The economic hardship had put the loyalty towards scriptures (*śāstrācār*) and rituals (*deśācār*) under severe challenges of harsh everyday realities. As a result Taranath was gradually forgotten from the public memory apart from the Sanskrit scholars. What was worse for him was his prolonged loggerhead with the most vigorous personality of nineteenth century Bengal. Beside Vidyasagar's towering and versatile personality, another star of Sanskrit College had gradually lost into oblivion.

Notes

- ¹ John Mcguire, *The Making of a Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadrolok in Calcutta*, Anu, Canberra, 1983, pp. 42-57.
- ² Subrata Dasgupta, *Bengal Renaissance: Identity and Creativity from Rammohun to Rabindranath*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2007, pp. 21-39.
- ³ Harishchandra Kaviratna, 'Sekāler Saṃskrita Kolej' in *Prabasi*, Ashwin 1332 B.S., pp. 896-97.
- ⁴ Brian Allison Hatcher, 'What's become of the Pandit? Rethinking the Sanskrit Scholars in Colonial Bengal', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 39(3), 2005, 683-723.
- ⁵ David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of the Modernization of Bengal 1773-1865*, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1969, pp. 22-42.
- ⁶ Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, 'Translating Gita 2.47 or Inventing the Nationalist Motto' in Bandyopadhyay, *Three Essays on the Mahabharata: Exercises in Literary Hermeneutics*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2016, pp. 59-74.
- ⁷ Rajendralal Mitra, (ed.), *Centenary Review of Asiatic Society of Bengal from 1784 to 1883*, Asiatic Society and Thacker. Spink and Co, Calcutta, 1885, pp. 11-30.
- ⁸ Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, 'Sekāler Saṃskrita Kolej' in *Sahitya Parishat Patrika*, Boishakh, 1333 B.S. p. 6.
- ⁹ Kaviratna, 'Sekāler Saṃskrita Kolej', p. 896.
- ¹⁰ Kaviratna, 'Sekāler Saṃskrita Kolej' in *Prabasi*, Bhādra 1332 B.S. pp. 646-647.
- ¹¹ Kaviratna, 'Sekāler Saṃskrita Kolej, in *Prabasi* Ashwin 1332 B.S., p. 795.
- ¹² Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, 'Kamalākānto' in *Bankim Rachanabali Dwitiya khaṇḍa*, Sahitya Sangsad, Kalikata, 1390 B.S., (1883), pp. 76-78.
- ¹³ Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, *Punditkulatilak Mahātma Taranath Tarkabāchaspātir Jībancharit*, Ingraji-Saṃskrita Jantra, Kalikata, 1300 B.S., (1893), pp. 1-4.
- ¹⁴ Taradhan Tarkabhushan, *Taranath Tarkabachaspater Jībani O Saṃskrita Bidyar Unnati*, Brahmo Mission Press, Kalikata, 1300 B.S., pp. 2-4.
- ¹⁵ Brian Hatcher, 'What's Become of the Pandit?', p. 712.
- ¹⁶ Taradhan Tarkabhushan, pp. 10-11.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid* p. 9.
- ¹⁸ Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, p. 6.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid* pp. 7-8.
- ²⁰ *Ibid* p. 8.
- ²¹ Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, 'Sekaler Saṃskrita Kolej' in *Sahitya Parishat Patrika*, Āṣaḍh, 1333 B.S, p. 159.
- ²² Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, pp. 8-9.
- ²³ Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, p. 10.
- ²⁴ *General Reports on the Public Instructions in the Lower Province of the Bengal Presidency: From 1st Oct 1849 to 30th Sept 1850*, Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, p. 59.

- ²⁵ Taradhan Tarkabhushan, p. 15.
- ²⁶ Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, pp. 12-13.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 13-14.
- ²⁸ Debabrata Vidyaratna, *Jibankatha: Acharjya Satyabrata Samashrami*, Kalikata Biswabidyalay, Kalikata, 1952, p. 13.
- ²⁹ Taradhan Tarkabhushan, pp. 15-16.
- ³⁰ Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, 'Abar Ati Alpo Hoilo' in *Vidyasagar Rachanabali Dwitiya Khandā*, Sahityam, Kolkata, 2006, p. 1196.
- ³¹ Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, *Vidyasagar Jibancharit*, Ingraji-Saṁskṛita Jantra, Kalikata, 1298 B.S. pp. 212-14.
- ³² Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, *Taranath Tarkabachaspater Jibancharit*, pp. 17-18.
- ³³ Gopikamohan Bhattacharya, *Kalikata saṁskṛita Colleger Itihas Dwitiya Khaṇḍa: 1858-1895*, Saṁskṛita College, Kalikata, 1961, p. 16.
- ³⁴ Quoted as in Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, 'Sekāler Saṁskṛita Kolej' in *Sahitya Parishat Patrika*, Śrabān 1348 B.S., p. 154.
- ³⁵ *Ibid*.
- ³⁶ *Ibid*.
- ³⁷ *General Reports on the Public Instructions in the Lower Province of the Bengal Presidency For 1844-45*, Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, p. 35.
- ³⁸ *General Reports on the Public Instructions in the Lower Province of the Bengal Presidency For 1845-46*, p. 46.
- ³⁹ *General Reports on the Public Instructions in the Lower Province of the Bengal Presidency: From 1st Oct 1849 to 30th Sept 1850*, p. 59.
- ⁴⁰ *General Reports on the Public Instructions in the Lower Province of the Bengal Presidency: From 1st Oct 1850 to 30th Sept 1851*, p. 31.
- ⁴¹ Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, 'Sekāler Saṁskṛita Kolej' in *Sahitya Parishat Patrika*, Śrabān 1348 B.S., p. 155.
- ⁴² Harishchandra Kaviratna, 'Sekāler Saṁskṛita Kolej' in *Prabasi*, Bhādra 1332 B.S. pp. 648-49.
- ⁴³ Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, *Taranath Tarkabachaspater Jibancharit*, pp. 48-49. The translation is mine.
- ⁴⁴ Quoted in *Ibid* pp. 53-54.
- ⁴⁵ Quoted in *Ibid* pp. 53-54. The Translation is mine.
- ⁴⁶ Gopikamohan Bhattacharya, *Kalikata Saṁskṛita Colleger Itihās, Dwitiya Khaṇḍa*, p. 9.
- ⁴⁷ Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, *Taranath Tarkabachaspater Jibancharit*, pp. 26-27.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.
- ⁴⁹ Gopikamohan Bhattacharya, *Kalikata Saṁskṛita Kolejer Itihas, Dwitiya Khaṇḍa*, p. 9.

- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, *Taranath Tarkabachaspater Jibancarit*, pp. 28-29.
- ⁵² Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, *Vidyāsāgar Jibancarit*, pp. 212-14.
- ⁵³ Brian A. Hatcher, "Whats Become of the Pandit?" pp. 689-703.
- ⁵⁴ Shivnath Shastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalīn Bangasamāj*, S. R. Lahiri Prokashan, Kalikata, 1904, p. 271.
- ⁵⁵ Haraprasad Shastri, 'Bankimchandra Kanṭhalpādāy' in *Paschimbanga Patrika: Bankim Samkhyā*, 1995, p. 12.
- ⁵⁶ Harishchandra Kaviratna, 'Sekaler Saṁskṛita Kolej' in *Prabasi*, Bhadra 1332 B.S. p. 648.
- ⁵⁷ Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, 'Intellectual Superiority of Europe' quoted in Shyamali Chakrabarti 'Bankimchandrer Nārīśikṣābhābnāy ṭol' in *Paschimbanga Patrika: Bankim Samkhyā*, p. 103.
- ⁵⁸ Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, *Taranath Tarkabachaspater Jibancharit*, p. 25.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-32
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-36.
- ⁶⁴ Taradhan Tarkabhushan, pp. 80-83.
- ⁶⁵ Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, *Taranath Tarkabachaspater Jibancharit*, p. 54.
- ⁶⁶ Bipinbihari Gupta, *Purātan Prasāṅga*, Kalikata, 1320 B.S., p. 208.
- ⁶⁷ Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, 'Abar Ati Alpo Hoilo', p. 1193.
- ⁶⁸ Taranath Tarkabhushan, p. 53
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- ⁷⁰ www.presiuniv.com. Digital archive, Bengali Letter 6.
- ⁷¹ Amitabha Mukhopadhyay, 'Bāṅglādeshe Koulīnya Prathar Atyachar' in Amitabha Mukhopadhyay, *Unish Shataker Samāj O Saṁskṛiti*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, pp. 27-55.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*
- ⁷³ Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna, *Taranath Tarkabachaspater Jibancharit*, p. 23.
- ⁷⁴ Taranath Tarkabhushan, pp. 88-89.
- ⁷⁵ Taranath Tarkabhushan, pp. 64-66.
- ⁷⁶ Bipinbihari Gupta, *Purātan Prasāṅga*, pp. 211-12.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 211.
- ⁷⁸ Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, 'Bidhabābibāha Prachalita Haoa Uchit Kina Etadbiṣayak Prastāb' in *Vidyāsagar Racanabalī Pratham Khaṇḍa*, Sahityam, Kolkata, 2006, pp. 483-94.
- ⁷⁹ Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, 'Bahubibāha Rahit Haoa Uchit Kina Etadbiṣayak Prastāb' in *Vidyāsagar Racanabalī Dvitiyo Khaṇḍa*, p. 1018.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1020. The Translation is mine.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1066. The Translation is mine.

⁸² Taranath Tarkabhushan, p. 90.

⁸³ Brian A. Hatcher, "What's Become of the Pandit?" pp. 715-716.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

⁸⁵ Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, 'Jaynarayan Tarkapanchanan' in *Sahitya Parishat Patrika*, Boishakh 1333 B.S., p. 19.

⁸⁶ Gopikamohan Bhattacharya, *Kalikātā Saṃskṛita Kolejer Itihās Dwitīya Khaṇḍa*, pp. 45-53.

⁸⁷ Harishchanda Kaviratna, 'Sekāler Saṃskṛita Kolej' in *Prabasi*, Āświn 1332 B.S. p. 695.

The Journey of Islamic Calligraphy

Farhin Saba

Abstract

Islam has been practised for the past 1400 years and is now spread across a quarter of the world. With the spread of Islam, writing in Arabic script gained popularity, though it is not the primary motif in Islamic visual culture.

The Quran is frequently considered by both Muslims and non-Muslims as the best example of Islamic calligraphy. It was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad at the start of the seventh century. The Quran text is based on pages from beautiful codices of the Quranic verses, which are often decorated with gold and written in a variety of scripts on parchment or paper.

Keywords: type of calligraphy, tools, preparation of ink and paper.

Introduction

Islamic art is incomplete without calligraphy. The Quran, the book of God's revelation to the Prophet Muhammad, was conveyed in Arabic, and the Arabic script can produce a variety of decorative forms. The use of calligraphy as adornment had a distinct aesthetic appeal, but it was frequently accompanied by a talismanic element. Calligraphy is primarily a means of transmitting a text, although in a stylish manner.

The Quran itself emphasises the value of writing numerous times; for instance, in the first sura 96/3-4, [Quran : 3-4] God is referred to as the Almighty Who "educated man with the Pen". As a result, writing was seen to have divine origins; every human fate has been recorded since the beginning of time, and the prophetic tradition *qad jaffa'l-qalam*, "The Pen has already dried up", expresses how changeable this record is. Even today, Muslims refer to their fate as "written" or "*alinyazisi*", which in Turkish for "what is written on the forehead".

God has consequently been referred to as the Eternal Calligrapher in numerous poems. It is therefore entirely understandable that Muslims began writing the Quran in a manner befitting of its enduring beauty very early.

Additionally, the requirement that all adherents to Islam learn Arabic at least well enough to recite the Quran and utter prayers correctly has made the Arabic alphabet the most important aspect of all Muslims. However, every Muslim feels a connection to the letters of the Quran or to specific “religious” characteristics that are associated with these characters. According to F. Rosenthal, “Sacredness became a defining quality in writing.” The Arabic script’s fundamentals have not been altered for about thirteen centuries, despite some minor regional variations that emerged through time.

Architecture inscriptions are the greatest and most important group of evidences for our study of the history of Arabic writing, including epigraphs, which are early tombstones with inscriptions. The development of shapes of letters can be easily traced on coins bearing rulers’ names and confessions of faith. Documents ranging from early papyrus pieces with brief notes to the lengthy and elaborate works produced by Persian and Turkish chancelleries, where calligraphers displayed their talent on scrolls measuring many yards in length, and of course the Quran manuscripts, which reflect the various styles of artistically written collections. The stages of evolution can also be determined by inscriptions on glass, metallurgy, woven or embroidered fabrics.

A broad outline understanding of a given style’s historical aspect is necessary to comprehend its regional quirks. However, a thorough and methodical examination of the regional variations of the main forms add to our overall understanding of how they have evolved throughout the Islamic world.

There are extremely few manuscripts available for the study of calligraphy in pre-Mughal India. Thankfully, calligraphy is an essential component of Islamic architecture. Thus, inscriptions on monuments provide evidence of the evolution of calligraphy. But the early era monuments are also uncommon. Photographs of inscriptions taken separately from the monuments to which they belong also fail to capture even a fraction of their original artistic quality.

Understanding the basic development of a given style is necessary to comprehend the regional specificities of that style. On the other hand, a methodical and thorough examination of the regional variations of the main styles add to our overall understanding of how they have evolved throughout the Islamic world. A methodical and thorough research of the development of calligraphy in India led to the creation of the current asseveration.

The Context of Calligraphy

It has been discovered to be vital to preserve chronological order as much as feasible for a comprehensive study of calligraphy. Because of this, the pre-Mughal and the Mughal eras have been used to roughly separate the history of Islam in India. The pre-Sultanate and the Sultanate periods can be used to further categorise pre-Mughal India's history.

The inscription date 587/1192, the year the Sultanate of Delhi was founded, marks the beginning of the history of the Sultanate period's mural calligraphy. From this point on, India has a sufficient amount of epigraphy.

Before the Mughal dynasty came to power in India in 933/1526, the Delhi throne was held successively by the *Mamluk*, *Khalji*, *Tughluq*, *Sayyid*, and *Lodi* dynasties.

The *Khalji* period saw the apex of the calligraphic style that can be found in the inscriptions of the *Mamluk* Sultans. After that new style started to emerge in the second half of the *Tughluq* era. There is no advancement found during the *Sayyid* dynasty. However, it appears that the calligraphers of the *Lodi* period broke some new grounds.

New calligraphy techniques did not result in the creation of new styles. *Naskh*, *Thulth*, and *Tughra* are the three main types of mural calligraphies from the Sultanate period. However, there are many variations of the same style at various times and locations. This fascinating research is made possible by the various key stylistic advancements throughout various eras of Indian history.

There were several states in mediaeval India that were unconstrained by the Delhi Sultanate. From a calligraphic perspective, the three autonomous Muslim kingdoms — Bengal, Golconda, and Bijapur are the most significant. An evaluation of these states' contributions to the

growth of calligraphy in all of India has been made. Bengal's contribution is deemed to have been innovative and distinctive in this regard. The different *Tughra* styles that Bengal produced appear to be unique in Islam. These styles are methodically investigated in considerable depth.

The Sultanate period saw the pinnacle of the development of the *Naskh* and *Thulth* styles. It was difficult to outdo these two styles during the Mughal era.

The astonishing growth of *Nast'liq*, frequently regarded as the most beautiful calligraphic style, in Mughal India merits its own thorough asseverate. The current work only serves to identify the main points of origin, development, and direction. However, special consideration has been given to the accomplishments of the great calligraphers who directly or indirectly, invented, led, and steered the entire path of its growth. It has been deemed useful to contrast the style and accomplishments of the top calligraphers in India because the *Nast'liq* style started in Persian and afterwards spread to that country with the masters of Persia. As a result, it is possible to examine and link the concurrent developments of this lovely style in India and Persia.

The point or dot was first used as a unit of measurement by Ibn Muqalah. A point or rhombus was created by pressing the pen against the paper. The width of the nib determines how long the sides of this rhombus are. The nib of the *qalam* also affects how much pressure needs to be applied to the pen while pressing against the paper. If the nib is cut straight, there should be moderate pressure, however, if it is cut obliquely, there should be no pressure at all¹. Nevertheless the pen is never applied to the paper firmly. The size of the lettering changes depending on the dot or rhombus size; the relative sizes of the letters stay the same. The number of dot required to form the length of an *alif* is not governed by strict rules. Ibn Muqalah related all other letters to the fundamental unit of measurement after deciding to begin with the *alif*, the length of which is determined by the number of points put from vertex to vertex. Thus, exact scale reproductions of the letters in all of their various permutations and combinations are possible. According to the Khatt al-Mansub technique, Dr. Nabia Abbott tried to rebuild the Arabic scripts².

The Ibn Muqalah method may be used for all types of calligraphy. Without it, the Muslim East would have never seen the emergence of so many exquisite calligraphic styles. Since the Muslims in the West did not adopt Ibn Muqalah's method, calligraphy in the Eastern sense did not flourish there, according to Ibn Khaldun's observations of the various calligraphy teaching techniques in Egypt and Spain.³

The six styles of writing — *Thulth*, *Tauqi*, *Muhaqqaq*, *Naskh*, *Raihan*, and *Riq'a*⁴ — that Ibn Muqalah is credited with creating are known as al-sitta. Ibn Muqalah's two sons, Ali and Abd Allah, continued to hone their father's skill after him. In *Naskh*, Abd Allah and Ali both had areas of expertise. The instructor, Ibn a-Asa, was followed by Abu-al Hasan Ali Ibn Hilal, also known as Ibn al-Bawwab⁵, who came after him. Ibn Muqalah clearly enhances the beauty of writing, but his main contribution is the invention of the principles of writing and the geometric rendering of the letters. Less than a century later, Ibn al-Bawwab added the aesthetic component and perfected the writing styles that Ibn Muqalah had initially developed; as the Arab writers put it, "he weaved on the loom of Ibn Muqalah yet he wove a masterpiece of his own."⁶

Numerous calligraphy samples signed in the name of Mir Ali, or occasionally just "Ali", are found in numerous libraries around the world. Mir Ali is a well-known scribe. The issue of their identification and estimate of their respective merits cannot be solved unless all of these specimens are gathered together, properly compared, and collated. Despite all the uncertainty, one Mir Ali stands out as the most illustrious *Nasta'liq* style master. He was raised in Herat and went to school with Zayn al-Din Mahmud⁷. After that, he travelled to Mashhad, where he joined Sultan Ali's army and gained excellence. Only Mir Imad and Muhammad Hussain Kashmiri in later years dared to dispute Maulana Mir Ali's fame.

In the reign of Abu al-Fadl Iran, Tehran, India, and Turkey were home to eight calligraphic styles that are still used today : *Thulth*, *Naskh*, *Tauqi*, *Riq'a* *Muhaqqaq*, *Raihan*, *Ta'liq*, and *Nast'liq*⁸. The *Thulth* and *Naskh* consist of each one-third curved lines and two-thirds straight line; the former (*Thulth*) is in *jali*, while the later (*Naskh*) is *khafi*. This is how he defined and categorised both styles. Three-quarter of the lines in the *tauqi* and *riqa* are curved, while one-quarter is straight; the former is called *jali*, while the latter is called *khafi*⁹. Three-fourths of a

straight line are contained in the *Muhaqqaq* and *Rihan*; the former, as in the previous sentence, is a *jali* and the *Raihan Khafi*¹⁰. *Thulth* and *Naskh* appear to share the same stylistic characteristics based on this classification. Their slight difference is only affected by the thickness and thinness of the lines. The other two sets of styles are the same. Again, there do not appear to be any noticeable distinctions in the variations of straight and curved lines between these three pairings of designs. These six styles, which broadly speaking are related to the *Naskh* family, have an appearance that is similar to one another.

Very few straight lines can be found in the seventh style, *Ta'liq*, which is thought to have descended from *Riq'a* and *Tauqi*. This style seems to be unique from the other six styles.

Taliq represents an effort to get away from *Naskh*'s influence. It is arbitrary, domineering, and forceful. But it was unable to maintain its dominance in the wake of *Nastaliq*'s ground-breaking advancement. It is widely believed that the new style was given the name *Nast'liq* since it is descended from *Naskh* and *Taliq*. However, the actual meaning of the term *Naskh-i-Taliq*, of which *Nastaliq* is a shorter form, may provide a more convincing explanation of the term *Nasta'liq*. *Naskh* is a word that denotes cancellation, abolition, or abrogation¹¹.

Nast'liq marked the pinnacle of Islamic calligraphy development. It is an "easy and informal" style that is polished, sophisticated, and elegant. It is a very cultured and sophisticated people's expression. *Nastaliq* is the laughter of saints¹², according to Pope, who was influenced by this style's nearly indescribable abstract attractions.

The laughing of saints is one of *Nast'liq*'s two significant offsprings. The main distinction between *Shikastah* and *Nast'liq* is that the letters *alif*, *dal*, *ra*, and *waw* are joined in *Shikastah* to the left, but they are not in other styles. The letter shapes are slightly altered for this purpose, however such change is not necessary.¹³

The Tools and Necessary Materials for Writing

Pen and knife

The blade should be of the right length, neither too long nor too short, neither too narrow nor too wide, but just enough to pierce the wall of the *qalam*¹⁴.

Qalam

A type of reed is used to create the *Qalam*. *Hilla* and *Wasit* in Mesopotamia used to produce the finest varieties of reeds. According to Fateh Allah, many types of reeds for creating *qalams* were brought from *Wasit*, *Arnol*, Egypt, and Mazandaran in the sixteenth century. Shiraz produced a specific type of reed. They are also widely grown in India.

Others loved reeds growing along the seaside, while some preferred those cultivated on rocky terrain. The reed used to prepare the pen is one with the firmest flesh, the hardest bark, and the least amount of thickening between its two knots¹⁵.

The process of cutting the pen while holding the pen-knife

When cutting the pen, hold the pen-knife flat on the work surface and grasp it where the *jilfa* (the place where the blade of the knife begins to fan away from the thickness at the haft) begins. It should be tightly grasped by the fingers, just like a bow. The thumb should be placed on the knife's back. The area next to the pen tip is then treated with the knife's edge. The fleshy portion of the left thumb should receive the reeds.

There are four steps involved in cutting the *qalam*: 1. *fath* (the initial cutting), 2. *shaqq*, (the splitting) 3. *Naht* (paring) and 4. *qatt*, (pointing).

How to hold the pen?

According to Shaikh Imad al-Din Ibn al-Afif, "the three fingers, middle fore and thumb, should be evenly spread out, without gripping, at the beginning of the cut part (*fath*) and as far away from the beginning of the inky part (*madada*), so that the writer may obtain total control over the will of the pen." He should not squeeze the pen too hard or hold it with an excessively loose grip¹⁶. The pen should not be kept in an inky state; rather, it should only be so when being used for writing. The *liqa* (the wad of unspun silk or cotton-wool inserted in the pen's ink holder to absorb the ink; it prevents ink spilling and serves as an effective barrier against blotting because it does not cause an excess of ink to adhere to the pen) should be used to wipe the ink off the page.

The process of making ink

There are numerous preparation techniques and formulas for ink. Here, a select few samples are provided.

Ink's typical constituents include water, barley or rice powder, indigo, gallnuts, shot, vitriol, and other substances. Instead of vitriol, deep black rock alum is used to manufacture ink¹⁷. Sultan Ali claimed that two sirs of gallnuts and four sirs of excellent gum are needed to produce one sir of vitriol and one sir of soot, respectively. "Take equal amounts of shot and alum, a double amount of gallnuts, and a triple amount of gum", according to another authority¹⁸.

The Process of Samghi Ink

It is filled with some lampblack and vigorously pounded until it becomes extremely glossy. A small amount of filtered gum Arabic that is neither thick nor thin is slowly added to the moisture. After that, it is thoroughly rubbed until it becomes sturdy. Then, some candies, sugar, salt, and rosewater are combined with it. This combination is gently stirred after a night and then poured into a bottle, where it can be used.

The Ingredients and Procedure for making Starchy Ink, known as Nishastaji

Some starch is placed in a copper kettle and heated over a low flame until it turns black. To avoid burning it, extreme caution must be taken. Finally, it is trituated. A few gallnuts are dissolved in water. After that, gradually combine the produced wheat starch with this gallnut water. The entire mixture is then set on fire to boil. Then, it is strained. It is then given some alum and made suitable for usage¹⁹.

The preparation technique of paper

There are different qualities of paper such as silk-paper, note-paper, strong and weak paper, smooth and ribbed paper, white and coloured paper, etc. which were in use in the Muslim world. Paper was made in or cut into different sizes. Generally, it had four sizes, namely, full (*jami*), half (*ansaf*), quarto (*arba*), and octavo (*athman*)²⁰.

According to Sultan Ali, "there is no paper better than Chinese. Paper from Samarqand is the second best, and another authority of first-class paper comes from Damascus, India and Baghdad."²¹

Conclusion

It is frequently considered challenging to be both comprehensive and intensive. It was not always possible to treat each element of the work fairly. The way some portions have been treated is also primarily due to the nature of the material. Nevertheless, it is believed that the fundamental goal, which was to open the door for more research on Islamic calligraphy, has been accomplished by demonstrating that something can and should be done in the topic.

It is believed that the *Naskh*, *Thulth*, and *Tughra* styles have been appropriately addressed. It has been demonstrated how early Sultanate calligraphers experimented with the *Naskh* style in numerous ways. As evidenced by the calligraphic inscriptions on the "*Alai-i-Darwaza*", all of their experiments contributed to the exceptional accomplishments in the Khalji period. The *Naskh* of the simple kind thus achieved the pinnacle of its development during the Tughluq era. The beautiful *Thutth* style emerged in the second half of the Tughluq era, as evidenced by the Bihar inscription. The calligraphers of the Lodi period created a new sort of *Nakh* and *Thulth*, as if they were dissatisfied with the dominant style.

The crossed *Naskh*, *Thulth*, and *Tughra* calligraphy styles were the most significant in the kingdoms of Golconda and Bijapur. In Golconda, there is at least one instance of the extraordinary *Shikastah* style being employed for inscriptions. In Bijapur, there is also a Bengali variant of *Tughra* with detached *ha*, *ya*, and *nun* strung on the vertical shafts.

Nast'liq appears straightforward, and possibly this deceptive simplicity has led many people to mistakenly think of it as a basic design. However, out of all the styles, *Nast'liq* is the most challenging. To perfect this style, it takes a lot of patience, persistence, and hardwork over a lengthy period of time. The six famous *Nast'liq* calligraphers Sultan Ali Mashhadi, Mir Ali, Mir 'Imad, Muhammad Hussain Kashmiri, Abd al-Rahim, and Abd al- Rashid deserve at least six different monographs.

Notes

¹ Abu Haiyan, *Art Islamica*, 1984, p. 9.

² N. Arabic Script, p. 35.

³ Ibn Khaldun vol-2, p. 378.

- ⁴ Ain-i-Akbari, Blochman's Translation, Calcutta 1873, p. 99.
- ⁵ Qadi Ahmed, p. 58.
- ⁶ Qadi Ahmed, p. 57.
- ⁷ Ibid, p. 126.
- ⁸ Ain-i-Akbari, p. 99.
- ⁹ A Survey of Persia Art, vol.2 London 1938.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, p. 100.
- ¹¹ Qadi Ahmed, p. 116.
- ¹² The Master piece of Persia Art, London 1960, p. 148.
- ¹³ E. H. Palmer, Oriental Penmanship, Londn, 1889, p. 24.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, p. 114.
- ¹⁵ Abu Haiyan, p. 2.
- ¹⁶ Ibn Abdal-Rahman, Studio p. 79.
- ¹⁷ Qadi Ahmad, p. 112.
- ¹⁸ Ibid. p. 199.
- ¹⁹ Qadi Ahmad.
- ²⁰ QaziAhmad. Main Akhtar, Studio, Islmic & Oriental Lahore, 1945, p. 103.
- ²¹ Ibid. p. 113.

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**Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar as a Promoter of Female
Education in Bengal.**

(Based on unpublished State Records.)

BY BRAJENDRANATH BANERJI.

If the 18th century saw a revolution in the political history of Bengal, the 19th century saw another and equally far-reaching revolution in our life and thought. This second change has been rightly called the Renaissance of India. At the time of the English conquest, not only were our indigenous kingdoms in utter dissolution, but our society also was decayed and our mediaeval civilization was dead. The old order was dead, but the new order did not come into being till seventy-five years after the battle of Plassey, *i.e.*, in the age of Lord William Bentinck.

This beneficent revolution in intellect and morals received its start from Rajah Rammohun Roy. It went on gathering force and volume till it created a new literature, a new faith, a new social organization and a new political life—in short, a new civilization in India.

In the intellectual sphere it took two forms; first the acquisition of the new learning and scientific method of the West, and secondly the recovery of the literature, thought and spirit of our ancient forefathers in their true and pure original form. In both of these fields Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar took a leading part. He was not only the first great critical Sanskrit scholar among the modern Bengalis, he was also the founder of vernacular education on sound modern lines and the creator of the first English college conducted entirely by Indians. Great as Vidyasagar admittedly was as a social reformer and philanthropist, he was not less great as an educational pioneer in two very important and untried fields. A study of this aspect of his career from original records is, therefore, a source of instruction to us, who are easefully reaping where he sowed with so much toil and anxiety.

The education of Indian women did not form a recognized part of the Government's duties before 1850, although a beginning in this direction had been made by some respectable Indians (notably Rajah Radhakanta Deb) and the Christian missions. In 1849, a very successful lay school for girls was opened in Calcutta by Drinkwater Bethune—a great well-wisher of the Indians. It was at first named the Hindu Female

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School and afterwards the Bethune Female School. Bethune was fortunate in having Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar as his co-adjutor and fellow-worker from the beginning. During his Presidentship of the Council of Education he had known the pandit as a highly talented and untiring worker, and so he now induced him to accept the Honorary Secretaryship of his institution (Dec. 1850). Soon after Bethune passed away on the 12th of August 1851. From October 1851, however, Lord Dalhousie had borne all the expenses necessary for keeping the institution going, and on his Lordship's departure in March 1856 it became a recognized Government institution, supported by the State, and was placed by the Lieutenant-Governor under the superintendence of Mr. Cecil Beadon. In his letter, dated 12th August 1856, Mr. Beadon submitted a scheme to the Bengal Government, proposing certain measures as likely to bring the character and objects of the school more prominently to the notice of the higher classes of the Hindu community, and to induce them to educate their daughters in this institution. The appointment of a Committee was also suggested, including among its members Rajah Kalikrishna Deb Bahadur, Rai Harachandra Ghose Bahadur, Babu Ramaprasad Roy and Babu Kashiprasad Ghose. Mr. Beadon was anxious to secure the services of Vidyasagar as Secretary to superintend the affairs of the Bethune School. He remarked in his letter to the Lieut.-Governor:—

“It may be thought by His Honour no less than justly due to the past services and distinguished position of Pandit Ishwarchandra Sharma to appoint him Secretary to the Committee.”¹

The Bengal Government gave its assent to the proposal. Mr. Beadon was elected President and Vidyasagar Secretary of the Committee.²

Like Drinkwater Bethune, Vidyasagar was a staunch advocate of female education as a means of improving the condition of his countrymen. But his zeal and activity were not solely confined to the Bethune Female School.

The Home authorities, in the famous Education Despatch of 1854 and elsewhere, had expressed the intention of giving full and cordial support to female education, and early in 1857 Halliday found himself in a position to take up the problem of the establishment of female schools in Bengal. He sent for Vidyasagar, then the Principal of the Calcutta Sanskrit College and an Assistant Inspector of Schools, South

¹ Letter from C. Beadon to W. Grey, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated 12th August 1856.—*Education Con.* 4 September 1856, No. 166.

² Bengal Government to C. Beadon, and to Vidyasagar dated 30th August 1856.—*Ed. Con.* 4 Sept. 1856, Nos. 168 & 170.

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Bengal, and had a free discussion with him on the subject. They fully realized the difficulty that was then to be expected in attempting to establish a female school, the chief obstacle being the reluctance with which respectable Hindus could be persuaded to allow their girls to attend a public school. Vidyasagar, however, felt that, by energetic exertion, he would be able to enlist the sympathies of the people in such a good cause.

The Pandit was soon able to report the opening of a girls' school at Jowgong in Bardwan. He made an application for a monthly grant on its behalf, as will be seen from the following letter which he wrote to the Director of Public Instruction on 30th May 1857 :—

“ It is with great pleasure I have the honour to report that the inhabitants of Jowgong in Bardwan have at the suggestion of the Head Master of the Model School at that village established a female school there. It was opened on the 15th of April last and now musters on its rolls 28 girls of different ages, ranging from 4 to 11 years, the majority of whom are daughters of respectable Brahmans and Kyasthas of the place. The school is at present located at the dwelling house of Babu Nabagopal Mazumdar the most influential man of the village and opens in the mornings when the Head Master of the Model School, assisted by another, performs the duties of teachers. The establishment of the institution was intimated to me at the commencement, but as I felt doubtful about its stability, I did not think it proper to report the circumstance to you at that time. Having however visited it during this week I have been led to hope that there is every chance of it flourishing within a short time. Not only do the inhabitants take the liveliest interest in its success, but the girls themselves appear to prosecute their studies with great delight and attention. Arrangements for the management of the school are, therefore, urgently required, and I beg to submit them in the accompanying tabular statement for your sanction.

“ It will be seen that in the statement I have applied for two pandits as, under present circumstances, I do not think the school can be properly managed with a less number. It is true that the number of girls is only 28 but as each girl has a separate lesson to learn, one man cannot conveniently teach them all. The contingent charges have been estimated at Rs. 5 per month. This sum includes the cost of class-books which it is intended to supply gratis to the pupils, because the inhabitants claim the same privilege in this respect as that allowed in the Bethune School.”¹

TABULAR STATEMENT		Rs.
Female School at Jowgong, Zila Bardwan :		
Head Master	..	25
Asst. Master	..	15
Maid servant	..	2
Contingencies	..	5
		—
		Rs. 47
		—

¹ *Education Com.* 22 Oct. 1857, No. 72.

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However, it seemed to the Director that two masters were unnecessary for the school,—at all events in its first stage—and after a personal conference with the Pandit, he recommended to Government a monthly grant of Rs. 32 for the institution.

Some months before this the Director had submitted to Government three applications of a similar nature, dated 18th March 1857, received from Mr. Pratt, the Inspector of Schools, South Bengal, for grants-in-aid to three female schools, which were proposed to be established at Dwarhatta (thana Haripal) and Gopalnagar (thana Baidyabati) in zila Hughli, and at Narogram in Bardwan.¹ The Lieutenant-Governor sanctioned monthly grants for the support of all the female schools in question, the inhabitants of the villages undertaking in each case to provide a suitable school-building. In sanctioning these grants the Lieutenant-Governor desired to be informed of any other applications for grants-in-aid to female schools which the Director might have received from the Divisional Inspectors “as he would be glad to have them submitted for his favourable consideration.”²

The attitude of the Bengal Government towards the education of Indian women appeared to the Pandit to be encouraging. He had already put the Model Vernacular Schools for boys into working order, and now directed his attention chiefly to opening female schools. He naturally assumed that his plan—similar to that followed in the case of the Model Vernacular Schools for boys—had generally been approved by Government, and under this impression he opened a number of female schools in the districts under his charge. As usual he reported the opening of the schools to the Director of Public Instruction and applied for monthly grants. That officer, in accordance with previous instructions, sent up the Pandit's applications, along with others, to the Lieutenant-Governor for consideration.³

Between November 1857 and May 1858 Vidyasagar established 35 female schools with an average total attendance of 1,300 girls. The following is a list of the villages where these schools were located, the dates on which they were opened, and the monthly expenditure involved in maintaining them⁴:—

¹ D.P.I. to the Govt. of Bengal, No. 384 dated 1st May 1857; No. 709 dated 9th July 1857.—*Education Cons.* 22nd October, 1857, Nos. 68, 71. For Mr. Pratt's letters, *ibid.*, Nos. 69, 72.

² Govt. of Bengal to the Offg. D.P.I., dated 21st October 1857.—*Ed. Con.* 22nd Oct. 1857, No. 74.

³ Letter from the D.P.I. to the Govt. of Bengal, dated 15th Feby. 1858. For the tabular statement, see *Ed. Con.* 24 June, 1858, No. 167C.

⁴ *Education Con.* 5 August 1858, No. 16. See also *Ed. Cons.* 24 June 1858 Nos. 167 A and B, H-I-K-L; *Ed. Con.* 2 Decr. 1858, No. 5.

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HUGHLI	..	Potbah	..	24 Nov., 1857	..	Rs. 29
		Daspur	..	26 "	..	" 20
		Boinchi	..	1 Dec. "	..	" 32
		Digshooi	..	7 "	..	" 32
		Talandu	..	7 "	..	" 20
		Hatinah	..	15 "	..	" 20
		Hoyera	..	15 "	..	" 20
		Nopara	..	30 Jany. 1858	..	" 16
		Udairajpur	..	2 March "	..	" 25
		Ramjibanpur	..	16 "	..	" 25
		Akabpur	..	28 "	..	" 25
		Shiakhala	..	1 April "	..	" 20
		Mahesh	..	1 "	..	" 25
		Birsingha	..	1 "	..	" 20
		Goalsara	..	4 "	..	" 25
		Dundipur	..	5 "	..	" 25
		Daypur	..	1 May "	..	" 25
		Raujapur	..	1 "	..	" 25
		Malaipur	..	12 "	..	" 25
		Bishnudaspur	..	15 "	..	" 20
BARDWAN	..	Ranapara	..	1 Dec. 1857	..	" 20
		Jambooi	..	25 Jany. 1858	..	" 30
		Srikishenpur	..	26 "	..	" 25
		Rajarampur	..	26 "	..	" 25
		Jot-Srirampur	..	27 "	..	" 25
		Dinehat	..	1 March "	..	" 20
		Kashipur	..	1 "	..	" 21
		Sanooi	..	15 April "	..	" 25
		Rasulpur	..	26 "	..	" 31
		Banteer	..	27 "	..	" 20
		Belgachi	..	1 May "	..	" 20
MIDNAPUR	..	Bhangaband	..	1 Jany. "	..	" 30
		Badanganj	..	10 May "	..	" 31
		Shantipur	..	15 "	..	" 20
NADIA	..	Nadia	..	1 "	..	" 28

Rs. 845

On 13th April 1858 the Lieutenant-Governor reported to the Supreme Government that he had received some 26 applications from the Director of Public Instruction for grants-in-aid to female schools which it was proposed to establish in the different districts of East and South Bengal, but that he could not sanction them unless the rules for grants-in-aid were to some extent relaxed. He pointed out that the Home authorities, in their despatch of 1st October 1856, had held out hopes that school-fees would not be required in the case of female schools, but he thought that some further encouragement was required. He accordingly proposed that the grant-in-aid rules should be so far modified in favour of female schools, that whenever a suitable school-building was provided, and the attendance of not less than 20 girls was promised, all other expenses for maintaining the school be defrayed by Government.¹

¹ *Education Con.* 24 June 1858, No. 167 N.

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The Supreme Government, however, replied, on 7th May 1858, refusing to allow the abrogation of the grant-in-aid rules, in favour of female schools, and holding that unless female schools were really and materially supported by voluntary aid, they had better not be established at all.¹

These orders of the Supreme Government greatly affected Vidyasagar's activities, because, he had, in anticipation of Government's sanction, established quite a number of female schools on the understanding that the inhabitants would provide suitable school-buildings, while their maintenance charges would be defrayed by Government, and it now appeared to him that all his labours had been fruitless and the schools set up by him would have to be closed immediately. Another problem was the payment of the salary to their staff. They had not received their pay from the commencement, and the amount due up to 30th June 1858 was Rs. 3,439-3-3. The following letter, which the Pandit addressed to the Director of Public Instruction on 24th June, explains the situation:—

"With reference to the orders of the Government of India bearing date the 7th ultimo forwarded with your circular letter No. 1316 dated 29th idem, I have the honour to state that in anticipation of the sanction of Government, female schools were opened by me in several villages in the districts of Hughli, Bardwan, Nadia and Midnapur and the requisite establishment entertained in them. The schools were opened on the condition that the inhabitants of each village would provide a suitable school house, the expenses for their maintenance being defrayed by Government. The Supreme Government, however, have in their orders quoted refused to grant any aid to the schools on the above condition and the institutions must therefore be closed. But it is necessary that the establishment should receive their pay which they have not had since the commencement and which, I trust, Government will be pleased to pass.

2. It is true that the establishment was entertained by me without orders. But I must be permitted to mention that at the commencement of my operations I was not discouraged either by yourself or Government. If I had been, I would never have ventured to open so many schools nor been placed in my present difficult position. The establishment, having been appointed by me, naturally look up to me for payment, and it will certainly be a great hardship if I am made responsible for it, especially when the expenditure has been incurred on furtherance of an object of public utility."²

The Director recommended the Pandit's case to the Bengal Government in the following terms:—

"I would venture to recommend to the generous consideration of Government the Pandit's petition to be shielded from personal and pecuniary liability on account of the female schools which,

¹ *Education Con.* 24 June 1858, No. 167 O.

² Letter from Ishwarchandra Sharma, Special Inspector of Schools, South Bengal, to W. Gordon Young, Director of Public Instruction, dated 24th June 1858.—*Education Con.* 5th August 1858, No. 15.

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in anticipation of the sanction and approbation of Government, he was the means of establishing.

2. 1 would solicit attention to the memorandum annexed to the Pandit's letter, as the Government may perhaps hardly be aware of the extent of this officer's voluntary and unostentatious labours in the cause of female education. If so much can be done in the villages by one individual burdened with other and distant duties, occupying a position of no great authority, and almost without aid or countenance from his superiors, how much might not be done in the same way if the Government were to afford its sanction and support? On the other hand, what discouragement may not be inflicted on the cause if the benevolent exertions of the officer referred to are seen to lead only to his discredit and pecuniary loss."¹

The Bengal Government in turn placed the whole matter before the Government of India, on 22nd July 1858, with the following remarks :—

"The Lieutenant-Governor desires earnestly to support the recommendation of the Director of Public Instruction, and His Honour is not without hope that when the Hon'ble the President in Council is made aware of the number of promising female schools which had been actually established by the unostentatious zeal of the very intelligent and meritorious Principal of the Sanskrit College, and which will now, together with the keen and anxious hopes and anticipations to which they have given rise, be suddenly extinguished, he may perhaps be disposed spontaneously to reconsider the orders of the 7th May."²

The Supreme Government, before passing orders on the subject, demanded a full explanation of the circumstances under which the Pandit was, or conceived himself to be, encouraged to incur so heavy an expense in establishing the schools in question in anticipation of sanction, and also desired to know who was responsible for the encouragement under which the Pandit had claimed to have acted. As at least one-half of the schools had been established, some of them for several months before the Bengal Government's letter dated 13th April 1858, the Supreme Government enquired whether the circumstance was known to the Lieutenant-Governor at that time and, if so, why it was not then mentioned.³

In reply to the inquiry of the Government of India, the Pandit wrote thus to the Director of Public Instruction on 30th September 1858 :—

"I have the honour to state that as some female schools on this footing had already been established with the sanction of the Government, I believed that the plan was generally approved. I invariably reported to your office the establishment of every new school, and usually in the month succeeding that in

¹ *Education Con.* 5th August 1858, No. 14.

² *Ibid.*, No. 17.

³ *Education Con.* 16th September 1858, No. 1.

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which it was opened. My several applications for the establishments required in these schools were always entertained by you though no orders were ever passed, and during a period of several months I was not in any way discouraged in the course I was taking, which I believed to be in accordance with the wishes of the Government."¹

The Director forwarded the Pandit's letter to the Bengal Government, supporting his own case with the following observations :

"For my part, knowing or believing that the Pandit had been in personal communication with the Lieutenant-Governor on the subject during my own absence from Calcutta, and inferring from your letter (No. 503) of the 21st October that the Government was prepared to regard his exertions with favour, I did not hesitate to send on his reports to Government (as Mr. Woodrow in my absence had done) without delay, discouragement, or remark.

"I regret to say that the untoward result with which the action of the department in this matter had been attended has given a 'heavy blow and great discouragement' to the cause of female education, from the effects of which, I fear, nothing that is likely to be now done will enable it speedily to recover."²

However, the Lieutenant-Governor settled the question more equitably, as his reply to the Government of India (27th Nov. 1858) will show :

3. The Lieutenant-Governor desires to submit the explanation of the Pandit for indulgent consideration, as it appears he has been acting under a misconception. It appears that previous to the application made to the Government of India in my letter of the 13th April last for sanction to grant to 26 female schools recommended by the Pandit and the Director of Public Instruction, which application was not complied with, four grants on similar terms had been sanctioned by the Lieutenant-Governor on the 21st October 1857 under a mistaken view of his authority. This was afterwards overlooked by the Lieutenant-Governor and the irregularly sanctioned grants to these schools continuing uninterrupted, seemed, not unreasonably, to have led the Pandit to suppose that all other such schools would receive grants on similar terms. This must have fully excused him for continuing to recommend grants to schools of a similar kind, but the question still remains why did the Pandit set the schools going and incur expense for their establishments before he had received sanction for them from Government. This question the Pandit has not answered, but he might have submitted a not unreasonable excuse for his irregularity had he stated that the wording of his application always expressed that the schools about which he wrote had been established, and specified the dates on which they had each been opened. And the Director of Public Instruction understood this as requiring retrospective sanction and so entered it in his prescribed tabular statement. But this was

¹ *Education Con.* 2nd Decr. 1858, No. 4.

² Letter from W. Gordon Young, Director of Public Instruction, to the Junior Secy. to the Government of Bengal, dated 4th October 1858.—*Education Con.* 2 Dec. 1858, No. 3.

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undoubtedly overlooked when my letter was written dated 13th April last. There has been evidently a general misconception about these grants. For some time the Lieut.-Governor was under the impression that he could sanction them himself and when he became better informed he found that it was little more than a form to send them up the Supreme Government for sanction, believing that the Supreme Government was certain to approve and sanction them and to applaud all extension of such female schools, especially when established at the desire of the people themselves and partly at their expense. This useful view naturally commended itself to the Lieutenant-Governor's subordinates so that the Pandit thought he could not please the Government better than by encouraging female schools, and the Director of Public Instruction supposed he had only to sanction a recommendation to aid a promising girls' school and it was sure to be sanctioned. The Lieutenant-Governor states all this merely as a fact without attempting to defend or extenuate the error into which he himself, not less than his subordinates, is shown to have fallen. But he trusts it may be viewed indulgently, all the circumstances having been considered."¹

The biographers of Vidyasagar are responsible for the story which has obtained currency that the Government did not do justice to the Pandit and refused to relieve him of the pecuniary liability which he had incurred by doing Government's work and which he had ultimately to meet out of his own pocket! The Supreme Government's letter, dated 22nd December 1858, conveying its final orders on the subject of the female schools established by Vidyasagar, conclusively proves that the Pandit was paid all his expenses:—

"It is to be regretted that the Pandit's scheme of opening female schools on a plan opposed to the orders of the Hon'ble Court, but in the name of the Government and in anticipation of sanction, should not have been discouraged at once. As it is evident, however, that the Pandit acted in good faith, and with the encouragement and approbation of his superiors, His Honour in Council is pleased under all circumstances, to relieve him from responsibility for the sum of Rs. 3,439-3-3 actually expended on these schools, and to direct that it be paid by the Government.

"With regard to the future the President in Council observes that, so far as can be gathered from these papers, there is no security for the permanent character of any of the schools, and that the only sound material guarantee for their success, namely the voluntary support of the neighbourhood, is wholly wanting. It is not even stated that school houses have been built. Not an argument is brought forward to shake the decision of the Government of India already taken, that the main principle of the grant-in-aid rules shall not be relaxed in favour of these female schools. If keen and anxious hopes really exist, a small monthly payment is no very violent test of them.

"With reference to the above considerations and to paragraph 38 of the Hon'ble Court's despatch, dated the 22nd June last,

¹ *Education Con.* 2nd December 1858, No. 6.

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the President in Council must decline to give his sanction to the grant of any public money for the continued support of the female schools opened by Pandit Ishwarchandra, or for the establishment of the Government schools it is proposed to set up in their stead. The correspondence will be forwarded for the consideration of the Rt. Hon'ble the Secretary of State, with a recommendation that a grant not exceeding Rs. 1,000 per mensem may be made for the establishment of female schools in Hughli, Bardwan, and the 24-Parganas, a portion to be expended in assisting such schools as were established by Pandit Ishwarchandra Sharma, and a portion on a few model schools to be supported by the Government."¹

On a reference from the Government of India (10 January 1859) the Secretary of State for India replied (12 May 1859) that owing to the financial pressure caused by the Mutiny Government was not then in a position to entertain the proposal of making a permanent grant in aid of female schools, but reserved its consideration for a future occasion.²

Vidyasagar had retired from Government service in November 1858 and, it is said, that his resignation was due in part to his differences with the Director of Public Instruction on the question of the establishment of female schools. But even the loss of a monthly income of Rs. 500 and the refusal of all financial support by the Government did not make Vidyasagar despair of the future of the institutions he had established. In order to set the girls' schools going, he opened a Female School Fund to which many distinguished Indians (notably Rajah Pratap Chandra Singh of Paikpara) and high Government officials contributed. It will be seen from the following letter which the Pandit wrote to the Hon'ble Sir Bartle Frere on 11th October, 1863 that his efforts generally in the cause of female education were appreciated by his countrymen:—

"... You will no doubt be glad to hear that the Mofussil Female Schools to the support of which you so kindly contributed, are progressing satisfactorily. Female education has begun to be gradually appreciated by the people of districts contiguous to Calcutta, and schools are being opened from time to time."³

Lieutenant-Governor Beadon also encouraged the Pandit by subscribing to the Fund:—

"I have now the pleasure to enclose a cheque for Rs. 330 on account of Sir Cecil Beadon's subscription to the Female Schools for the half year of 1866. This would have been sent before

¹ Letter from C. Beadon, Secretary to the Govt. of India to C.T. Buckland, Junior Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, dated 22nd December 1858.—*Education Con.* 20 Jany. 1859, No. 9.

For the minutes of the members of the Supreme Council, indemnifying the Pandit, see *Education Branch Con.* 24 Dec. 1858, No 5. (Imperial Records.)

² *Education Con.* 14 July 1859, No. 27.

³ Mitra's, *Isvar Chandra Vidyasagar*, p. 173.

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but the cheque book was accidentally left behind." (17 August 1866.)¹

VIDYASAGAR'S SERVICES TO THE BETHUNE SCHOOL.

Vidyasagar was made Honorary Secretary of the Bethune School Committee in August 1856, and a member² of the Committee in January 1864. In spite of the numerous demands on his time and attention, he always took a lively interest in the welfare of that institution. We get a glimpse of the condition of the school and the progress made by it during his Secretaryship in the following report (dated 15 Dec. 1862):—

"Reading, writing, arithmetic, biography, geography, and history of Bengal, with gallery lessons on objects form the course of study. Needle-work and sewing are likewise taught. Instruction is imparted to the pupils through the medium of the vernacular. The tutorial staff consists of a Head Mistress, with two female assistants and two pandits. Besides general superintendence, the Head Mistress teaches needle-work to the first and second classes, and revises the lessons given to them by the pandits. The second mistress teaches needle-work and sewing to the remaining classes, assisted by the third mistress. The third mistress teaches in addition the class consisting of beginners in which the phonetic system is being experimentally introduced. The pandits teach all the books read in the several classes.

"As regards the number of admissions, the Committee beg to observe that there has been a steady increase from 1859. The number at present on the rolls is ninety-three. It would have exceeded 100 ere this, if the Committee had not been obliged to reject applications for admission for some time from want of the means of conveyance. The inconvenience has since been removed by the provision of a third carriage, and it is hoped that the anticipated increase will soon take place. It may be as well to mention, with reference to this third conveyance, that, Rajah Pratap Chandra Singh Bahadur presented an omnibus, and that some of the members of the Committee, and a few other native friends of female education, subscribed for a pair of horses.

"As regards the proficiency attained by the first class, the Committee regret to observe that, owing to early withdrawals, the majority of the pupils are unable to prosecute their studies up to the desired standard. In cases, however, where girls are admitted at an early age, and permitted to remain at school till the age of eleven or twelve, they attain a fair amount of knowledge in the different subjects taught.

"From the manner in which the number of admissions has recently gone on increasing, the Committee trust that the institution is rising in the estimation of those classes of the community for whose benefit it was originally established. The wealthier classes of native gentlemen do not indeed seem as yet to be

¹ Mitra's, *Ishvar Chandra Vidyasagar*, p. 173.

² S. C. Bayley, Junior Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, to Pandit Ishwarchandra Sharma, dated 19th Jany. 1864.—*Ed. Con. Jany. 1864*, No. B. 160.

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availing themselves directly of the advantages offered by the school; a very few admissions have as yet been made from those classes. The Committee, however, are happy to believe that home education for females is being resorted to in many families amongst the wealthier classes; and this result, they believe, is in a considerable degree owing to the beneficial influence of the Bethune School.

“If a large number of conveyances were at the disposal of the Committee, the school might be made more extensively useful. It will be understood, however, that if the number of children should exceed a certain limit, increased resources will then be required in order to supply an extra staff of instructors, etc.”¹

Miss Mary Carpenter's name is well known in this country as a philanthropic worker and friend of the Indian people. She paid a visit to Calcutta during the latter part of 1866. She wished very much to promote female education in India, and on her arrival in Calcutta sought to make the acquaintance of Vidyasagar who was well known as a champion of the cause of female education. Mr. Atkinson, the Director of Public Instruction, wrote a letter to the Pandit on 27th November 1866 making an appointment with him to meet Miss Carpenter at the Bethune School.

She visited some of the female schools in the vicinity of Calcutta, accompanied most of the time by Vidyasagar, with whom she had contracted a sincere friendship at her first meeting. In December 1866 she visited the Uttarpada Girls' School along with Vidyasagar, the D.P.I., and Mr. Woodrow—an Inspector of Schools. On the return journey the Pandit met with a serious accident—his buggy (dog-cart) capsizing and causing severe injuries to his liver. In consequence of this accident his health was greatly impaired, and it paved the way for the fatal malady which brought about his death in July 1891. But Vidyasagar paid no heed to the decay of his health and, like a true patriot, continued to work hard for the good of his country.

Miss Carpenter moved the Government to undertake the establishment of a Normal School for the training of native female teachers to be accommodated temporarily in the premises of the Bethune School. On 1st September 1867 Sir William Grey, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, asked for Vidyasagar's views on the proposal. The Pandit, however, was opposed to the measure and he gave the following reply:—

“Since we met last, I have made careful enquiries and have thought over the subject, but I regret to say that, I see no reason to alter my opinion as regards the difficulty of practically carrying out Miss Carpenter's scheme of rearing a body

¹ From Pandit Ishwarchandra Sharma, Hon'y. Secretary, Bethune School Committee, to the Hon'ble A. Eden, Offg. Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, dated the 15th Decr. 1862.—*Education Con. Decr. 1862*, Nos. A. 59-62.

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of native female teachers either in connection with the Bethune School or independently, such as may be acceptable to the bulk of the Hindu community and worthy of their confidence. Indeed, the more I think about it the more am I convinced that I cannot conscientiously advise the Government to take the direct responsibility of setting in motion a project which, in the present state of the native society and native feeling, I feel satisfied, will be attended with failure. You can easily conceive whether respectable Hindus will allow their grown-up female relatives to follow the profession of tuition and necessarily break through the present seclusion, when they do not permit the young girls of ten or eleven years to quit the zenana after they are married. The only persons, whose services may be available, are unprotected and helpless widows, and apart from the consideration whether morally they will be fit agents for educational purposes, I have no hesitation in saying that the very fact of their dispensing with the zenana seclusion and offering themselves as public teachers will lay them open to suspicion and distrust and thus neutralize the beneficial action aimed at.

"I think the Government cannot pursue a better course on this subject than what has been indicated in the India Government's letter lately published in the papers. The best test of popular feeling will be the application of the grant-in-aid principle. If the people are willing to carry out Miss Carpenter's idea, they should be assisted with liberal grants by Government. Although the great bulk of the Hindu community, so far as I can perceive, will not avail themselves of such assistance, still there are particular individuals who seem to be very sanguine on this subject and if they are sincere and earnest they will, at any rate, it may be hoped, come forward and with Government aid, begin the experiment.

"I am free to confess that I do not place much reliance in them; but they will have no right to complain under the rules announced by the Government of India.

"I need hardly assure you that I fully appreciate the importance and desirableness of having female teachers for female learners; but if the social prejudice of my countrymen did not offer an insuperable bar, I would have been the first to second the proposition and lend my hearty co-operation towards its furtherance. But when I see that success is by no means certain and that the Government is likely to place itself in a false and disagreeable position, I cannot persuade myself to support the experiment.

"As regards the Bethune School, I entirely go with you that the results are not proportionate to the amount expended upon it, but at the same time I cannot recommend its abolition altogether. As a memento of the services to the cause of female enlightenment in India of the great philanthropist whose name the Institution bears, it has, I submit, a claim to the support of Government. In the next place, it is very desirable that there should be a well-organized female school in the heart of the metropolis, to serve as a model to sister institutions in the interior. The moral influence of the present institution in native society has been undoubtedly great. It has, in fact, paved the way to female education in surrounding districts and this, in my humble opinion, is no mean return for the large sums which have been annually expended upon it. But I must say that there is great room for economy and improvement. The expenses, I think, can be reduced to nearly half the present amount without detriment to the efficiency of the institution.

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"I intend to go to the North-Western Provinces shortly for prolonged change for the benefit of my health and if you wish to know my views on the re-organization of the Bethune School, I shall be happy to await your return to Calcutta and confer with you on the subject." (1st Oct. 1867.)

The Lieutenant-Governor acknowledged receipt of the Pandit's letter on 14th October, 1867 in the following terms:—

"I am greatly obliged to you for your letter of the 1st instant ; it is both useful and interesting. I hope you will not, on any account, postpone your visit to the N. W. Provinces, and I trust that you will obtain a revival of health from the change.

"Should I find you in Calcutta however a few days hence, I shall be most happy to see you and to hear your views as to the re-organization of the Bethune School. Otherwise you can perhaps find leisure to write to me on the subject from the N. West.

"If you should desire to have letters of introduction to any of the Government officers in the N.-W. Provinces, I shall be glad to assist you in that way. I shall be at Belvedere from the 18th inclusive."

The Government of Bengal, however, favoured Miss Carpenter's scheme, and an opportunity for giving it a trial soon arose.

Some time about the middle of 1867 the Bethune School Committee were led to believe, from the falling off in the number of pupils, as well as from other circumstances, that the condition of the school required a searching enquiry and, accordingly, at a special meeting held for the purpose in July 1867, a Sub-Committee, consisting of Ishwarchandra Vidya-sagar, Kumar Harendra Krishna Deb and Prasanna Kumar Sarvadhikari, was appointed. The Sub-Committee met, enquired fully into the subjects, and submitted their report on 24th September, 1867. This report disclosed the fact that gallery teaching had been neglected, the children were not well taught, the promotions were not properly made, and that the distribution of the teaching agency had not been very judicious. The Bethune School Committee maintained that the school would not flourish or recover its position as long as Miss Pigott was at its head.¹

In its letter dated 3rd March, 1868 the Bengal Government, while concurring with the desirability of an early termination of the service of the Head Mistress, wrote to the Committee of the school as follows:—

"I am to request at the same time that the Committee will be so good as not to proceed to the engagement of another Mistress without communicating with the Lieutenant-Governor. His Honour is disposed to think that the opportunity should be taken to render the building bequeathed by the late Mr. Bethune and the large annual grant from the general revenues which is now connected with it more useful in the promotion of female education

¹ *Education Con.* March 1868, No. A. 8.

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than he believes it to be under present arrangements, and this end, the Lieutenant-Governor is led to believe, may be materially served by combining with a Female School on a more moderate scale than the present one, a Normal School for female teachers.

"If it is determined to utilize the Bethune School building, and the funds connected with that building for such a purpose, it will be desirable to bring the whole institution into more close and direct connection with the Education Department than it is at present. The Lieutenant-Governor will be glad to know if in this event the Committee of native gentlemen who have hitherto, with an English President, conducted the affairs of the Bethune School, would be willing to act as a Consultative Committee in co-operation with the Divisional Inspector of Schools."¹

The Committee refused to take part in the management of the institution in future if they were placed on the footing suggested, and their Hony. Secretary, Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar gave the following reply to the Bengal Government on 13th June, 1868 :—

"As regards the establishment of a Female Normal School, the Committee, in their letter to the Director of Public Instruction,² have stated at length their views, and they desire me to forward a copy of the same for His Honour's information.

"The members of the Committee, I am desired to state, regret much their inability to act in the proposed Consultative Committee under the Divisional Inspector of Schools for the management of the Normal School."³

The Lieutenant-Governor, before passing final orders in this important matter, desired the D.P.I. for a full expression of his opinion after consulting Mr. Woodrow, the Inspector of Schools, Central Division.⁴

The D.P.I. held that both economy and efficiency would be best ensured by combining the Normal School and the Bethune School in one institution under a single Superintendent, subject to the direct control of the Education Department.⁵

The Lieutenant-Governor approved the scheme proposed by the Director.⁶ One Mrs. Brietzche was, on 27th January 1869,

¹ *Education Con.* March 1868, No. A. 9.

² This is a lengthy letter which W. S. Seton-Karr (the President of the Bethune School Committee) addressed to the D.P.I. on 18th Feby., 1867, negating the proposals of Mary Carpenter for the establishment of a Female Normal School in Calcutta, contained in the D.P.I.'s letter to the Bethune School Committee, dated 16 Feby., 1867.—See *Ed. Con.* July 1868, No. A. 69.

³ *Education Con.* July 1868, Nos. A. 68-70; *Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette*, dated 3rd Feby., 1869.

⁴ Bengal Govt. to D.P.I. dated 20 July, 1868.—*Ed. Con.* July 1868, Nos. A. 68-70.

⁵ D.P.I. to Bengal Govt. dated 28 Dec., 1868.—*Ed. Con.* March 1871, Nos. B. 43-56.

⁶ Bengal Govt. to the D.P.I., dated 25th January, 1869.—*Ed. Con.* March 1871, Nos. B. 43-56.

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appointed Lady Superintendent of the Bethune and Normal Schools for three years on a salary of Rs. 300 per month. The Bethune School Committee was dissolved, and the D.P.I. conveyed thanks to the members of the Committee—specially to Vidyasagar, their able Secretary—for their past services.

Vidyasagar, although not very hopeful of the success of the new arrangement, gave the authorities every possible assistance whenever asked, as will be seen from Mr. Woodrow's letter to the D.P.I., dated 2nd March, 1869 :—

"I have the honour to report that Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar made over to me the documents relating to the Bethune School on the 23rd instant [February]. He also spent a long time in going with me over the school and its grounds and discussing the means necessary to make it suitable for the residence of Hindu ladies.

"He kindly offered to give me every assistance in his power in the establishment of the Normal School though he entertains but slight hopes of its success while placed in Calcutta."¹

But the Pandit proved a true prophet and, before some three years were over, Sir George Campbell, the next Lieutenant-Governor, ordered the Female Normal School—attached to the Bethune School—to be closed after 31st January, 1872, as he was satisfied that if an undertaking of this nature was to succeed in the existing state of Indian society, it must be started and managed by the people of the country according to their feelings and fashions.² The order for the immediate abolition of the Normal School was conveyed to the D.P.I. in the following letter :—

"On a general review of the whole subject, it is clear that after a three years' experiment the Female Normal School has unquestionably failed.... The Lieutenant-Governor is himself too inclined to think that there is much in the view taken by the ladies most experienced in these matters, viz., that it may be very dangerous to give women education and a certain freedom of action without the sanction of some religion.

"The Female Normal School will, therefore, be closed after the 31st January, 1872."³

It will be seen from the foregoing what ardent interest Pandit Ishwarchandra continued to take throughout his life in the cause of female education in Bengal. After his demise

¹ H. Woodrow, Inspector of Schools, Central Dvn. to the D.P.I., dated 2 March, 1869., *Ibid.*

² "A rival school [was] opened by Babu Keshav Chandra Sen with funds supplied by Miss Carpenter, but in direct opposition to her wishes.... Babu Keshav Chandra Sen is now about to close his school on the strong remonstrances of Miss Carpenter, who has refused to allow the funds supplied by her to be spent on its support."—D.P.I. to Bengal Govt., dated 27th Dec., 1871.—*Ed. Con. Jany. 1872*, Nos. A. 30-36.

³ The Under-Secy., Govt. of Bengal to the D.P.I., dated 24th Jany., 1872.—*Education Con. Jany. 1872*, Nos. A. 30-36. See also *Ed. Con. April 1872*, Nos. A. 54-58.

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in July 1891, a body of Hindu ladies perpetuated the great Pandit's memory in the following manner :—

“The Committee beg to announce that they have recently received the sum of Rs. 1,670 from the Secretary to the Ladies' Vidyasagar Memorial Committee in Calcutta, for the establishment of an annual scholarship tenable for two years to be awarded to a Hindu girl who after passing the annual examination in the third class of the school, desires to prepare herself for the University Entrance Examination. The late Pandit Ishwar-chandra Vidyasagar was the co-adjutor and fellow-worker of Mr. Bethune, when the school was founded, and since then continued, so long as he lived, to take the keenest interest in its welfare. It is, therefore, a source of great gratification to the Committee to find that a body of Hindu ladies in Calcutta should have interested themselves in this manner to perpetuate the memory of the late Pandit Vidyasagar who, during his lifetime, in addition to the philanthropic work to which he devoted his whole life, had done so much to promote Female Education in Bengal.”¹

¹ In the presence of H.E. the Viceroy and Governor-General of India—Lord Elgin, and many other notable European and Indian gentlemen—Bethune College—5th March, 1894. Annual Report.

*Pioneering Female Education in Bengal:
Vidyasagar's Legacy and the Colonial Context*

Arnab Chatterjee

Brojendranath Banerji (1875-1947), a distinguished Indian historian, archeologist and epigraphist penned an article entitled "Iswarchandra Vidyasagar as a Promoter of Female Education in Bengal : Based on unpublished State Records" in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, New Series, Vol. XXIII, 1927 (p-381). This seminal article sheds light on Iswarchandra Vidyasagar's (1810-1891) pivotal contribution to the promotion of female education in Bengal, drawing on previously unpublished state records as primary sources. This article offers invaluable insights into the history of women's education in Bengal, underscoring Vidyasagar's significant role in this regard.

In the sweltering heat of 19th century Bengal, a quiet revolution was brewing — Renaissance. Amidst the dusty streets and crumbling colonial structure, a pioneering educationist and polymath named Iswarchandra Vidyasagar was waging a war against ignorance and oppression. His mission was audacious: to empower the woman of Bengal through education and in doing so, to challenge the entrenched social norms that had held them back for centuries. Renaissance left its impression in two ways in the mindset of intellectuality. One half was anxious to adopt the new learning, science and scientific method of the West and other half engaged themselves in restoration of the literature, thought and spirit of our legacy in true form and sense. Vidyasagar is a man who assimilated these two schools of thought in his life perfectly. This article examines the obstacles that Vidyasagar encountered in his quest to promote female education, and evaluates the implications of the then government's policies on this issue.

One of the most striking aspects of Vidyasagar's story is the government's ambivalence towards female education. On the one hand, the Govt. had ostensibly encouraged Vidyasagar's efforts to establish female schools, recognizing the importance the education in promoting social reform. However, when it came to providing financial support, the Govt.'s enthusiasm waned. The supreme Govt's refusal to provide funding for the schools, citing concerns about their sustainability, is a stark example of this ambivalence. The education of the Indian woman was not a recognised Govt.'s duties before 1850. In 1849 Drinkwater Bethune established a school for girls in Calcutta, namely Hindu Female School and afterwards it became Bethune Female School. Bethune was fortunate enough to have Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar as his coadjutor since the inception of the foundation stone laid. Though, Nabinkrishna Mitra, Kalikrishna Mitra and Pyaricharan Sarkar had founded a female school in Barasat, in 1847. It is the first female school in colonial Bengal. Soon, in December 1850, Vidyasagar became the Honorary Secretary of the school and in 12th August Bethune passed away. After that Lord Dalhousie had taken the charges of necessary expenses for keeping the school go forth. After the completion of the period of Lord Dalhousie, Mr. Cecil Beadon took charges of the recognised Govt.'s institutions and Vidyasagar had become the Secretary of the school committee and Beadon was the President. In early 1857, Frederick James Halliday was then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, he vested the charge of Assistant Inspector of schools for South Bengal onto Vidyasagar, and Vidyasagar was then the Principal of the Calcutta Sanskrit College. The prime obstacle was that the Hindu people were reluctant enough to allow their girls to go to school. Vidyasagar had arranged a horse drawn vehicle for the girls of the Bethune school and it acted as a school's pool car then and it was bannered by "kanyapebyong paloniya shikhaniyati jatnatah" — it is a duty to educate the girls with care. On 15th April, 1857 a Model School for girls was opened in the house of Babu Nabagopal Mazumdar, at Jowgong village in Bardwan district. Twenty eight girls of different ages from four to eleven years were the

students of the school. Monthly rupees forty seven were needed to run the school smoothly and Vidyasagar wrote to the Director of Public Instruction on 30th May in the same year for the grant.¹ The Govt. allowed monthly grant of Rs. 32 for the institution. Some months before of this the Director had submitted three applications of similar nature to the Govt. that envisaged grants-in-aid. The Lieutenant Governor had sanctioned monthly grants for the school—one in Dwarhatta (Police Station Haripal), second one in Gopalnagar (PS Baidyabati) and the third in Narogram, Bardwan district. The attitude of the Bengal Govt. towards female education was satisfactory. Vidyasagar assumed that the similar line of action would be followed up for establishing the girls' school as he had got the result in terms of Govt.'s approval for establishing the Model Vernacular School for boys. Between November 1857 and May 1858 Vidyasagar established 35 female schools with an average total attendance of 1300 girls.² Vidyasagar always sent up the information about schools to the Director of Public Instruction for the consideration of the Lieutenant Governor. On 13th April, 1858 the Lieutenant Governor wrote to the Supreme Govt. that he had received some twenty six number of applications from the Director of Public Instruction for grants-in-aid for female schools which were proposed to establish in the different districts of East and South Bengal but unless the rules of grant-in-aid be relaxed he could not sanction them. The Lieutenant Governor F. J. Halliday also proposed to exempt the school fees for girls, moreover, where the schools' buildings were provided and attendance of girls were regularly not less than 20, all other expenses for maintaining the schools be defrayed by the Government.³ The Supreme Govt. replied on 7th May, 1858. It envisaged the refusal of changes in grant-in-aid rules for female schools and also directed not to establish the female schools at all unless the female schools were really and materially supported by voluntary aid. Vidyasagar was greatly affected by this order of the Supreme Government. He wrote to him that for the every establishment of the female school he had informed duly to the Govt. Neither anyone from his office stopped him nor did anyone informed

him about the willingness of the Govt. Moreover, being an appointment authority of the school teachers — it was expected that he would pay the fixed allocation for them. The Bengal Govt. placed the whole matter before the Govt. of India, on 22nd July, 1858. It envisaged a plea for Vidyasagar and his enormous activity, and an appeal for reconsideration of the order of the 7th May. The Govt.'s actions were marked by a disturbing lack of consistency. On the one hand, the Govt. had initially encouraged Vidyasagar's efforts, but on the other hand, it later refused to provide financial aid, citing concerns about the schools' sustainability. This inconsistency created uncertainty and undermined Vidyasagar's efforts to promote female education. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the Govt.'s policies were driven more by a desire to maintain control and exert influence over the education sector, rather than a genuine commitment to promote female education. On 22nd December, 1858 in the Govt.'s letter finally conveying the message that "to relieve him from responsibility for the sum of Rs. 3,439.33 actually expended on these schools, and to direct it be paid by the Government."⁴ But, due to the Mutiny the Govt. was not able to provide permanent funds to the female schools but reserved its consideration for future, the Secretary of State for India replied on 12th May, 1859. Vidyasagar had retired from the Govt. service in November, 1858 and it is assumed that his resignation was made due to the difference of opinion with the Director of Public Instruction on the question of the establishment of female schools. At that time he earned Rs. 500 monthly and refused all govt.'s financial support. In order to set the girls' schools going, he opened a Female School Fund with a view to collecting funds from notable personalities. Raja Pratap Chandra Singh of Paikpara was one of them. Even, the Lieutenant Governor Cecil Beadon also encouraged him for collecting the funds:

I have now the pleasure to enclose a cheque for Rs. 330 on account of Sir Cecil Beadon's subscription to the Female Schools for the half year of 1866. This would have been sent before but the cheque book was accidentally left behind.

17th August, 1868⁵

Contribution of Vidyasagar to Bethune School

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, a luminary of the Bengal Renaissance, left an indelible mark on the educational landscape of 19th century Bengal through his unwavering commitment to promoting female education. With unrelenting passion and perseverance, Vidyasagar sought to dismantle the entrenched societal barriers that had long denied women access to educational opportunities, thereby perpetuating their subjugation and marginalization. Through his pioneering efforts, Vidyasagar not only helped to create a paradigm shift in the way society perceived the role of women, but also paved the way for the establishment of a robust network of schools that would empower girls with the knowledge, skills and agency necessary to challenge the status quo and forge a brighter future for themselves.

The Juvenile School was founded in 1819. In 1821, the Ladies Societies was founded by the Christian Missionaries. In 1822, *Strishikhyabidhayak* was published by Gourmohun Vidyalankar. Vidyasagar's contribution to female education were instrumental in shaping the social and cultural landscape of the then Bengal.

Vidyasagar was made Honorary Secretary of the Bethune School committee in August, 1858.⁶ In his secretaryship female students of the school used to read arithmetic, biography, geography, phonetic system was experimentally introduced and history of Bengal with gallery lessons on objects from the course study. Needle work and sewing were likewise taught. On 27 November, 1866, Mr. Atkinson, the Director of Public Instruction wrote a letter to Vidyasagar that Miss Mary Carpenter wanted to meet him at Bethune School, with a view to promoting female education in India. In December, 1866, she went to Uttarpara Girls' School along with Vidyasagar, Mr. Atkinson and with Mr. Woodrow, the Inspector of Schools. On the return of their journey Vidyasagar met a serious accident where his buggy, the cart had been capsized and got hurt into his liver. Since then his health had been seriously impaired which brought about his death in July 1891.

Miss Carpenter moved to the Govt. to undertake an establishment of a Normal School for the training of native female teachers to be accommodated temporarily in the premises of the Bethune School.

On 1st September, 1867, Sir William Grey, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, asked for Vidyasagar's views on that proposal. But, Vidyasagar was opposed her idea. Because, he knew that the elite Hindu family would not allow their grown up female members to follow the profession of tuition. Yet, he proposed to the Govt. that if the people were willing to carry out the Miss Carpenter's idea, they should be assisted by the Govt. with liberal grants. On 14th October, 1867 Lieutenant Governor acknowledged receipt of Vidyasagar's letter. However, the Govt. of Bengal had favored Miss Carpenter. Some time about the middle of 1867 Bethune School realized that it had been losing its students. A special meeting had been held in July, 1867 for search enquiry. A sub-committee formed having consisted with Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Kumer Harendra Krishna Deb and Prasanna Kumer Sarbadhikari. The subcommittee submitted their report on 24th September, 1868 and it envisaged that the teaching had been neglected, students were not properly taught, promotion were not properly made and teaching agency had not been judicious. It was also revealed that as long as Miss Pigott would have been Head Mistress, recovery from that position was not possible. On 3rd March, 1868, the Bengal Govt. had decided to terminate her from the headship and Govt. also proposed to merge both the schools, Female Schools and Normal School into one. Though, the Committee did not want to take part in the new management system. Nevertheless, Vidyasagar was always ready to stretch out his helping hand to the Govt. for the betterment of female educational system. The Lieutenant Governor approved the scheme for merging both schools into one and the proposal was made by the Director of Public Instruction. On 27th January, 1869, Mrs. Brietzche was appointed Lady Superintendent for next three years for both schools — Bethune and Normal School on a salary of Rs. 300 per month. Bethune School Committee was dissolved and D.P.I thanked to all members of the committee especially to Vidyasagar for his service. Though, Vidyasagar was not very hopeful to the success of the new arrangements. On 2nd March, 1869, Mr. Woodrow had sent a letter to the D.P.I; he conveyed that Vidyasagar had handed over all the documents of Bethune School to him on 23rd

February. There had been made a long discussion with him on the topic of establishing a suitable residence of Hindu Ladies within the school premises. Mr. Woodrow also ensured that Vidyasagar would help him by all means but on question of success, Vidyasagar was quite sure that it would fail to reach its goal.⁸ Vidyasagar was right. Lieutenant Governor Sir Gorge Campbell had made an order to close the Normal School. He ordered:

On a general review of the whole subject, it is clear that after a three years' experiment the Female Normal School has questionably failed ... the Lieutenant Governor is himself too inclined to think that there is much in the view taken by the ladies most experienced in these matters, viz., that it may be very dangerous to give women education and a certain freedom of action without sanction of some religion ... The Female Normal School will, therefore, be closed after the 31st January, 1872.⁹

Vidyasagar's pioneering work in promotion female education in Bengal stands as a shining example of the transformative potential of education to reshape societal norms and foster a more just and equitable world. The establishment a scholarship in his honor by a group of Hindu ladies serves as a poignant testament to the lasting impact of his vision and dedication.

The committee begs to announce that they have recently received the sum of Rs. 1670 from the Secretary to the Ladies' Vidyasagar Memorial Committee in Calcutta, for establishment of an annual scholarship tenable for two years to be awarded to a Hindu girl who after passing the annual examination in the third class of the school, desires to prepare herself for the University Entrance Examination Hindu ladies in Calcutta should have interested themselves in this manner to perpetuate the memory of the late Pandit Vidyasagar who, during his lifetime, in addition to the philanthropic work to which he devoted his whole life, had done so much to promote Female Education in Bengal.¹⁰

As we reflect on Vidyasagar's remarkable legacy, we are reminded that education is a powerful catalyst for social change, and that the unwavering commitment of individuals like Vidyasagar can leave an indelible mark on the course of history.

Notes

- ¹ Education Con. 22nd Oct. 1857, No. 72. (Article, p. 383)
- ² Education Con. 5th August 1858 No. 16 & Education Con. 24th June 1858 No.167 A & B, H, I, K, L; Edu. Con. 2nd Dec. 1858, No. 5. (Ibid, p. 384).
- ³ Education Con. 24th June 1858, No. 167 N. (Ibid, p. 385).
- ⁴ Letter from C. Beadon, Secretary to the Govt. of India to C.T. Buckland, Junior Sec. to the Govt. of Bengal, dated 22nd December, 1858-Education Con. 20th January 1859, No. 9. (Ibid, p. 390).
- ⁵ *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. NS. XXIII, 1927, P-391.
- ⁶ S. C. Bayley, Junior Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, Education Can. January, 1864. No. 160 B. (Ibid, p. 391).
- ⁷ Education con. March 1868, No. A. 8. (Ibid, p. 394).
- ⁸ H. Woodrow, Inspector of Schools, Central Dvn. to the D.P.I. dated 2nd March, 1869. (Ibid, p. 396).
- ⁹ The Under Sect. Govt. of Bengal to the D. P. I., dated 24th January, 1872. Education Con. January, 1872, No. A. 30-36. & Education Con. April 1872, No. A. 54-58. (Ibid, p. 396).
- ¹⁰ In the presence of H.E the Viceroy and Governor General of India — Lord Elgin, and many other notable European and Indian gentleman-Bethune College, 5th March, 1894. Annual Report. (Ibid, p. 397).

BOOK REVIEW

Amrita Bagchi, *Healthcare in Post-Independence India: Kolkata and the Crisis of Private Health Care Services*, Routledge, Price: Rs. 1495

In *An Uncertain Glory*, Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen identified two interrelated problems faced by health care in India – ‘its massive inadequacy’ and ‘the near-absence of public discussion of this inadequacy’ (p 148). Several years after the publication of the book, we did see a sudden spurt in discussion on the massive inadequacy when the COVID-19 pandemic struck us. But the discussion was rather short-lived and has had very little impact on how the Indian health care system should be reorganised to save millions of Indians from acute ailments and chronic ill-health. The paradigm shift in policy thinking to allowing the private sector to dominate the health system had been complete much before the pandemic hit us. When the National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS) or *Aushman Bharat* was introduced with a big bang, we hardly heard any discussion on questioning the very rationale of such an insurance-based scheme. India’s poor health and nutrition indicators are clearly the result of inadequacy of care of both curative and preventive kind, particularly in rural areas. While child and infant mortality still remains high, deaths from chronic diseases are also increasing.

The growing reliance on private health care, particularly of dubious quality, results largely from a lack of access to publicly provided good quality care. The obvious consequence of the inadequacy of the government’s effort to improve supply of care is that the vacuum created by the absence of public facilities has been filled by an unregulated private sector which is essentially driven by ‘self-interest with guile’. The series of expert committees constituted earlier by the government all recommended that public provisioning should be improved to bring down the dominance of the private sector, presumably informed by the fact that India’s public expenditure on health care as a percentage of national income is one of the lowest in the world. The possible consequences of improvement in public provisioning in the context of a mixed system of public and private curative health care have not been studied much. However, with the

shift of focus in policy discourse from the supply side intervention in the form of direct provisioning to a demand side financing mechanism (i.e. the government financing the care-seekers who go to the private provider), we need to reflect on this shift itself with a more comprehensive analytical approach than what is apparent in public discussions post-NHPS. There is enormous inequality in the distribution of ill-health across regions, income or wealth classes, social and gender groups. The spread of hi-tech, hospital-based medical care in the private sector stands in stark contrast to deficiencies in the provision of basic health care.

In *Healthcare in Post-Independence India* Amrita Bagchi eminently shows how important it is to track the structure and growth of the private health care services in order to understand the changing trajectory of the health care system in India. The book is the outcome of painstaking research that involved sifting through a substantial amount of material available through different sources and application of the researcher's careful judgement in interpreting the material. Chapters 1 and 2 present an excellent account of the evolution of the Indian state's approach to health and healthcare. What is to be noticed in this evolution is the shift in emphasis from an essentially publicly provided system to achieve population health goals to viewing the private health care sector as a fast growing sector of the economy which would contribute to the country's overall economic growth. The turning point is perhaps to be traced back to World Bank's *World Development Report 1993* which was eloquent about the supposedly positive role that the private health care sector should play in the emerging economies.

Although private care providers did exist in the initial decades after independence, large private corporate hospitals were unheard-of. Chapter 3 made a serious attempt to chart out the growth of what was known as 'private nursing homes' in Kolkata in the early days. These nursing homes were supposed to be registered under the West Bengal Clinical Establishment Act of 1950, and therefore the government

registers could turn out to be a good source of data. But the author's attempt was frustrated by the strange practice followed by the government registers. They mention the date of renewal of registration but not when an entity was first registered! The author had to take resort to a number of alternative sources including newspapers and periodicals of the time to dig out some numbers given in the published reports and articles. She has succeeded in presenting a comprehensive empirical account of the growth of private nursing homes and hospitals in Kolkata. The subsequent metamorphosis of the private sector from the one characterised by a predominantly stand-alone private nursing homes and small hospitals to the one dominated by large corporate hospitals is a phenomenon that has not been studied much. The author must be congratulated on having chosen this under-researched area and accomplishing what she set out to do in Chapters 4 and 5. These two chapters are likely to be considered by future researchers in this area as an essential part of the must-read literature.

We end with clarifying a small possible confusion regarding the idea of Universal Health Coverage (UHC). This might stem from what the author has written in the conclusion: "Ensuring the health of the population under the Universal Health Coverage is not the solution to the problem of access to and equity in healthcare". There seems to be a conflation between UHC as articulated by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Indian policymakers' approach to achieving UHC through a predominantly demand-side financing mechanism (i.e. *Ayushman Bharat*). One can surely critique the second, but not the concept of UHC as WHO framed it:

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) means that all people have access to the full range of quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship. It covers the full continuum of essential health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care across the life course ([https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-(uhc))).

Clearly, there is very little in the definition of UHC that one can complain about. The concept is perfectly consistent with a system of extensive direct public provisioning of healthcare through a network of public facilities.

Even though the book is very well-written and highly readable, it would have been helpful for readers if a glossary of abbreviations and acronyms were provided at the beginning of the main text in the book. This small and avoidable shortcoming notwithstanding, I strongly feel that the book will be of great value to all those who want to develop a sophisticated understanding of the health care sector in India in general – and the growth of the private health care sector in a metropolis like Kolkata in particular – going beyond the commonplace and trivia.

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Books :

Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, London, 1933, 7.

Articles in Books :

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Edited Volumes :

C.W. Troll, ed. *Muslim Shrines in India : Their Character, History and Significance*, Delhi, 1989.

Articles in Journals :

G. Hambly, "A Note on the Trade in Eunuchs in Mughal Bengal", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (hereafter *JAOS*), Vol. 94(1), 1974, 125-29.

Articles in Edited Volumes

P. Gaeffke, "Alexander and the Bengal Sufis", in Alan W. Entwistle and Francoise Mallison, eds, *Studies in South Asian Devotional Literature, Research Papers, 1988-1991*, New Delhi/Paris, 1994, 278-84.

10. Book Reviews must contain name of the author/editor and the book reviewed, place of publication and publisher, year of publication, number of pages and price.

SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION

SANSKRIT

आ = ā	ई = ī
ऊ = ū	ऋ = ṛ
ऌ = ṛ̥	च = ca
छ = cha	ज = ja
ट = ṭa	ठ = ṭha
ड = ḍa	ढ = ḍha
ण = ṇa	श = śa
ष = ṣa	म् = m̐

TIBETAN

ཀ = ka	ཁ = kha	ག = ga	ང་ = ṅa/nga
ཅ = ca	ཆ = cha	ཇ = ja	ཉ = ṅa/nya
ཏ = ta	ཐ = tha	ད = da	ན = na
པ = pa	ཕ = pha	བ = ba	མ = ma
ཚ = tsa	ཛ = tsha	ང = dza	ལ = wa
ཞ = zha	ཟ = za	འ = 'a	ཡ = ya
ར = ra	ལ = la	ཤ = śa/sha	ས = sa
ཨ = ha	ཨ = a		

ARABIC (both Cap & Small)

ا (long)	- A a	د	- D
آ	- Ā ā	ت	- T
ب	- B b	ث	- Th
ج	- J j	ج	- Gh
ح	- H h	خ	- Kh
ك	- K k	د	- D
ذ	- Dh	ذ	- Dh
ر	- R	ر (long)	- R
ز	- Z	ز	- Z
س	- S	س	- S
ش	- Sh	ش	- Sh
ص	- S	ص (long)	- S

PERSIAN

ا (long)	- A	د	- D
آ	- Ā	ت	- T
ب	- B	ث	- Th
پ	- P	ج	- Gh
ت	- T	خ	- Kh
ث	- Th	د	- D
ج	- J	ذ	- Dh
چ	- Ch	ر	- R
ح	- H	ز	- Z
خ	- Kh	ز	- Z
د	- D	س	- S
ذ	- Dh	ش	- Sh
ر	- R	ص	- S
ز	- Z	ص (long)	- S
ز	- Z	ش	- Sh
س	- S	ص (long)	- S
ش	- Sh		
ص	- S		

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It will flourish, if naturalists, chemists, antiquaries, philologers and men of science, in different parts of Asia, will commit their observations to writing, and send them to the Asiatick Society at Calcutta; it will languish, if such communications shall be long intermitted; and it will die away, if they shall entirely cease.

Sir William Jones
on the publication of the Asiatic Society