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Heritage & Heresy: Conflict of Discourses Regarding the Ideological Formation of Adolescence in Colonial Bengal

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Colonial Bengal witnessed an unprecedented surge of ideas and experiments in the field of juvenile education. Both the British colonizers and their Bengali subjects contributed abundantly in this discourse of ideological formation of adolescence. The purpose of this essay is, therefore, to explore how all those discourses have been influenced often covertly and sometimes even overtly by the hegemonic intention to control this utterly unpredictable but fully formative stage in the making of a future citizen.

As Foucauldian critical theory of Power/Knowledge has shown us that power is generated and upheld with the means of production and reproduction of a special kind of knowledge-base that would ultimately support the entire logic of maintenance of that power in a circulating way. Thus while the British rulers designed a kind of knowledge to be imparted upon the child and adolescent population of the ruled society to sustain the rationale of their rule on them, the subjugated Bengali society in their own way to decolonize the younger generation planned a different kind of instructional system that would maintain the integrity of their core society — the home and heart of their culture. But there were two things common in both groups of the guardians of the colonial society. One is that neither of these stakeholders was in favour of an independent and spontaneous development of the child into adolescence and further into an individual person. The other one is that in this ideological indoctrination of the child both groups targeted the institutionalized education system as well as the literature intended for children and adolescents. Now we shall see how through both these apparently innocent and apolitical means took turn in becoming ideological state apparatuses and discourse of nationalism in the colonial period.

This essay is, however, in no way a chronicle of all the historical developments in the educational as well as literary scenario. In the brief scope of this essay some of the

fundamental trends from both the fields will be discussed and analyzed to mark the basic dimensions of the multiplicity of orientations.

As an effective system of sociocultural control of the colonial subjects the East India Company of England introduced the English education in India much before it was institutionalized in England. The Bengal province being the seat of the official activities of the Governor General in Council of the Company emerged at the centre of India's tryst with English education. But the translation of Company's policies into implementation was not smooth as there remained various kinds of tensions among the British ideologues. The roots of some of those tensions were traced in the metropolis, i.e. in England. Again, some were in reaction to the realities in the colony.

The Charter Act of 1813 is generally given the credit of making education in India a responsibility of the Company. The ironical fact behind this is that it was done to arm the colonial subjects against the corrupt Company officials by making the latter disciplined with some kind of liability towards the native population whom they were indiscriminately robbing of all their resources. The anxiety back in the metropolis over the moral degradation of the colonial agents destabilizing the entire logic of the colonial hold over the morally inferior and uncivilized East by the so called morally superior and civilized We stare clearly visible in the following opinions raised in the British Parliamentary debates. Henry Montgomery, a speaker in the house debate, while condemning the wrongdoings of the Company officials in Bengal maintained, "If we wish to convert the natives of India, we ought first to reform our own people there, who at present only gave them an example of lying, swearing, drunkenness, and other vices." Edmund Burke, the great British Parliamentarian also censuring the depravity of the Company abroad urged to take steps to "form a strong and solid security for the natives against the wrongs and oppressions of British subjects resident in Bengal" (Viswanathan 27). Another critic of the Company Charles Grant, a zealous champion of the Christian missionary interests in India, advocated for the need of spreading education in India to compensate for the damages done by the Company to the colonial subjects:

Certainly a great deal was due from us to the people in compensation of the evils which the establishment of our power had introduced among them; and in return for

the vast advantages which we reaped from the change, it was but fit that what the country had suffered, or was subjected unavoidably to lose by being dependent upon us, should be repaid by all the benefits which good government, in consistency at least with that dependence, could bestow. (Viswanathan 25)

It will be a grave misjudgment if one misses the colonizer inside the paternalism of these Parliamentarians. They did not question the rationale of colonialism. They were rather more concerned for the maintenance of that rationale so that it remained incorruptible for ages to come. This dilemma is rather overtly notable in Grant's words in the following passage:

The primary object of Great Britain, let it be acknowledged, was rather to discover what could be obtained from her Asiatic subjects, than how they could be benefited. In process of time it was found expedient to examine how they might be benefited in order that we might continue to hold the advantages which we at first derived from them....[Their] happiness is committed to our care.(Viswanathan 26)

Another anxiety started to be felt in the meantime among the Company representatives as they were gradually realizing the growing need for effective ideological state apparatuses such as education, religion, legal system, revenue system, etc. to complement the merely repressive ones such as military and police. This predicament is distinctly noticed in in Warren Hasting's words: "we rule over them and traffic with them, but they do not understand our character, and we do not penetrate theirs. The consequence is that we have no hold on their sympathies, no seat in their affections"(Viswanathan 28). Out of this desire of penetration into the psyche of the native subjects the official colonial project of Orientalism set out in India in the last quarter of eighteenth century. Gauri Viswanathan calls this policy an expression of 'reverse acculturation' in *Masks of Conquest* (28). Thus great Orientalist scholars like William Jones, Henry T. Colebrooke, Nathaniel Halhed, Charles Wilkins, et al. used to receive official patronage in their discovery of the 'past glory' of their colonial subjects of the East in their literary and artistic expressions. But the Company administration was more practical about that venture as is again evident in Hasting's words: "every accumulation of knowledge, and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the state: it is the gain of humanity"(Viswanathan 28).

This conception of useful knowledge, however, posed as the main threat of this official policy of Orientalism in the hands of the emerging trends of Utilitarianism in England that replaced the former policy with Anglicism. On the administrative plain the change of policy became visible in Lord Cornwallis's strategy of establishing in the colony the rule of an integrated system devoid of human sentiments. As company rule in India passed the initial phase of indecisiveness that was a mark of Hasting's era Cornwallis ventured to consolidate it on firmer basis. The company officials with utilitarian bent openly started to question the rationale of the defense mechanism of the bygone ages called Orientalism. Cornwallis replaced all Indians with Europeans in the public offices of serious nature. Anglicism continued to attack everything that the Orientalists held noble by stressing that the Indian psyche were too insufficiently equipped with moral training to appreciate the ethics of Indian classics, if it had any at all. Their prevalent view was that the Indian literature was responsible for the innumerable superstitions, immorality, sensuality and an overall apolitical and ahistorical bent of mind.

Before the Charter Bill was passed in 1813 with the champions of free trade the missionaries also had been attacking the Company's policy of non-interference in the religious matters of the colonial subjects. The Clapham Evangelicals like Zachary Macaulay, William Wilberforce, Samuel Thornton, and Charles Grant were passionate exponents of reform and large scale conversion. They found their greatest ally in Alexander Duff who tried to assure the Company administration by maintaining, "As Christianity has never taught rulers to oppress, so will it never teach subjects to rebel" (Viswanathan 53). In this process he even held the Company policies responsible for the atrocities of the Mutiny of 1857 by treating India as "a fair and open field for testing the non-religious theory of education", the attempt of introducing which failed in England. In his strange paradigm of arguments that he termed as 'secular convergency' he regarded all branches of science as derivative of religious studies: "The teaching of these branches seemed no longer an indirect, secondary, ambiguous part of missionary labour,—but, in one sense, as direct, primary and indubitable as the teaching of religion itself." Duff was not an exception to hold such views as "a writer for the *Calcutta Review* remarked,'who will succeed in robbing Shakespeare of his Protestant common sense, Bacon and Locke of their scriptural morality, or Abercombie of his devout sentiment?'"(Viswanathan 63-64)

Thus the Company officials caught between their self-professed obligation of religious neutrality and moral urge of reformation began to find in English literature a strange concoction of values and knowledge that can make the colonial subjects more civil, aware of their so called 'past glory' that was degraded in the dark ages due to religious superstitions and malpractices as well as tyranny of the feudal administration. But an instruction in English literature does not vacate the Indian psyche of all the debilitating effects of native history, society and religious culture; it also fills the mind with awe and veneration towards the grandeur of the ruling society. The effectiveness of it was not unnoticeable to the Utilitarian Company official like Charles Traveyan: "[The Indians] daily converse with the best and wisest Englishman through the medium of their works, and form ideas, perhaps higher ideas of our nation than if their intercourse with it were of a more personal kind" (Viswanathan 20). Thus Arnoldian theory of curriculum rich in values, religious fervor and culture to restrain anarchy among the proletariats got a new dimension in the colony also.

In the meantime Bengali elites whose representatives were Rammohun Roy, Radhakanta Deb, et al. led by David Hare, an enthusiast English philanthropist educationist, ardently started pressurizing the Company Governor William Bentinck to introduce useful and scientific English education for the colonial subjects instead of encouraging traditional oriental education system. On Bentinck's official commission Thomas Babington Macaulay drafted in 1835 the famous (or infamous) Minute on Indian Education which is undoubtedly one of the most notable document of anglophilia of the British colonial Utilitarians of the nineteenth century. The 'Filtration Theory' received final touch in Macaulay's hands when he commented:

"In one point I fully agreethat it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population." (Wikipedia)

The Anglicist policy of “One Power, One Mind” is also expressed in the deeply rooted conviction of Edward Thornton: “As soon as [the Indians] become first-rate European scholars, they must cease to be Hindoos.” (Viswanathan 22, 68-93). Thus English literature itself became in one the method as well as the subject of study to train the Indian subjects to be compliant British subjects for generations to come. Bentinck was in no way the father of English education, but his policies replaced the classical attitude hitherto given on the English literary studies by his predecessors like Minto, Montstuart Elphinstone, Charles Metcalf, Thomas Munroe, and John Malcolm with new ideological, historical and cultural emphasis.

In a typical Missionary school curriculum as represented by Duff's Free Church Institution apart from the *Bible* the following books were prescribed for a course on English literature: *Poetical Reader*, Cowper's *Poems*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, with *Minor Poems*, Pollock's *Course of Time*, *Selections from Southey, Montgomery, Campbell and Wordsworth*, Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*, Akenside's *Pleasure of Imagination*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, Bacon's *Moral and Civil Essays*, and *Advancement of Learning*, Whately's *Rhetoric*, Schlegel's *History of Literature*, Hallam's *Literary History of the Fifteenth, Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress*, Whewall's *Moral Philosophy* etc. For comparison we can observe the content of a government school where the following texts were prescribed for English studies: Richardson's *Poetical Selections* (Goldsmith, Gray, Addison, Pope, and Shakespeare), Otway's *Venice Preserved*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, Pope's *Illiad by Homer*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* (the first four books), Addison's *Essays*, Johnson's *Rasselas* and *Lives of the Poets*, Paley's *Moral Philosophy*, Goldsmith's *History of England*, Bacon's *Essays*, *Novum Organum*, and *Advancement of Learning*, Malkin's *History of Greece*, Horace Wilson's *Universal History*, Adam Smith's *Moral Sentiments*, Abercombie's *Intellectual Powers*, and Whewall's *Moral Philosophy*, etc. (Viswanathan 54). Among several common texts there is a basic difference between the spirits of these two curricula: while the Missionary school curriculum stressed over the literary and moral texts, the government school curriculum favoured a more historical one. This was so because the chief concern of the former was preparing the ground for conversion while that of the latter was to prepare efficient government servants.

James Mill was an exponent of English literature as a prerequisite for the colonial subjects to be employed in offices of responsibility as only through this kind of instruction one can achieve 'requisite knowledge' and 'adequate motives for fidelity'. He was wise enough to see the ideological reach of English literature even through translation: "without his [an English educated person] being found troublesome by pertinacity in his own opinions, compliance, I think, would be more likely to be the general habit of any native so chosen" (Viswanathan 90-91).

Thus we see that English education was introduced in India as a result of tensions among different groups with distinct interests of each of their own— The Company, The British Parliament, The Utilitarians, the Missionaries, the Free traders, the colonial elites, etc. But from the last three decades of the nineteenth century especially after the Mutiny of 1857 the literary education system came under serious criticism due to its ineffectiveness as a controlling mechanism. As this education system was primarily designed for the gentlemen or elite section of caste Hindu society, their growing urge for liberty and desire for respectable profession were bound to fail their expectations in a restrictive colonial set up. The Young Bengal movement, although was a short-lived one, brought about a dilemma in the minds of the advocates of English education as the students of Hindu College aspired for freedom from all kinds of dogmas, be it Oriental or Occidental. The 'privileged desperados' or 'gentlemen outlaws' of the 'Godless school of Goldighi' compelled the colonial rulers to think afresh about the feasibility of a liberal kind of literary education in English (Viswanathan 52). Thus Wood's Despatch in 1854 recommended for a stratified education system based more on practical needs than on merely moral values. It again divided the Indian society that was already stratified along class, religion, caste, ethnicity, and profession.

So far I have discussed the colonizer's measures to control the upbringing of a child into adolescence and further into an ideal colonial subject. Now I want to show how the vernacular textbooks as well as Children and juvenile literature reacted to it. Iswar Chandra Bandopadhyay in his Bengali primer called *Barnoparichay* created two myths that recur in subsequent Bengali primers as well as children's literature of colonial times. The much cited Gopal/Rakhal duality is one such myth, here Gopal is the epitome of a good, gentle, studious, and obedient boy who in future would surely turn out to be a compliant colonial subject

serving the British colonial government. But Rakhal is just the opposite of Gopal. He is the epitome of a bad, insincere, careless, and disobedient boy. While this Gopal does not question any of the government policies, Rakhal obviously would turn into a rebel interrogating the 'white man's burden' of continuing the civilizing mission in the colony.

Myth as Shibaji Bandyopadhyay in *Gopal-Rakhal Dyondo Samas: Uponibeshbad O Bangla Shishusahityo* shows is a closed statement, an ahistorical conception which cannot be questioned, whose validity cannot be doubted. But still myth itself becomes an area of contention in its attempt to remain unchanged for generations. As a result the inner tension does not remain hidden to the critical eye and its covert mechanism becomes exposed (1-37). Thus while the myth of Gopal-Rakhal or first boy-last boy recurs in subsequently, among the dominant discourse of making a gentleman out of a child, some rebel voice also emerges all on a sudden to destabilize the one-dimensional development of the text.

Madanmohan Tarkalankar's *Shishushiksha* is contemporary of Iswar Chandra's *Barnoparichay*. In it too children are advised to be as loyal to the authority as a faithful dog. But discipline must be distributed among the female subjects also. Thus Madhusudan Mukhopadhyay's *Sushilar Upakhyan* shows how to control the sexuality of a woman to reproduce the existing socio-economic and cultural relations in a colonial society to maintain the status-quo. In these texts family is regarded as the unit of colonial state. So, ideological indoctrination must be started inside the family too. The foils of Gopal and Sushila would simply be expelled of the society while in an ideal situation Gopal would marry Sushila and reproduce more Gopals and Sushilas to streamline the government.

In *Sahaj Path :Dwitio Bhag*, the primer written in Bengali by Rabindranath Tagore there are instances when the socioeconomic relations of a stratified society is taken for granted. If one observes critically, one would find out that the writer, the narrator and the addressee belong to the same class and caste position—that of an upper caste Hindu gentleman. Similarly in Dakhinaranjan Mitra Majumdar's *Thakurmar Jhuli* does not question an oppressive feudal structure of the society depicted in this apparently innocent collection of indigenous fairy tales. *Thakurdar Jhuli* by the same author targeted the little girls as its addressee but here too we find the same phallogocentric language expressing its opinions in sugar-coated idiom of a folktale.

Thus we see that in the colonial period the education system and literature meant for children were neither innocent nor apolitical by any means. They were rather adopted as a means of ideological interpellation into the dominant discourse. Utilitarian Bentham's idea of Panopticon achieved a favourable ground in colonial Bengal as the psyche of each child took the training of turning themselves the prisoner or guardian of their own selves against any corrupting influence. In this way through continuous suppression of heresy heritage is maintained; or through continuous maintenance of heritage heresy is suppressed.

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